

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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for snow, not because we enjoy it so much, but because we enjoy seeing children enjoy it. Just as we watch and enjoy children, God watches His own children. He enjoys seeing us enjoy the life He has given us.

Does God pity single people? Hardly. So the wise singles have no time to pity themselves. They take life as God gives it to them

and discover that God also gives them an outlook that enjoys it.

*Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart,
That tastes those gifts with joy.* ■

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He Lavishes His Grace Upon Us

by Edgar B. Hardesty

When I first began to drive, the only vehicle available to me was our family car. My dad had a set of rules that went with the privilege of driving, but his parting comment was always the same—“Make sure you replace the gas that you use.” Being a resourceful (otherwise known as cheap) high school senior, I would mark the gas gauge with a grease pencil upon my departure from home. After an evening of cruising about, I would pull into a local gas station and announce to the attendant about to pump the gas, “Go ahead, I’ll tell you when to stop!” I’m not sure Dad ever knew how I was able to meet his expectations with such precision.

It is almost painful to look back on those days and contemplate just how self-serving I was to grudgingly return that which was so freely given. How very human—and how unlike our Heavenly Father! The contrast is startling, to say the least.

Paul begins his letter to the church at Ephesus with that marvelous run-on sentence (in the Greek text) that extends from Chapter 1, verse 3, through verse 14. The blessings that he lists are nothing short of astounding. He tells us that, at the point of our salvation, we are the recipients of “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (NASB). Paul goes on to explain that in Christ:

- God has chosen us and made us His sons.
- He has redeemed us by Christ’s blood and forgiven our trespasses.
- He has made known to us that all things

find their summing up in Christ.

- He has secured for us an eternal inheritance after the counsel of His own will.
- And He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit of Promise as His own possession.

What continues to capture this reader’s attention is the description of the manner in which He bestows these blessings. As we observed above, verses 7 and 8 speak of the redemption in Christ’s blood. That redemption through Christ’s blood not only secures our forgiveness, but it does so “according to the riches of his grace.” The abundant nature of the supply will never be in question, but the next phrase ought to fill our hearts with praise. Our God pours out His blessing in such a fashion that Paul refers to it as being “lavished upon us.” This word *lavish* speaks of intentional generosity. It calls to mind other descriptive words such as abundance, overflowing, and superabounding—words that try to help us get our minds and hearts around the simple fact that we are absolutely awash in His grace. No stingy giver is He. His blessing is not precisely measured portions barely adequate for the task. Oh no! Our God pours out His blessings *lavishly* in accordance with the riches of His grace.

Such generosity calls us to love and serve Him in a manner that responds openly to His lavish blessings. Throw away your grease pencil. Tell the attendant to “fill ’er up!” ■

—Reprinted with permission from *PBU Today*, Summer 2008.

Person of the Month:

Walter L. Wilson

(1881–1969)



Walter Lewis Wilson was born into a doctor's family May 27, 1881, in Aurora, Indiana.

In 1890, at the age of 9, Walter already wanted to become a doctor like his father so he began making a collection of all kinds of bones. Wilson also had a concern for the things of the Lord at a young age and would always be the pretend "preacher" when the neighborhood children would play "church."

In 1896, at the age of 15, Walter Wilson was converted to Christ. Because of his zeal to reach the lost, Brother Wilson conducted his first evangelistic street meeting the following year when he was 16 years old.

After his secondary education Wilson went on to study for the medical profession. During medical school he also worked part-time for his future father-in-law who owned a tentmaking business. Graduating from the University of Kansas, he then began a medical practice in Webb City, Missouri, after receiving his license in 1904 at the age of 23.

1904 was a very blessed year, as he married Marion Baker. During their life together God blessed their family with the births of three sons and five daughters, all of whom, over the years, recognized their need of Christ and went forth to serve Him and others.

As a medical doctor, Walter Wilson was not only concerned about a patient's physical health but also, most importantly, his or her spiritual health and relationship to Christ. He would use every opportunity to share his faith with others. However, as the result of a tract he read, Brother Wilson's witness became much more fruitful as he came to the realization that he needed to give every part of himself to the Holy Spirit for His use. It was then that he completely depended on the Spirit's leading and God used him mightily.

At some point in his years as a doctor, Walter was asked to take over the tent-making business of his father-in-law due to his father-in-law being seriously ill. He then worked full time at tents and part-time as a doctor. He served in the business for the next twenty-five years. Brother Wilson was responsible for developing camouflaging and waterproofing of tents.

In 1920, at the age of 39, Walter founded Central Bible School in Kansas City, Kansas. He pastored there forty-one years until his retirement in 1961. Many came to Christ as a result of his ministry at the church.

Brother Wilson was also a pioneer in radio. He was determined to use every means possible to spread the Gospel. By 1924 he owned his own radio program.

Wilson had a burden to see a Bible institute at the college level in Kansas. In 1932, at the age of 51, he founded what became known as Kansas City College and Bible School in Overland Park. In addition to his full schedule he also authored twenty-seven books. His messages, as well as his books, had a style that was heart-warming and down to earth. He was not hard to listen to or to understand.

Sadly, on September 25, 1962, Walter's beloved wife, Marion, died. They were happily married for 58 years.

The following year Brother Wilson, now 82, married Ruth Selders of Kansas, who was a member of his church family.

As a result of a stroke Walter L. Wilson went home to be with his Lord May 24, 1969, at the age of 88.

—Gail L. Emerson

Missionary Zeal Among the Anabaptists

by John Horsch

Editorial Note: The writer John Horsch basically uses the words *Mennonite* and *Anabaptist* interchangeably in this article. The Mennonite Church developed out of the Anabaptist Movement, but the name *Mennonite* was not used at the very beginning.

The Mennonite Church at the beginning was preeminently a missionary church. This was one of the reasons for its rapid spread. In that period there were no special mission organizations, yet the church was engaged in aggressive evangelistic work. In the earliest years of its history its congregations, like the primitive Christian congregations, consisted of men and women who were noted for their zeal for propagating the gospel. Of the first Christians in Jerusalem it is stated that, when they were scattered abroad by persecution, they "went every where preaching the word." This does not mean that all preached in the sense as preaching is generally understood today. They did not all conduct public services. They all considered it their duty to spread the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.

A certain writer says that as one who has been in a shipwreck will tell the story of how he was rescued, so the early Christians related that they had found personal salvation in Christ. The missionary spirit was very much in evidence. The same may be said of the early Mennonite Church. This was one of the reasons why some of the state church leaders did not approve of exiling and scattering the evangelical Anabaptists. Their antagonists were aware that such measures of persecution would only result in their further spread. The early Brethren insisted that the life of the membership of the church should in all its aspects be of a distinctly Christian character and influence; their whole life should be a distinct testimony for Christ.

In the first period of the history of the Mennonite brotherhood their principal fields of labor were Switzerland, South Germany, and Austria. The work of spreading the gospel was carried on under indescribable difficulties. They were in constant danger of apprehension and death. Their willingness to endure persecution was evidence, however, of their firm conviction that their message was the gospel truth. They endeavored to reach the common people, and their word of testimony, being spoken from sincere conviction, made a deep impression on their hearers. Sometimes their efforts resulted in the organization of a congregation within a few days after the arrival of a messenger of the gospel at a given place.

For reasons previously stated, the preachers of the Swiss Brethren and Mennonites were practically the only missionaries of that time. The historian C. A. Cornelius says correctly that in Catholic countries, where Protestantism was persecuted, the field was left entirely to the Anabaptists who did not shrink from dangers of torture and death. Pilgram Marpeck, in 1532, said of the preachers of the state church, that they preached only in places to which the protection by the Protestant government extended "and not freely under the cross of Christ"; he gave this as one of the reasons why their gospel did not bring the expected fruit. Again, Menno Simons in his writings says repeatedly that he was constrained in conscience, through love to God and the unsaved, to risk his life in the endeavor to spread the evangelical truth.

A chronicler of the Hutterian Brethren wrote concerning their missionary work:

The witnesses to the truth who were sent forth by the brotherhood, gave testimony earnestly and steadfastly to the Word of the

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Lord, by their life and work, by word and deed. They spoke with power of the kingdom of God, showing that all men must repent, be converted, and turn to God from the vanity of this world and its unrighteousness, from a sinful, vile, and wanton life. To all such work God gave His blessing, so that it was carried on with joy.

Menno Simons, as well as other evangelical Anabaptist and Mennonite leaders, was in a real sense a missionary. Menno was engaged in the work of spreading the gospel through preaching, teaching, and personal work, as well as through the printed page. On the point of the missionary calling of the church Menno Simons' views differed from those of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. These reformers held that Christ's commission to preach the gospel to all nations concerned only the apostles. Menno, as is clear from his writings, recognized that the great commission is binding for the Christian church of all periods. It is impossible to estimate in numbers the visible results of Menno's labors. There is no record of the baptisms which he performed. However, his co-worker Leonard Bouwens, who had the oversight of the congregations in a large part of Holland and North Germany, kept a list of persons baptized by him. This list is still preserved. It shows that from 1551 to 1582 Leonard Bouwens baptized 10,252 persons. Obviously, the greater number of these were not of Mennonite parentage but were won through special effort put forth by local congregations.

Following are excerpts from Menno Simons' writings on the subject of missionary work:

In the second place we seek and desire with yearning, ardent hearts, yea at the cost of our life and blood that the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ and His apostles, which alone is the true doctrine and will remain until Jesus Christ will come again in the clouds, may be taught and preached throughout all the world, as the Lord Jesus Christ commanded His disciples in His last words which He addressed to them on earth.

This is my only joy and the desire of my

heart that I may extend the borders of the kingdom of God, make known the truth, reprove sin, teach righteousness, feed the hungry souls with the Word of the Lord, lead the stray sheep into the right path and win many souls for the Lord through His Spirit, power, and grace as therefore we seek, to the extent of our opportunity, to make known and proclaim to all mankind the grace of God which has appeared, and His great love toward us, that they may experience with the same joy and renewing of the Spirit, and know and taste with all saints how sweet and good and kind the Lord is to whom we have come. To this end we preach as much as opportunity and possibility affords, both in day time and by night, in houses and in fields, in forests and wildernesses, in this land and abroad, in prison and bonds, in the water, the fire and on the scaffold, on the gallows and upon the wheel, before lords and princes, orally and by writing, at the risk of possessions and life, as we have done these many years without ceasing.

A contemporary chronicler of the early Hutterian Brethren in Moravia wrote concerning their missionary work:

The Christian mission work is carried on among us according to the command of Christ: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you," and again: "I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go forth and bring fruit." Accordingly, ministers of the Gospel and their assistants are annually sent forth into the various countries to those who desire to amend their lives and are asking for the truth. Such are brought to the brotherhood in Moravia, in spite of hangman and headsman, notwithstanding the fact that many were apprehended while on their way to Moravia and suffered martyrdom.

The oldest extant Christian missionary hymn, containing twenty-three verses of eight lines each, was written about 1563 by a Hutterite brother in Moravia.

An indication of the serious purpose of the early Swiss Brethren to live a life of consecration to the service of God and their neighbor is found in their teaching and

practice regarding the use of earthly possessions. The principle of Christian stewardship and Christian brotherhood, as held by them, was more than an abstract theory; they were seriously determined to carry it into practice. It is known from Martin Butzer's writings that the Brethren believed it inconsistent for Christians to live in luxury while there are those who do not have the necessaries of life and to whom help could be given. Butzer criticized the Brethren for holding such views which he believed extreme and unwarranted.

Hans Leopold, who suffered martyrdom in 1528 at Augsburg, said of the Brethren that "if they know of any one that is in need, whether or not he is a member of their church, they believe it their duty, out of love to God, to render him help and aid." Heinrich Seiler, who in 1535 was executed by drowning at Bern in Switzerland, said: "I do not believe it wrong that a Christian has property of his own, but yet he is nothing more than a steward." Heinrich Bullinger, in his larger work against the Swiss Brethren, made the charge that they were of the opinion that to be rich is inconsistent with Christian principles ("*rych syn sye boss*"). While this charge cannot be substantiated from the source material, they obviously believed that in the acquisition of material wealth a point may be reached where further accumulation would be a violation of Jesus' teaching on wealth, being contrary to the Christian principle of stewardship.

A testimony to the point under consideration is also found in a book of the early Hutterian Brethren, in which is stated that among the Swiss Brethren one of the questions addressed to applicants for baptism was, "whether they consecrated themselves with all their temporal possessions to the service of God and His people." In 1557 a member of the established Protestant church of Strasburg in Alsace visited a meeting of the Swiss Brethren near that city. A number of persons were received into the Church by baptism on that occasion. Among the questions addressed to the applicants before the ordinance was admin-

istered, was this, "Whether they, if necessity required it, would devote all their possessions to the service of the brotherhood, and would not fail any member that is in need, if they were able to render aid."

Heinrich Bullinger's writings contain various corroborations of these statements concerning the position of the Swiss Brethren on the principle of Christian stewardship. He says, for example, that, according to their teaching, "every good Christian is under duty before God from motives of love to use, if need be, all his possessions to supply the necessaries of life, to any of his brethren who are in need." The Lutheran church historian Paul Tschackert speaks of the evangelical Anabaptists as "a voluntary Christian fellowship for manifesting the Christian spirit in the practice of brotherly love." Again, a contemporary writer of the early Anabaptists says of the Brethren at Augsburg in Swabia: "In their brotherhood there was in evidence the purpose to render each other the greatest possible help from motives of brotherly love."

The first Mennonite foreign mission society was established in the year 1847 at Amsterdam by a small number of Dutch Mennonites. In 1851 this society sent its first missionary, John Peter Jansz, to Java, Dutch East Indies, and in 1871 Heinrich Dirks, of Gnadenfeld, South Russia, began work at Pakanten, island of Sumatra, under this society. At the time of the beginning of the World War these missions were fairly prosperous. Most of the financial support, as well as nearly all the missionaries, came from the Mennonite colonies in South Russia. In [the early 1930s] a very considerable part of the needed financial support of these missions [was] supplied by the congregations of Germany, Switzerland, and France. The missionaries—six in number—[were] of the last named countries, while the three missionary physicians [were] Netherlanders. ■

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Me, Myself, and iPhone

Technology can be an instrument for gratitude or for idolatry

by Vern Poythress

Ten years ago a few visionaries were predicting the era of “ubiquitous” computing, when all kinds of appliances would contain computerized links to the rest of the world. Now it is upon us, in the form of cell phones.

A capable cell phone today has more computing power than the computer that took the Apollo astronauts to the moon. It gives instant access not only to your friends’ voices but to all the information on the Internet. Are you keeping up or falling behind in the race for the latest electronic fashions?

Science and technology get a lot of attention because of the new gadgets they spin out. I love science, because it displays God’s wisdom (Proverbs 8:22-31). I love technology, because it shows what great gifts God has given to us, and what great human capacity God has given us to exercise dominion (Genesis 1:28-30). But I see hopes placed in science and technology that they cannot fulfill. Science, it is said, will solve the problems of world hunger. It will

bring world peace. And more and better technology will solve the problems introduced by lesser technology.

Well, sometimes; and in some ways. Maybe science will find an efficient way to harness nuclear fusion to produce clean power—or maybe not. But we can be awash in technology and still be hate-filled or lonely. You can have 200 friends on Facebook and have no one who really knows you, no one who loves you.

Sometimes science only increases the problem. If, instead of seeing the wisdom of God in it, you listen to the propaganda of scientism, it will solemnly assure you that you inhabit a faceless, lonely, materialistic universe that is heading only toward ultimate death. And the gadgets of technology become Band-Aids to cover spiritual wounds and empty hearts. One more electronic game or one more DVD movie or one more pop song holds back the slide into boredom and depression. We search for one entertainment after another to keep back the dread of facing the hollow inside.

God will not be mocked (Galatians 6:7). If you sow a “me”-centered life, you will reap a harvest of emptiness. If you hope in the human wisdom of science, it will fail. Knowledge it may offer, by the truckload. But when such knowledge is detached from the God who gave it, it cannot give you wisdom to know yourself or to know God. The technology in which you hoped will mock you and testify to your ingratitude to God.

We have lost our way. Christ answers, “I am the way” (John 14:6). The world is founded on Christ, by whom all things were created, in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:16, 17). From Him we can have eternal life in fellowship with God: “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and

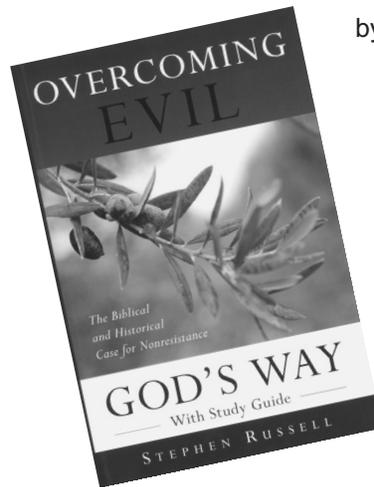
believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26). His power, manifest in His resurrection, is the foundation for all science and technology. The Bible says that Christ is “upholding all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). His upholding sustains the regularities on which science and technology constantly depend. His wisdom is behind the knowledge and beauty in science. What is most astounding is that you can know Him personally, and have your rebellion healed. And then you will know that He, the King of the universe, loves you and understands you. If you are grateful to Him, you will have science and technology in perspective. ■

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New Book!

OVERCOMING EVIL GOD'S WAY

by Stephen Russell



We live in a world wracked with violence and despair. Does that mean that every act of violence must be met with an equal or greater counterblow? *Overcoming Evil God's Way* asserts that the biblical message offers hope of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation in place of hatred, vengeance, and fear. This book looks at both the historical and the biblical evidence for the non-resistant lifestyle of the Christian.

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

OCTOBER 5, 2008

Empowered by the Spirit

Acts 2:1-17

October's lessons, all from the Book of Acts, continue the quarter's general theme: Christ Builds His Church. Today's lesson focuses on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. The remaining three lessons focus on the calling of men to leadership positions in the newly established church. As usual, reading context will be helpful in getting the broad picture as well as the immediate setting of each lesson.

Jesus had instructed His disciples prior to His ascension (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4), to wait in Jerusalem for the empowering He had promised (see Acts 1:5, 8). As they were together on the day of Pentecost that promise was fulfilled. There came the sound of a mighty wind, and cloven tongues of fire rested upon each of them. The Holy Spirit had come in manifestation of power to infill and empower them for the task of sharing the witness of Christ (see Luke 3:16). The immediate result of this experience was the gift of tongues with which they glorified God (v. 11).

On this day of Pentecost Jerusalem was crowded with devout Jews from every nation under heaven, there to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, one of three important Jewish festivals. Perhaps it was the noise like the wind, or a rumor about what was taking place, that drew the crowd to the disciples. At any event, as they gathered, they heard the disciples praising God in their own tongues, even though by their own reckoning the disciples were all Galileans. They were amazed. And they wondered what it was all about. That something of

utmost significance was taking place they had no doubt. But what?

Not everyone who heard, however, was in a spiritually receptive mood. Some mocked. Obviously, these were not of the devout group and may have been those who caused much trouble and grief for the nascent movement in succeeding days.

Peter, emboldened by the Spirit's infilling, took the lead in explaining what was taking place. They were not drunk: it was too early in the day for that to be a possibility. Rather, they were seeing partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy—the outpouring of God's Spirit in the last days and the subsequent prophetic utterances by His people. (The remaining verses of the chapter detail Peter's message. The hearts and minds of the audience were prepared to hear and accept Peter's message identifying Jesus as God's Messiah. As a result, three thousand souls responded in repentance.)

In this passage we note the obedient waiting of the disciples for Jesus' promised blessing and empowerment. They were bound together in prayer (1:14). Their receptivity to the Spirit shows the attitude of heart with which they waited. And their expression of the power that infilled them shows the depth of commitment and eagerness with which they embraced God's gift. They were changed men, transformed from fearful to fearless. They were now ready to move forward in the task Jesus had assigned.

For thought and discussion

1. The Holy Spirit was certainly operative in the world before Pentecost. Why was this special event necessary, and what did it signify? Discuss.
2. What was so significant about the Holy

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Spirit coming on the day of Pentecost? (Some background study will be necessary.)

3. What was significant about the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost, and why is it no longer necessary as an accompaniment to the gift of the Holy Spirit?
4. How do we tell today when a person has been filled with God's Spirit? What are the identifying characteristics? Discuss.
5. Be sure to note the underlying foundation this passage lays for subsequent events in the Book of Acts. Especially note references in the next three lessons to the Spirit's power and work.

OCTOBER 12, 2008

Calling Men for Leadership

Acts 6:1-15

The Church was on the move: souls were being added daily and, as is so often the case with fast-growing organizations, growth was outstripping administrative capabilities. Noting figures in Acts 2:41; 4:4; and 5:14, we may well surmise that the nascent movement had garnered 10 to 12 thousand adherents by this time. We also note from verse 1 (and 2:44, 45 and 4:32) that they were obviously practicing a form of Christian communal living, sharing freely with one another, or at least taking care of those who had no other means of support. We also note cultural friction, in verse 1, between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. This all led to potential conflict.

When apprised of the problem of unequal distribution of goods, the twelve disciples, as recognized leaders of the movement, made immediate plans to rectify the situation. They called the group together and gave the people responsibility for solving the problem. Their task, they stated, was to preach and teach. Other qualified and capable men should be chosen to see after the material aspect of the work.

Note the stipulations they gave for the men to be chosen: honest, Spirit-filled, wise,

implying capability. With harmony the group chose men and presented them to the leaders for authorization and appointment. After prayer these seven were confirmed and blessed in their new role. Interestingly, these men were likely all of Greek origin and thus best equipped to serve their own people. This entire experience shows a dramatic sense of brotherhood and cooperative spirit in solving potential disruptive conflict. We note, too, in verse 7, that the resolution of this problem opened the door for additional growth of the group. Even a number of priests were convinced of the truthfulness of the message about Jesus as the Messiah and joined themselves to the movement.

Stephen, one of the seven, soon takes center stage with his miracle-working power and clear, powerful presentation of the gospel message. He, along with Philip, did more than simply "serve tables." They were also mighty in the Word, preaching and disputing convincingly of the Christ. Stephen's boldness soon put him in conflict with traditional Judaism and led to his eventual martyrdom.

When men do not want to be convinced against their strongly held beliefs, they often turn to drastic measures to silence opposition. In Stephen's case, when they could not resist the wisdom of his speech, they persuaded men to accuse him of blasphemy. They were more intent on defending tradition than on being open to the revelation of truth.

Stephen's critics hauled him before the Sanhedrin for judgment. Again, the only way they knew to silence this man was by setting false witnesses against him, accusing him rightly, but not understanding the import of his message regarding Jesus and the Law.

In contrast to the dark cunning of his accusers, Stephen openly and boldly gave his defense (Chapter 7). Jesus was supporting him and an angelic light suffused his countenance. For the cause, he became the first Christian martyr.

For thought and discussion

1. Study the issues related to the conflict(s) mentioned in the first verse of the lesson (growth, culture, neglect).
2. How can we avoid divisive prejudice in today's church between differing cultural or ethnic groups? Discuss.
3. Note the diplomatic way the disciples approached the problem in the first part of our lesson text. How can we best implement their methods to resolve problems and conflicts in the church today? Discuss with your class.
4. Explain how "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." How did this work out in Stephen's experience?
5. What enabled Stephen to face the situation he did? Why are there not more "Stephens" in the church today, willing to give themselves wholeheartedly to the cause?

OCTOBER 19, 2008

Called to Serve

Acts 9:1-19

Saul had heard Stephen's testimony and was in agreement with the penalty meted out to him (see 7:58; 8:1). To Saul's pharisaical mind it was just punishment. He was infuriated with this new movement and threw himself wholeheartedly into destroying it. Stephen's death triggered great persecution against the believers and scattered them far and wide from Jerusalem. However, this dispersion only served to spread the gospel as these believers took the message with them and preached it wherever they went (see 8:1, 4; 11:19).

As our lesson text opens, Saul was making plans to pursue people of "this way" all the way to Damascus, some 135 miles to the north of Jerusalem. His intent was to bring them, men and women, bound to Jerusalem, there to face trial for their supposed heresy. But God had other plans for Saul. He met him in a dramatic encounter

and turned him from number one destroyer of the faith to number one defender. The touch of God's hand that day on the road to Damascus changed Saul's life, the church, and the world.

One wonders if perhaps Stephen's testimony had at least made some impression upon Saul, and had perhaps gotten him thinking. At least in this encounter on the Damascus Road he accepted the fact that Jesus was alive and that He was Lord. Something helped him to that awareness. And, to his credit, he submitted to Christ's authority and opened himself to further direction and usefulness.

Saul, blinded by his confrontation with the living Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:8), was led humbly into Damascus where he spent the next three days in fasting and prayer. His companions were clueless as to what had happened, but for Saul it was a life-changing experience. He had met the risen Lord.

While Saul waited in prayer, God was preparing another disciple through whom he was to receive sight, blessing, and instruction. Ananias had grave misgivings about approaching this man, Saul, of whom he had heard so much. But the Lord had assured him that Saul was a changed man and that He had a special role for him in building His kingdom. He would be a witness to Jew, Gentile, and royalty.

So Ananias went. And, laying aside fear and prejudice, greeted this one-time enemy as "Brother Saul." How that must have stirred and cheered Saul's heart. Ananias gave credence to his mission by stating that this Jesus whom Saul met on the way was the One who spoke to him and sent him to minister to Saul. That certainly also assured Saul of his divine call.

As Ananias laid his hands on Saul, scales fell from his eyes and his sight was restored. Immediately Ananias baptized Saul. Then he was fed and his strength was restored. It is also likely that further instruction in the Christian way followed as he spent time with the disciples at Damascus.

It will be instructive to read through

verse 30 to note how Saul began immediately to proclaim the risen Christ and how strong opposition surfaced to threaten his life. But Saul was on the move. He was God's chosen vessel. He could not be restrained.

For thought and discussion

1. Do some background study on the life of Paul to see how he was well-equipped for his role in the developing church after his conversion. (Philippians 3 will be helpful.)
2. There is no one so fanatical as a religious fanatic. Explain. Was Saul a religious fanatic? What motivated him before his conversion? Afterward?
3. Not all conversion experiences are as dramatic as Saul's. Examine the methods God uses. Why was Saul's so spectacular? How did God call you?
4. Examine the role of Ananias. He was obscure, unknown, yet a willing tool in God's hands to lead a seeker to a fuller understanding of salvation. Pray that we might be as willing and useful in the task to which God calls us.
5. Notice the lessons here in obedience, acceptance, and service. Apply them to your own life as well.

OCTOBER 26, 2008

Commissioned to Witness

Acts 13:1-12

Up to this point the growth and expansion of the church was largely the result of persecution (see 8:1; 11:19, 20). As believers fled the persecution that arose in Jerusalem following Stephen's martyrdom, they took the message of Christ with them to areas beyond. As of yet, however, there was no thought-out, established plan or program to actively fulfill Christ's command to take the gospel to the "uttermost part of the earth" (see Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8). But the Holy Spirit was at work to change that, as we note in today's text.

Barnabas and Saul had been in Antioch at least a year, after fulfilling other ministries on behalf of the church (see 11:19-30; 12:25). They, together with Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen, had been teaching and preaching to the believers at Antioch, now called Christians, as we note in 11:26. It would seem from the text that perhaps they were seeking further direction from the Lord through prayer and fasting. And God honored their seeking.

The identities of the "prophets and teachers" here at Antioch speak to the cosmopolitan nature of the church. They were from the island of Cyprus, Cyrene on the North African coast, Tarsus, and possibly other places in Africa. They were also of diverse social backgrounds. This all speaks well to the leveling influence of Christianity. In Christ all are one, as the Apostle Paul was to write later in his career.

As this group of leaders ministered, prayed, and fasted, the Holy Spirit made it clear that Barnabas and Saul should be set aside for special ministry. It then appears that the whole church became involved in commissioning them as their representatives to take the gospel to yet unreached areas. But, we note in verse 4 that, in addition to the blessing of the church, it was also the Holy Spirit who sent them on their way.

Did they choose Cyprus as their first field of endeavor because it was Barnabas' home country, or did the Holy Spirit specifically direct them there? We don't know. However, the Holy Spirit did accompany and bless their ministry on Cyprus as we note from the following encounter.

The Christian movement began among Jews and they remained the primary focus for the first number of years. We note here at the beginning of the missionary movement that Barnabas and Saul first went to the synagogues to preach (verse 5, and see also verses 14 ff, and 14:1).

Here on Cyprus Paul (v. 9) performed his first miracle. Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus, expressed a desire to hear the Word of God spoken by Paul and

Barnabas. However, Elymas, the sorcerer, withstood them and sought to turn the proconsul away from faith. He no doubt had ulterior motives. Should Sergius accept the gospel of Christ, his position as chief magician would be in jeopardy.

However, his magical prowess was no match for God's Spirit. Paul denounced him and pronounced judgment upon him in the form of temporary blindness. The glorious result was the acceptance of faith by the proconsul as he witnessed the tremendous power of God.

For thought and discussion

1. Learn what you can about the city of Antioch. It was to become headquarters for Paul's missionary endeavors.
2. What does the choosing of Barnabas and

Paul teach us about calling men today for special work? Explore the principle of teamwork. Discuss.

3. We note in verse 9 that Saul's name was changed to Paul. Was there significance to that in light of the future direction of the movement? Note, too, that now Paul's name becomes prominent, signifying his emergent leadership.
4. How can we deal with those today who would hinder others from hearing or accepting the gospel? Dare we call down blindness, or other deterrent? Discuss.
5. In addition to Elymas' temporary blindness and the proconsul's belief, what other positive effects would this experience have had on the missionary movement? ■

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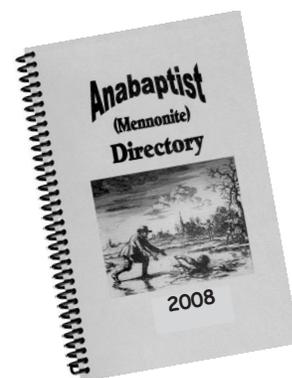
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Who's Behind High Prices?

Tired of high gasoline prices and rising food costs? Well, here's a solution. Let's get rid of the speculators. A chorus of politicians, including John McCain and Barack Obama, blames these financial "opportunists" for piling into commodities markets and pushing prices to artificial and unconscionable levels. . . . If only it were that simple. Speculator-bashing is another exercise in scapegoating and grandstanding. Leading politicians either don't understand what's happening or don't want to acknowledge their own complicity.

[Steel] rose 117 percent . . . even though it isn't traded on commodities futures markets.

A better explanation is basic supply and demand. [T]he world economy has boomed. Since 2002, annual growth has averaged 4.6 percent, the highest sustained rate since the 1960s. . . . By their nature, raw materials (food, energy, minerals) sustain the broader economy. . . . When unexpectedly high demand strains existing production, prices rise sharply as buyers scramble for scarce supplies. That's what happened.

"No one foresaw that China would grow at a 10 percent annual rate for over a decade. Commodity producers just didn't invest enough," says analyst Joel Crane of Deutsche Bank. In industry after industry, global buying has bumped up against production limits. In 1999, surplus world oil capacity totaled 5 million barrels a day (mbd) on global consumption of 76 mbd, reckons the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Now, the surplus is about 2 mbd—and much of that is high-sulfur oil not prized by refiners—on consumption of 86 mbd.

Or take . . . copper and aluminum. "You

had a long period of underinvestment in these industries," says economist John Mothersole of Global Insight. For some metals, the collapse of the Soviet Union threw added production—previously destined for tanks, planes, and ships—onto world markets. Prices plunged as surpluses grew. But Mothersole says, "The accelerating growth in India and China eliminated the overhang." China now accounts for up to 80 percent of the world's annual increased use of some metals.

[Commodity] trading might drive up prices if they were investing in stocks or real estate. But commodity investing is different. Investors generally don't buy the physical goods, whether oil or corn. Instead, they trade "futures contracts," which are bets on what prices will be in, say, six months. For every trader betting on higher prices, another is betting on lower prices. These trades are matched. In the stock market, all investors (buyers and sellers) can profit in a rising market, and all can lose in a falling market. In futures markets, one trader's gain is another's loss.

Futures contracts enable commercial consumers and producers of commodities to hedge. Airlines can lock in fuel prices by buying oil futures; farmers can lock in selling prices for their grain by selling grain futures. The markets work because numerous financial players—"speculators" in it for the money—can take the other side of hedgers' trades. But the frantic trading doesn't directly affect the physical supplies of raw materials. In theory, high futures prices might reduce physical supplies by inspiring hoarding. But that's not happening now. Inventories are modest. World wheat stocks, compared with consumption, are near historic lows.

Politicians promise to tighten regulation of futures markets, but futures markets aren't the main problem. Scarcities are. Government subsidies for corn-based ethanol have increased food prices by diverting more grain into biofuels. A third of this year's U.S. corn crop could go to ethanol. Restrictions on oil drilling in the United States have limited global production and put upward pressure on prices. If politicians wish to point fingers of blame, they should start with themselves.

—excerpts from “Who’s Behind High Prices?” by Robert Samuelson in *The Washington Post* (<http://tinyurl.com/46rqw3>)

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Swaddling Clothes

Swaddling clothes for babies are experiencing a revival as a mother inventor realized the benefits of this Bible-time practice. Amie Nilsson used the Bible’s mention of swaddling clothes as her inspiration for the product she invented and produced, which she calls Cocooi Babywrap. The *UK Daily Mail* writes, “It is made of pure merino wool, a superfine and soft material that lets the child breathe. The wool absorbs and releases moisture away from the baby in warm conditions and insulates it when the temperature drops.”

Testing by parents has shown that “babies settled [down] faster and slept much better than on normal blankets.” The slight pressure and warmth is thought to give the baby a feeling of security as it mimics the feeling of the womb. For some time, the age-old practice was thought to hinder “self-expression” and prevent the baby from learning to coordinate its movements. However, scientists proved in 2005 that it helps babies sleep more deeply. The Cocooi can be had for a mere \$49 on MerinoKids.com, although I don’t think Mary needed to order one from the UK for Jesus!

—Source: *UK Daily Mail*

* * * * *

UK Mothers Want to Quit Jobs

“Almost two-thirds of working mothers with young children would like to give up their job to care for their family, according

to a report published [16 July, 2008].

“More than 80 percent of parents said they were ‘physically worn out,’ while 68 percent felt ‘exhausted’ and ‘emotionally drained.’

“Eighty percent of mothers surveyed said they had less than an hour a day to themselves while 57 percent of parents felt there was ‘not enough time in the day for normal family life.’ ”

—Excerpt from “62 percent of working mums ‘want to quit job for a normal family life’ ” in *The UK Daily Mail* (<http://tinyurl.com/6xt2gt>)

* * * * *

New Yorker Obama Cartoon Causes Offense

There was widespread outrage over a cartoon of Obama and his wife on the cover of the *New Yorker* magazine. The cartoon showed Obama in Muslim garb in the Oval Office with a flag burning in the fireplace and a picture of Osama hanging on the wall. The purpose of the cartoon was to poke fun at those who have attacked Obama as a Muslim. However, this cartoon instead evoked outrage from both the Obama and McCain campaigns and the media.

Patrick Buchanan believes that the cartoon backfired. He opined, “Why did progressives recoil? Because the more savvy among them sense that, like much humor, this cartoon was an exaggeration that contained no small kernel of recognizable truth. After all, Barack did dump the flag pin. Michelle did say she had never been proud of her country before now. Barack did don that Ali Baba outfit in Somalia. His father and stepfather were Muslims. He does have a benefactor, Bill Ayers, who said after 9/11 he regrets not planting more bombs in the 1960s. He did have a pastor who lionizes Black Muslim Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Jon Stewart of the comedic *Daily Show* humorously summed it up best: “Obama’s camp initially agreed that the cartoon was ‘tasteless and offensive.’ Really? You know what your response should have been? It’s very easy. Here. Let me put the statement

out for you: ‘Barack Obama is in no way upset about the cartoon that depicts him as a Muslim extremist, because you know who gets upset about cartoons? Muslim extremists! Of which Obama is not.’ ”

—Sources: *The Daily Show, Human Events* (<http://tinyurl.com/5wtbzi>)

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African Witches Come to Christ Through *Jesus Film*

“In a central African nation with a dark history of witchcraft, the Gospel message is breaking through and touching the hearts and lives of villagers, including witches.

“Screenings of the ‘Jesus’ film in the Central African Republic has led to tens of thousands of commitments for Christ, dozens of churches planted, and witches being freed from dark forces, according to *The Jesus Film Project*.

“Central African Republic, which neighbors the highly-troubled nations of Chad and Sudan, has struggled with what some might consider an epidemic of witchcraft. Local witches reportedly have the power to kill and cause excruciating physical pain, leading to great fear among villagers.

“The government routinely imprisons accused witches, but has found that prison walls cannot contain their power.

“When witches saw the ‘Jesus’ film—which follows the life and teachings of Jesus Christ—in their own language, many reportedly were convicted by the Holy Spirit. They repented of their sins, were freed from their spiritual bondage, and committed their lives to Jesus Christ, *The Jesus Film Project* reported.

“In the Bossangoa area in western CAR, people have dubbed the ‘Jesus’ film, ‘The Miracle Film.’

“The region’s governor has personally called the ‘Jesus’ film team to thank them for the ‘miracles’ the movie has done on the witches in his area.”

—Excerpt from “African Witches Come to Christ Through Jesus Film” in the *Christian Post* (<http://tinyurl.com/66fpka>) via the *Kuepfer Kronicle*

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American Christians Told Not to Preach in UK

“Two Christians holding U. S. passports were told by a police representative to stop leafleting in a Muslim area of east Birmingham, the BBC has reported.

“ ‘The U. S. Christians said they were advised they were committing a hate crime by trying to convert Muslims,’ the BBC reported.”

—Excerpt from “American Christians ‘told not to preach’ in Muslim area of UK” in the *Christian Examiner* (<http://tinyurl.com/56jnhc>)

* * * * *

UK Christian Registrar Tells of Bullying

“The devout Christian registrar who won a landmark legal battle over her refusal to carry out gay ‘weddings’ has spoken for the first time about the devastating campaign of bullying she suffered at the hands of her politically correct colleagues.” You can read her whole story at: <http://tinyurl.com/57t2y6>.

—Source: *UK Daily Mail*

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Converted Couple Arrested in Iran

“Security police officials in Tehran this month tortured a newly converted couple and threatened to put their four-year-old daughter in an institution after arresting them for holding Bible studies and attending a house church.

“A Christian source in Iran said that 28-year-old Tina Rad was charged with ‘activities against the holy religion of Islam’ for reading the Bible with Muslims in her home in east Tehran and trying to convert them. Officials charged her husband, 31-year-old Makan Arya, with ‘activities against national security’ after seizing the couple from their home on June 3, forcing them to leave their four-year-old daughter ill and unattended.”

—Excerpt from “IRAN: Convert couple arrested, tortured, threatened for holding Bible studies” in the *Christian Examiner* (<http://tinyurl.com/6gnnnn>).

SWORD AND TRUMPET

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Political Correctness in Dallas

“At a recent meeting of city officials in Dallas County, Texas, a small racial brouhaha broke out. County commissioners were hashing out difficulties with the way the central collections office handles traffic tickets. Commissioner Kenneth Mayfield found himself guilty of talking while white. He observed that the bureaucracy ‘has become a black hole’ for lost paperwork.

“Fellow Commissioner John Wiley Price took great offense, shouting, ‘Excuse me!’ That office, the black commissioner explained, has become a ‘white hole.’

“Seizing on the outrage, Judge Thomas Jones demanded that Mayfield apologize for the ‘racially insensitive analogy,’ in the words of the *Dallas Morning News*’ City Hall Blog.

“*Houston Chronicle* science blogger Eric Berger notes that everyone should be ‘very glad that the central collections office has not become a white hole, a theoretical object that ejects matter from beyond its event horizon, rather than sucking it in. It wouldn’t be fun for Dallas to find itself so near a quasar.’”

Ah, the joys of political correctness! Unfortunately with hate crimes legislation coming, it might soon be an arresting officer that is facing you rather than simply an angry liberal.

—Excerpt from “Black-Hole Speech” (<http://tinyurl.com/6g6edr>) by Jonah Goldberg

* * * * *

Muslim Woman Too Submissive for French Citizenship

“France has denied citizenship to a veiled Moroccan woman on the grounds that her ‘radical’ practice of Islam is incompatible with basic French values such as equality of the sexes, a legal ruling showed on Friday.

“She . . . lives in ‘total submission’ to her husband and male relatives, according to reports by social services.

“In the past, nationality was denied to Muslims who were known to have links

with extremist circles or who had publicly advocated radicalism, which is not the case here.

“‘She lives in total submission to her male relatives. She seems to find this normal and the idea of challenging it has never crossed her mind,’ [the legal expert advising the government] wrote.”

—Excerpt from “Muslim woman too submissive for French citizenship” (<http://tinyurl.com/6msgnj>) in *Reuters*

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U.S. Removes Uranium From Iraq

“The last major remnant of Saddam Hussein’s nuclear program—a huge stockpile of concentrated natural uranium—reached a Canadian port Saturday to complete a secret U.S. operation that included a two-week airlift from Baghdad and a ship voyage crossing two oceans.

“The removal of 550 metric tons of ‘yellowcake’—the seed material for higher-grade nuclear enrichment—was a significant step toward closing the books on Saddam’s nuclear legacy. It also brought relief to U.S. and Iraqi authorities who had worried the cache would reach insurgents or smugglers crossing to Iran, to aid its nuclear ambitions.”

This confirms what we knew all along: there was no nuclear program in Iraq. (Please forgive the sarcasm.)

—Excerpt from “AP Exclusive: US removes uranium from Iraq” (<http://tinyurl.com/5duofb>)

* * * * *

Russia Threatens U.S. With Military Action

After the U.S. signed a deal with the Czech Republic to host the radar for the anti-missile defense system the U.S. is building to protect Europe, Russia threatened to retaliate by military means. Robert Gates, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, cited the recent testing by Iran of ballistic missiles capable of hitting Europe as a good reason that this system needs to be built. Russia should not feel threatened by this

system because firstly it is a defensive system, but most importantly it has only ten interceptor missiles: enough to protect from a rogue state like Iran or North Korea, but impotent in the face of the thousands of nuclear ICBMs Russia has pointed at the U. S. and Europe.

A reader from the Ukraine commented that this is not about a military threat to Russia, but a political one. The Czech Republic used to be part of the Soviet Union and Russia intensely dislikes when former Soviet bloc states get friendly with the U. S. The Ukrainian commenting should know all about Russia’s intense desire to control former Soviet bloc countries: during an election in which a pro-Russian government appeared likely to be removed from office, the opposition leader (Yushchenko) was poisoned with a dioxin. Evidence (for example, the main suspects fled to Russia and were granted asylum) strongly points to Russian FSB (new name of the KGB) involvement.

—Sources: *The Times* of London, *Wikipedia*

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U.S. Says Israeli Exercise Directed at Iran

U. S. military sources say that the recent huge training operation carried out by Israel is a ‘dress rehearsal’ for a strike on Iran’s nuclear program. It involved over 100 fighter aircraft over the Eastern Mediterranean and Greece at roughly the same distance as Iran’s nuclear facilities.

In related news, Israel successfully tested a new system that intercepts short-range rockets such as the Qassam and Katyusha rockets which are fired into Israel on a fairly regular basis by Hamas and Hezbollah. I am living in Jerusalem right now, so this is good to hear. The system is slated to be operational in a year.

—Sources: *International Herald Tribune*, *AFP*

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Tablet Speaks of Messiah’s Death and Resurrection

“A three-foot-tall tablet with 87 lines of Hebrew that scholars believe dates from the decades just before the birth of Jesus is causing a quiet stir in biblical and archaeological circles, especially because it may speak of a messiah who will rise from the dead after three days.”

These scholars believe that the “messiah dying, rising on the third day” was a common myth of the period which is where the myth of Jesus came from. However, they are failing to consider two very important alternatives: If their dating was accurate and it was before Jesus, it could have been a prophecy. If their dating was inaccurate, it could have been a historical record. The bare facts here seem to validate the New Testament rather than discredit it. Only their interpretation strives to discredit it.

—Excerpt from “Tablet ignites debate on Messiah and resurrection” (<http://tinyurl.com/5g45y3>) in *The International Herald Tribune*

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Suggested Reads

“The GOP Is the Party of Civil Rights” (<http://tinyurl.com/65x96o>) in the *Wall Street Journal*

“Why Black People Don’t Care That GOP Is Civil Rights Party” (<http://tinyurl.com/5rq56d>) by LaShawn Barber, a conservative Christian lady who is black

“A Despicable Enemy” (<http://tinyurl.com/5bx815>) in the *New York Post* opinion section

“We’re Not Leaving” (<http://tinyurl.com/6fsgb6>) by Michael Barone

“NOPD officer punished for wearing the wrong uniform” (<http://tinyurl.com/5nsnd6>) in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

Feedback: hansmast@hansmast.com



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.

It's Time to LET GO of Our Nets!

by Dr. Joseph Stowell

I read about a time when former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher was campaigning for office. While greeting the residents of a nursing home, she stopped to speak to one woman in the corner whose eyes were rather glazed over.

Mrs. Thatcher greeted this lady and asked how she was doing, but the lady just looked at her in desperation. So Mrs. Thatcher asked her, “Do you know who I am?”

The woman looked up and said, “No, but that nurse over there helps us with those kinds of things.” Knowing who you are is a vitally important thing!

Our Identity Must Be Tied to the Person of Jesus Christ

Knowing who you are is a vitally important thing! So allow me to ask you this question: Who are you? If we were to sit down and have a cup of coffee together to discuss this, my guess is that you might begin by telling me about your profession, what you do for a living. Or because I'm a preacher, you might think I was looking for a religious response, so you might say, “I'm a Presbyterian” or “I'm a Baptist.”

If our conversation went in any of those directions, my response would be, “Those are all fine, but that's what you do for a living and where you go to church. What I'd really like to know is, who *are* you?”

But if you were to think for a moment

and then say, “I am a follower of Jesus Christ,” you would have gotten it right. When we went to the old, rugged cross and Jesus welcomed us to Himself and to His family, at that point we gained our true identity as followers of Him. Our sense of identity is very determinative of the way we live.

I also am a follower of Jesus Christ, but I suspect that a lot of us who identify ourselves in this way have never really stopped to think what that means and how our identity as Jesus' followers should define and dictate our lives.

Our Calling Is to Let Go of Our Nets and Follow Jesus

In Matthew 4:18-22, Jesus Himself unwraps for us what it means to be His followers when He meets four of His disciples for the first time. Matthew recalls that as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers—“Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother” (v. 18). They were casting their nets into the sea because they were fishermen. This was their profession, their career. Their occupation was their whole sense of personal identity. If you were to ask Peter, “Who are you?” he would say, “I'm a fisherman.”

But Jesus was about to change all of that, not only for Peter and Andrew, but also for James and John, by saying to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”

(v. 19). Jesus was about to change these men from being fishers of fish to fishers of men. That's what I call a career upgrade!

Most of us get up in the morning saying, "I am going to make something of my life, and I'll follow Jesus too." But I just want you to know that we can't have it both ways. We have to have the formula right. "Follow Me," Jesus said, "and as you follow Me, I will make something of your life." So these men heard Jesus' call—but here's what shocks me in this text. I read in Matthew 4:20 and 22 that both sets of brothers *immediately* left their nets and followed Jesus.

When I read this, I think about putting myself there. If I were a fisherman whose livelihood depended on the nets I was holding in my hands, before letting them go I probably would have wanted to negotiate with Jesus for a moment. You would too. We would want to know, "Is this short-term, or do I have to give my whole life to it? Is there a 401k plan? Is this going to be challenging? Do I get sick pay?"

In other words, our tendency would be to hang on to our nets. But as long as the disciples clung to their nets, they were going nowhere with Jesus. It seems to me that we all have nets in our lives. My net is anything that inhibits or prohibits my capacity to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe you know what your net is too—that thing you think of when you say to yourself, "If I were to become a fully devoted follower of Christ, I'd have to let go of ____." And then you fill in the blank.

But the disciples immediately let go of their nets. I think the reason their act of commitment and surrender strikes us as strange is because we have forgotten who Jesus Christ really is and how compelling this Man is. I think we have this Sunday school picture of Jesus in a neatly pressed robe and sandals, with a well-trimmed beard—a nice guy, rather harmless, but not very compelling.

But that's not the Jesus who calls us to let go of our nets and follow Him. These men He called were rugged fishermen, who,

in today's world, would have worked in a profession filled with guys who had tattoos on their tough biceps, who showed up at the diner at 5:00 in the morning, jamming their cigarette butts into an overflowing ashtray, talking about politics and cussing out Rome. These were tough men who wouldn't have been compelled to change their lives by a Sunday school Jesus. But He confronted them and called them, and they threw down their nets and followed Him.

Our Calling Is the Highest Honor We Could Ever Receive

I want to show you something very important about the calling that Jesus gave to the disciples because it has profound implications for us today. The culture of Orthodox Judaism in which Jesus and the disciples lived, helps us understand more deeply what was involved in Jesus' call to Peter and his friends to be His followers, and why it was the highest honor they could possibly receive.

The word that Matthew used for "follow" in our story is rich with meaning. It literally means "to be found in the way" with Jesus. In the Orthodox Judaism of Jesus' day, followers were a subgroup of people who, in their hearts, had a longing to know God. And to get that longing satisfied, they would attach themselves to God's local representative, the rabbi.

These people who wanted to follow a particular rabbi would move into the compound with him and sit at his feet as he was teaching them, listening to every word. They considered it their highest privilege to serve him, in even the smallest ways. They would watch him and imitate his dress and even his mannerisms—so much so that even in Jerusalem where there were many rabbis, you could tell which rabbi a person followed because he would act, talk, and respond just like his rabbi-teacher. Even Jesus said a well-trained student would become like his teacher (Matthew 10:25).

So these students would follow their rabbi, but at age 12 or 13 a cut was made, so to speak, and only the really brilliant

students had the privilege of asking the rabbi if they could commit their lives to being his followers. The ordinary students who didn't make the cut at this point went back into the trades, such as fishing.

Every Jewish student went to rabbinical school, to a point, but only the top students went on to this higher level. Think about what this meant for Peter and other fishermen Jesus called. They were the losers as far as society was concerned—the guys who didn't make the cut. But what an honor they were given when this soon-to-be headliner Rabbi, Jesus Christ, called them to be His followers. The rabbis of Israel would never ask their students to follow them. The students had to ask to follow.

Let me bring this down to us today. My friend, we were all losers from God's standpoint. We weren't making the cut. But the God of creation walked down the beach of our lives in the Person of Jesus Christ and said to us, "Follow Me." I hope we never get over the wonder of that honor!

Our Response Is to Follow Jesus as He Makes the Path

Remember, I explained that the word Jesus used in Matthew 4, which is translated "follow," was a very rich word in Jewish culture. The student who followed a rabbi for the purpose of learning from him and imitating him and becoming just like him was said to be "in the way" with that rabbi.

This is what Jesus was calling the disciples to do—to let go of their nets, leave their way of being fishermen, and follow Him in the way He would blaze for them as their way-maker and path-setter. The response that Jesus' call demanded was to accept that incredible honor and leave everything else to become His follower.

This is our call today—and it demands the same response from us. If we are going to be authentic followers of Jesus Christ, we must be with Him in the way.

Have you ever thought about how profound it is that Jesus came into our world, which is full of the broad ways that lead to

destruction, ways that are packed with foot traffic, and cut through the jungle of our lives to make whole new paths? That's what He is doing in the world today, and as Jesus makes the way, He looks over His shoulder and asks if anyone is in the way with Him.

The only right response we can make to that call is to follow Jesus! But I want you to know that following Him can be a shocking experience, because the path Jesus is making takes us off the path we are used to walking.

For example, Jesus shocked His disciples when He said, "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). The talk on the street was that you love your friends and hate your enemies. But Jesus cut a new path at that moment and asked, "Is anyone with Me in the way?"

On another occasion, Jesus' disciples were arguing about who would be the big shots in the kingdom of God (Mark 9:33, 34). Jesus corrected their thinking because they weren't on the path He was cutting. Then later He reminded them that as followers of His, their calling was to serve, not to be served, because that was His calling as well (Mark 10:45).

No matter where you turn in Scripture, you discover that Jesus left us in no doubt about what it means to be His authentic, fully committed followers. That leaves us with just one problem—those nets we are still holding.

For Peter and his friends, their nets represented their profession. But as long as they held on to their nets, they weren't going anywhere with Jesus. They may not have made the cut in terms of being able to follow the great rabbis of Israel—but on the shore of Galilee, they were being given the profound privilege of following the wisest Teacher of all. All they had to do was let go of their nets.

You and I must do the same—because true followers of Jesus are "netless" believers! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Veritas*, July 2008.

Relating to Other Fellowships in Our Communities

by John Edward Weaver

“Look! Those people are Mennonites! I wonder what group they are from?” Some of us live in areas where seeing other Mennonites is a common occurrence, while for others it is a rare occasion.

This article focuses on relating to those fellowships that doctrinally see the Scriptures in the same light as we do, whether they are groups that we closely fellowship with or not. How does God intend for us to relate to these groups? Let us see what God’s Word has to tell us.

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34, 35). What a blessing that all men, regardless of nationality, religious upbringing, or social status can come to God in fear and humility and be accepted by Him! This truth helps us realize that God relates equally to all individuals—and fellowships—that fear Him and keep His commandments. May we with God’s help follow this pattern in our relationships to others.

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Luke 18:9). In this parable God heard the prayer of the sinner, but despised the prayer of the supposed religious man. What was the difference between these two men? The Pharisee was glorying in his own accomplishments and looking down on others. The publican saw no good in himself and pled for God’s mercy. If we, like the Pharisee, begin to glory in our own or our fellowship’s accomplishments and do not give God the glory, God will distance Himself from us. God never intended for us to look on others with disfavor.

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do

good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). There will always be opportunities to extend Christian love to those in the communities around us, including Christians from other fellowships. We should do this out of a heart of genuine Christian love. Jesus, our great Example, did not hesitate to extend His mercies to all men. In times of disaster, we need to be at the door of these brothers or sisters to extend a helping hand wherever it is needed.

“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15). In special times of rejoicing we should be delighted to share in the joys of those around us. These times will include births, weddings, and simply rejoicing when God’s Kingdom is extended through other fellowships. There will also be times when our presence or letters will help to lift the load of those weighed down with special grief. Attending funerals, or even helping in funeral preparations, are ways to obey this Bible command. Also, when we see fellowships suffering spiritual loss we will weep with them.

“And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49, 50). To view other fellowships as competitors in God’s kingdom is not according to the Word of God. We all benefit greatly from others who are faithfully following God’s Word. These fellowships may even challenge us to greater faithfulness. To see other fellowships who are true to the gospel of Christ should, and will, cause great rejoicing to the child of God.

“But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Galatians 5:15). In the kingdom

of God we will not waste our time in conflict with other fellowships, even if our enemy would love to have it so. God loves to see an attitude of cooperation one with another, and this spirit will help to inspire all on to greater usefulness to God.

“And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth” (John 4:37). God’s kingdom work is so vast that it can in no way be accomplished by one fellowship alone. Rather, God is using all the faithful to accomplish His purposes. At times the spiritual reaping of one fellowship may be the direct result of the sowing of sister fellowships.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). Our relationships to our neighboring fellowships need to be free of judgmental attitudes. While every group needs to establish fellowship lines, this needs to be done with great

care and the consensus of the church. When we choose to take a cautious approach toward a particular group, does this mean we are judging them? No. We can choose to limit fellowship with other church groups while retaining our love for them and desiring their spiritual prosperity, without any judgmental attitudes.

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Revelation 7:9). This is the final reward for the faithful! There will be great rejoicing to see that multitude from every tribe and nation stand saved before the Lamb! God desires to use our feeble efforts to help swell the multitude! ■

—Reprinted with permission from the *Ontario Informer*, June 2008.

What Do You Talk About?

by Mark D. Avery

Gordon Sears, in a brief article in *The Sword of the Lord*, suggests that “a leading indicator of the character, harmony, and spiritual interests of a church will show up in the conversations” of the people of the congregation. The emphasis of the two-paragraph piece is that church people today tend to talk about things that are of little importance.

Sears also suggested that it used to be a common practice for Christians to talk to each other about whom they were trying to win to Christ. Sadly, that does not seem to be a regular topic of conversation today.

The Book of Acts could be outlined with three topics. **Power.** “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). **Purity.** Peter declared that purity is one important aspect of holy living in Acts 15:9 with these words: “purifying their hearts by faith.” **Personal Witness.** “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8).

Too often the church has emphasized the purity aspect of its doctrine without demon-

strating the effect of that purity. The person whose heart is purified does not have to isolate himself from the world to keep himself pure. Sure, he does not participate in sinful activities and does not go to some places, but he is not motivated only by what he does not do.

Jesus’ teaching explicitly includes the idea that people on whom the Holy Ghost has come “shall be witnesses unto me.” We have often rightly used this statement to stress the importance of world missions. Without question, that is *a part* of Jesus’ emphasis—taking the gospel “unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Most of us do not sense a call to some foreign field of service. While we do support those who are called to foreign missions with our prayers and financial support, we still have witness duty here at home.

Our statement of faith declares that we believe in heaven, the eternal home of the

(continued on page 23)



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.

Thy Life Was Given for Me



by Havergal/Gower

Lyrics: Central to the doctrines of Biblical Christianity is Jesus Christ's sacrificial atonement for the sins of mankind. Although our human minds will never be able to comprehend the full extent of the sacrifice made by God's Son, we all know that the Incarnation was no small step of condescension. When we realize what Jesus has done for us and turn to Him in faith, the obvious question is, "What can I do in return?" Of course, we all know that it is bad theology to think that we can somehow "repay" Christ for what He has done for us, but the desire to give in return is healthy, and even commanded by Jesus Himself. Frances Havergal's hymn "Thy Life Was Given for Me" discusses the relationship between what Christ gave for us, and what little we have to offer in return.

The first three verses move through three different aspects of what Christ did for us. The first talks about the life that Christ gave for us, and how it spared us from spiritual death. The second stanza relates the suffering that Christ experienced in order to save us from the eternal suffering of hell. In the third verse, the focus is on the gift of salvation. In addition to giving us life and saving us from hell, Christ's sacrifice saved us in the sense that we are free from the "law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2) in this *present*

life, not just in the next. Each verse ends with a question of what we have done in return, to which the obvious answer is "nothing!" (at least by comparison).

The fourth verse presents the only logical response to such great love and sacrifice: "I give myself to Thee." It is not as though giving up ourselves will be a great enough sacrifice to repay Jesus, but it is all we have, as well as all He asks for.

Music: The musical setting of this hymn may sound just a bit unusual at first, but it fits the text quite well. The descending chromatic intervals in the first phrase give the feeling of something being laid down or given up. This phrase of the first three verses discusses something that Christ has done for us, and the fourth speaks of our laying down our own lives for Christ.

For all four verses of the text, the next-to-last phrase is a summary of some aspect of Christ's sacrifice. Up to that point, the parts have been within their normal ranges, but at the "summary" phrase John H. Gower suddenly drops the top three parts below their usual comfort zone. This very quickly changes the tone of the music to something much more contemplative and serious than the rest of the hymn, drawing special attention to the text that it accompanies. ■

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

Thy Life Was Given for Me

I lay down my life for the sheep. – JOHN 10:15

DEVOTION 6s. 6 l.

FRANCES R. HAVERGAL, 1858

JOHN H. GOWER, 1895

1. Thy life was giv'n for me, Thy blood, O Lord was shed,
 2. Thou, Lord, hast borne for me More than my tongue can tell
 3. And Thou hast brought to me Down from Thy home a - bove
 4. O let my life be giv'n, My years for Thee be spent;

That I might ran - somed be, And quick-ened from the dead:
 Of bit - t'rest ag - o - ny, To res - cue me from hell:
 Sal - va - tion full and free, Thy par - don and Thy love:
 World-fet - ters all be riv'n, And joy with suf - f'ring blent:

rit.
 Thy life was giv'n for me; What have I giv'n for Thee?
 Thou suf - f'redst all for me; What have I borne for Thee?
 Great gifts Thou brought-est me; What have I brought to Thee?
 Thou gav'st Thy - self for me, I give my - self to Thee.

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WHAT DO YOU TALK ABOUT? . . . cont'd.

redeemed, and hell, the final abode of the lost. And one wonders, how can we believe in heaven and hell and do little or nothing to help people who are headed toward hell turn around and get to heaven?

The emphasis of the Great Commission is soul-winning. The challenge of Jesus' statement in Acts 1:8 is sharing the message. Even Isaiah, in his vision recorded in Chapter 6 of his prophecy, was immediately challenged to "go" after his cleansing in the Temple.

The bottom line is that people whose hearts have been made holy have a divine commis-

sion to share the gospel. Some will share it across the sea; many others should share the message across the fence or across the street.

Do you know your neighbors? Go to them. Build a relationship. Show them what a Christian is. Point the way to Jesus.

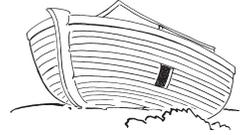
If we share our message with lost people, we will likely want to share our efforts with fellow Christians. Perhaps we will enlist their prayer support, maybe even inspire them to follow our example. After all, people who have the Holy Spirit living within will be Christ's witnesses. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Church Herald & Holiness Banner*, June 2008



Beginning Issues

John Mullett



GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Evolution's Deadly Theology

by William L. Krewson

The Creationist case should not be taught in schools, for, whatever may be said to the contrary, "Scientific Creationism" does move right over into religion.¹

How often this cry resounds whenever public discussion turns to the teaching of origins. Somehow evolutionists are never labeled as religionists. Consequently, evolution now dominates the discourse on origins. Since the separation of church and state is an essential policy in America, creation proponents face an uphill battle to even get a hearing in the public square. The playing field does not seem level. After all, it is argued, evolutionary science is neutral and objective, while creation science is merely religious dogma in disguise.

Would the matter change if evolution were classified as a religion? Is evolution more than simply the erroneous teaching that all life on earth originated through a natural progression from simple life-forms to the more complex? Indeed, evolutionists make it sound as if a higher power were at work, driving the evolutionary process forward. And some treat that unseen force like a god.

Philosopher Mary Midgley aptly demonstrated this point in her book *Evolution as a Religion*. Her research revealed that most scientific texts on evolution included statements that are not scientific but religious. "They made startling suggestions about vast themes such as immortality, human destiny and the meaning of life."² Whether

these authors intended to do so or not, their writings combined scientific analyses with spiritual application. This is a mark of religion! Although Midgley has no sympathy for Christianity, she deftly identified the hypocrisy of those who deny the religious nature of evolutionism.

The Source of Evolution's Theology

We need look no further than the writings of Charles Darwin, the father of modern evolutionary theory, for the source of evolution's theology. At one time Darwin considered entering the clergy of the Church of England. That path changed radically after he spent five years (1831-1836) sailing, and exploring the variety of living creatures on the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. In his autobiography, Darwin explained that, at that time, he wrestled with the presence of evil in a world created by God:

There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat should play with mice.³

In 1859 he published *The Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection*, detailing his view that all life came not from the hand of a creator but from the process of survival of the fittest. Thus Darwin

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disclosed his god. In a letter to a friend he even named it and capitalized it: “[M]y deity [is] ‘Natural Selection.’”⁴

Darwin expressed his religious views in a letter he wrote as an old man in ill health: “Science has nothing to do with Christ, except in so far as the habit of scientific research makes a man cautious in admitting evidence. For myself, I do not believe that there ever has been any revelation. As for a future life, every man must judge for himself between conflicting vague probabilities.”⁵

It is no wonder he wrote,

*I had gradually come by this time, i.e., 1836 to 1839, to see that the Old Testament was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos. . . . I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. . . . Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress.*⁶

There is little evidence, if any, that he ever changed his mind.

The path that Darwin traveled is described in Romans 1:

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (vv. 21-23).

God has created all people with an innate knowledge about Himself. But because mankind is disposed against God, people turn away from Him and worship self-manufactured deities. Humans instinctively worship, but many worship idols.

Darwin’s descent from professing Christianity, to pioneering evolution, has attracted many followers. What more convenient way to displace the consciousness of the true God than to postulate the god of natural selection?

The Character of Evolution’s Theology

Evolution’s god is the awesome force of

nature that supposedly drives all life forward in gradual steps of progress. This deity is impersonal, undemanding, and detached from the constraints inherent in a personal relationship. One does not pray to the god of natural selection. Although textbooks do not define the doctrine of evolutionary theology, its contours and highlights may be seen in three ways.

First, evolution’s theology forms the basis for secular humanism’s dogma as stated in *Humanist Manifestos I and II*. The first document, written in 1933, begins by promoting the need to create a new religion that would fit the coming age. Its first two pillars of faith regard “the universe as self-existing and not created” and teaches that man “is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process [evolution].”⁷

Forty years later, in 1973, this document added the need for faith in humanity’s progress, despite the emergence of Nazism and other despotic regimes after its first edition in 1933:

*Humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism . . . still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means for survival. . . . No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.*⁸

The humanists’ religion is the faith of evolution, and only the fittest will survive.

Second, Darwin believed that morals originate by the same process as all life: by his god of natural selection. In the struggle to survive, the fittest win merely because they display high moral values, not necessarily right values. Morals are therefore dependent on a situation and have no external basis of right or wrong.

The majority of social scientists view natural selection as the fundamental doctrine guiding their research in morality. Because mankind is simply a “higher animal,” the

study of animal behavior translates into equivalency for humans. "The biological sciences continue to throw fresh light on the nature of human beings in their relation with the remainder of the animal world."⁹ Such thinking produces situation ethics and a morality based on the moment. No wonder we see bumper stickers that read, "Do not be surprised when our children act like animals if they learn they descended from them."

Third, some theologians desire to wed evolution to the God of the Bible. Read these words of accommodation:

*A biblically inspired vision of the future provides a most suitable framework for both evolutionary science and the religious quest for meaning. . . . Rather than attributing to God a rigid "plan" for the universe, evolutionary theology prefers to think of God's "vision" for it. . . . The God of evolution does not fix things in advance, nor hoard selfishly the joy of creating. Instead God shares with all creatures their own openness to an indeterminate future.*¹⁰

Once again, God is being made in mankind's image. Compare the chaotic days of the judges in Israel when "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

The Result of Evolution's Theology

The stakes are high in this battle; eternal life or eternal death are the consequences. Acts 17 describes how the Apostle Paul fought a similar battle in Athens, the first century's heart of Greek philosophy and culture. Paul visited Athens and saw many temples to multiple gods. He engaged the philosophers at the Areopagus by noting the religiosity of the Athenian people. Shrewdly using the statue to the unknown god, Paul proceeded to explain the scriptural truth about that god—the true God.

However, before he could declare the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul had to demolish the Greek view of origins. Present with Paul that day were philosophers from the Stoic and Epicurean schools, whose "two eminent systems of Graeco-Roman philosophy were evolutionary in essence."¹¹

Paul began to dismantle the evolutionary, polytheistic worldviews by stating God's creative activity three times:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation (vv. 24-26).

Only after constructing a worldview based on the Genesis record of creation could Paul present the message about Jesus Christ and eternal judgment.

Satan's plan is quite ingenious: he has found a way to convince humanity that people are the product of an impersonal, evolutionary force and that they are therefore not responsible to any divine being. The fight is not merely about origins, but about destinies.

Christians must never allow those who argue for evolution to keep the battle in the realm of science. It is ultimately a religious war of faith, values, and worship. Christians worship the God who created all things: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). We should join with the heavenly beings in praise, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). ■

—This article first appeared in the July/August 2006 issue of *Israel My Glory*, published by The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended: A Guide to the Evolution Controversies* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1982), 322.
2. Mary Midgley, *Evolution as a Religion*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), viii.

Legalized Gambling: Should Christians Speak Against It?

by Haven Bradford Gow

According to Dr. Rex Rogers, president of Cornerstone University and author of *Gambling* (Kregel), 95 percent of Americans have gambled at some point in their lives; 82 percent have played the lottery; 75 percent have played slot machines; 50 percent have bet on dog or horse races; 26 percent have bet on sports; 74 percent have frequented casinos; 89 percent approve of casino gambling.

Dr. Rogers says we can see clearly the negative side of legalized gambling: “Gambling drains the economic order and undermines philanthropy. . . . Gambling threatens the moral foundations of the culture. It’s a package loaded with hidden economic costs. Gambling is bad for business. . . . Gambling threatens people . . . among the weaker or more vulnerable in the population: the poor,

the elderly, and children. Gambling is a regressive tax.”

According to Dr. Rogers, these are moral and religious objections to gambling: “Gambling violates Christian stewardship of time, talent, and treasure, and it violates our stewardship of our relationship with others; gambling undermines a biblical work ethic . . . ; covetousness . . . is the chief end of gambling, which encourages greed, materialism, and the love of money; gambling is a form of theft; gambling is potentially addictive; in most cases, gambling is associated with a host of social and personal vices, thus violating God’s command to avoid every kind of evil.”

Is legalized gambling morally good or bad or neutral? Do the alleged moral, spiritual, and social ills of gambling outweigh the purported economic benefits?

Recently in Greenville, MS, two officials—a father and his daughter—were convicted of embezzling from the charitable organization they once headed; they confessed they stole the money to support their gambling addiction.

In their book *Tables of Fortune* (Thistle, LLC, Box 2515, Jackson, MS), the authors document the social, economic, moral, and spiritual harm caused by legalized gambling; they point out that, since gambling was legalized in Atlantic City, “Illegal sports betting increased after casinos were opened. . . . Since casinos were introduced in Atlantic City, about 100 of 250 restaurants closed. . . . From 1973 to 1976, Atlantic City averaged 4700 major crimes per year. In 1990, total major crimes stood at 14,416. Two-thirds of those crimes occurred in the casinos.” Moreover, “In the first four years of casinos, pickpocket arrests went from 15 to 1,247. During that same period, purse snatchings increased 48 percent, shoplifting 342 percent, larceny from parked cars 347

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4. Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), 2:165.
5. *Ibid.*, 1:277.
6. Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin and Selected Letters*, 62.
7. *Humanist Manifesto I* [www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html].
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9. Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 327.
10. John F. Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 190-191.
11. Henry M. Morris, *The Long War Against God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 211. His discussion (pp. 211-218) includes Plato’s *Timaeus*, which reveals an early teaching of origins by chance (c. 400 B.C.).

percent, and larceny from buildings 430 percent. From 1972 to 1984, crimes in all categories increased dramatically: violent crimes 59 percent, crimes against property 76 percent, rape 54 percent, aggravated assault 76 percent, and robbery 49 percent.”

According to University of Nebraska scholars Douglas Abbott and Sheran Cramer, we must consider the social and moral costs and consequences of legalized gambling. For example, “Gambling sends the wrong moral message: It erodes the work ethic and glamorizes the notion that rewards are unrelated to work. Gambling’s subtle message is selfishness; it takes from others without giving something of value in return.” Also, “Gambling becomes an addiction for a small percentage of players. Government, by its sponsorship and promotion of gambling, knowingly contributes to the destruction of individuals and their families. In addition, nearly half of all pathological gamblers turn to crime to support their addiction.”

Indeed, people with high moral and religious standards who object to state lotteries and legalized gambling rightly insist that gambling is a pernicious moral and social cancer that offers the false hope of millions of dollars; the problem is that, while there may be one, two, or three winners, there are

millions of losers. While millions throughout this nation are dying mentally, physically, and spiritually from drugs, crime, poverty, hunger, lack of education, unemployment, and lack of quality medical care, millions of others in the United States are playing irresponsible games for money and pleasure and becoming addicted to a deadly vice: gambling.

Writing in the March 21, 1973, *Christian Century*, Methodist Theological School scholar/educator Paul Minus, Jr. put it this way: “State lotteries give public sanction and encouragement to an exploitative and wasteful lifestyle. Though it is not the business of government directly to ‘teach morals,’ its policies and programs inevitably promote some values and discourage others.” He added: “A government lottery undermines values by which healthy communities are bound together. It [encourages] and nourishes greed. It encourages the individual to become so preoccupied with his own gain that he ignores the fact that his gain is the direct result of others’ loss. And a lottery fosters citizens’ excessive dependence upon chance rather than the development of their God-given skills and talents for their own and their communities’ advancement.” ■

— Preparing for Marriage . . . cont’d. —

Corinthians 13 describes love but the Greek word *agape* defines it. Feelings are unpredictable and undependable. They are not wrong or bad, but they are inferior to love. Love will empower a person to stay in a marriage and support his or her mate in sickness and in health and for better or worse.

Knowing how our families of origin have shaped us is invaluable for a man and woman entering marriage. We are like the people who raised us more than we consciously realize.

Finally, I try to spend a session in premarital counseling on finances. Too many of today’s young couples enter marriage thinking it is okay to carry debt. I try to teach them that a good goal that will help them in their marriage is to have no debt except the

mortgage on their house. What about a vehicle? My recommendation to them is, if possible, to pay themselves the equivalent of a car payment before they buy a car. Then, after a few years of that kind of discipline, they can “borrow” the money from themselves and pay themselves back. Money is the number one problem in marriages today, and debt is very often a cancer to the relationship.

Marriage is God’s design. We will be influenced to one degree or another by our culture, but we must be committed to following God’s design and applying God’s truth to this most important of all human relationships. ■

—Taken from *Pulpit Helps*, published by AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37421



Counseling From the Word

Preparing for Marriage

by James Rudy Gray

Two of my daughters were married within the last six months. As a result, I have recently been thinking more diligently about the whole institution of marriage today.

Home is the bedrock of society. We must have good and godly marriages in order to build strong homes and even good churches.

However, at least half of the marriages in America end in divorce. What is wrong? I am convinced that we are not, as the church, preparing young people for marriage. Premarital counseling should be required for every professing Christian couple planning to be married. Why? Preparation precedes blessing. No one would build a house without preparation. No one would take an exam in school without any preparation. We should not marry without preparing for it.

I require at least six sessions of counseling with the couples who want me to officiate at their wedding. We talk about commitment to Christ and to each other. That is the foundation of a Christian home. That must be established before going any further in the process. The goal of the Christian life is to glorify God and the goal of a Christian marriage is the same. Christian couples can be taught that marriage is a ministry and that happiness is a by-product, not the goal, of a godly marriage.

God's design for marriage is intimacy, and that involves so much more than sex. Sex is not unimportant and I always spend

a session or more talking frankly with a couple about it. There are, however, at least eleven other categories of intimacy that a couple can experience in marriage. Spiritual intimacy, in my opinion, is the most important. This is where a couple does not simply attend church together but they actually share the things of God together. They pray together, study together, and talk about Scripture and how it applies to their lives.

In addition, I typically discuss birth order, male-female differences, communication, friendship, and finances. I am often surprised at how much young couples know about these areas. More frequently, however, I am shocked about how little they know in these areas.

A key question I ask two engaged people is, "Do you love her (or him)?" They always answer "yes." Then I simply ask, "What does that mean?" It is surprising at how many are stumped by that question. The overwhelming majority equate loving someone with the feelings they

have for that person. I often make the distinction that loving is about commitment and liking is about feelings. We actually need both in marriage, but you can love your mate even when you may not like him or her very much at the moment.

Love is the fruit of God's Spirit and a characteristic of His nature. First John 4:8 says that God is love and 1 John 4:19 says we love because He first loved us. First

(continued on page 28)

Christian couples can be taught that marriage is a ministry and that happiness is a by-product, not the goal, of a godly marriage.

Single in Christ: A Name Better Than Sons and Daughters

by John Piper – April 29, 2007

Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Isaiah 56:1-7).

I will start and end with my main point and, in the middle, cover a wide terrain of Scripture to support it. My main point is that God promises those of you who remain single in Christ, blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children, and He calls you to display, by the Christ-exalting devotion of your singleness, the truths about Christ and His kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than through marriage and childrearing. The truths, namely, are:

1. That the family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ;¹
2. That relationships in Christ are more permanent, and more precious, than relationships in families (and, of course, it is wonderful when relationships in families are also relationships in Christ; but we know that is often not the case);
3. That marriage is temporary, and finally gives way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—the way a picture is no longer needed when you see face-to-face.
4. That faithfulness to Christ defines the value of life; all other relationships get their final significance from this. No family relationship is ultimate; relationship to Christ is.

To say the main point more briefly: **God**

promises spectacular blessings to those of you who remain single in Christ, and He gives you an extraordinary calling for your life. To be single in Christ is, therefore, not a falling short of God’s best, but a path of Christ-exalting, covenant-keeping obedience that many are called to walk.

Better Blessings Than Sons and Daughters

Now let’s step back and look at the Scriptures. And here let me give credit to Barry Danylak for his research on this issue and his very helpful paper “*A Biblical-Theological Perspective on Singleness*” (PDF).

Let’s start in the middle of the Bible at Isaiah 56:4, 5,

For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place² and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

God promises to bless obedient eunuchs with blessings that are better than sons and daughters. In other words, God promises those of you who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children.

The Bigger Picture in Redemptive History

But to see this more clearly we need to get the bigger picture. In the created order that God put in place before sin was in the world, and in the covenantal order that God put in place with the Jewish people from Abraham to the coming of Christ, “God is primarily building His covenant people through the mechanism of procreation.”³ God was focusing His covenant-keeping faithfulness mainly on an ethnic people. Therefore, being married and having offspring was of paramount importance for one’s name and one’s inheritance and for the preservation of God’s covenant people.

Creation

So in Genesis 1:28, the first thing God says to Adam and Eve is, “*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.*” And in the account of Genesis 2:18, when woman was not yet created, God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

Abraham and Isaac

And when Abraham was chosen as the father of God’s people, God took him out and showed him the stars and said, “*So shall thy seed be*” (Genesis 15:5). And when Abraham could not have a son because of Sarah’s barrenness, Abraham said, “*O that Ishmael might live before thee!*” But God answered, “*Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed.*” In other words, the physical offspring mattered. And it would come in God’s way.

God reaffirms the same to Isaac in Genesis 26:3: “*I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father.*” Again physical “offspring” are crucial for the covenant.

David and Saul

These offspring are crucial not only for the preservation of the covenant but also because a person’s name would end without children. So Saul asks David to swear that he will not cut off his offspring for the sake of his name. First Samuel 24:21: “*Swear now therefore*

unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father’s house.”

Levirate Marriage and Ruth

Remember the whole elaborate system of Levirate marriage—that is, the marriage of a man to his deceased brother’s wife so that the name of the deceased brother would not be lost. The rule was that the first son born would bear the dead brother’s name. Deuteronomy 25:6: “*The firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel.*” That’s an amazing provision for the perpetuation of the name through physical seed.

The most famous instance of this is when Boaz agreed to marry Ruth to preserve the name of Elimelech, her father-in-law, and Mahlon her husband. Boaz said, “*Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day*” (Ruth 4:10).

Jephthah’s Daughter

So you can see how crucial marriage and offspring and the preservation of a name and an inheritance were in Israel. No wonder that Jephthah’s daughter asked for two months, not to bewail her impending death, but that she was never married. Judges 11:37, 38a: “*And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows. And he said, Go.*”

Isaiah’s Prophecy: “He Shall See His Offspring”

All of this is the background that makes Isaiah 56:4, 5 shine like the sun to eunuchs and others without marriage and children: “*For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place [monument]² and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that*

shall not be cut off.” So without marriage and without children, these covenant-keeping eunuchs get a name and a memorial better than sons and daughters.

Where did this amazing promise come from? What’s the basis of it and what is it pointing toward? Turn back to Isaiah 53. This is the great prophecy of the sufferings of Christ who “*was wounded for our transgressions [and] . . . bruised for our iniquities*” (Isaiah 53:5). In this chapter, we sometimes overlook these words in verse 10: “*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.*”

He shall see his offspring. Here is a great prophecy: When the Messiah dies as an “offering for sin” and rises again to “prolong his days,” He will by that great saving act produce many children: He will “see his seed.” In other words, the new people of God formed by the Messiah will not be formed by physical procreation but by the atoning wash of Christ.

Which is why the next chapter (Isaiah 54) begins, “*Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD*” (Isaiah 54:1). And this is also why our text (Isaiah 56:5) says that unmarried covenant-keeping people will have “*a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters . . . [and] an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.*” In the true people of God formed by Jesus Christ, monuments, names, offspring, and inheritances do not arise through marriage and procreation.

Jesus, Paul, and Peter

So when we come now to the New Testament, Jesus makes clear that His people—the true people of God—will be produced not by physical procreation but by spiritual regeneration. So he says to Nicodemus, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3).

And Paul says in Galatians 3 to the Jews and Gentiles alike, “*Know ye therefore that*

they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. . . . Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:7, 26). In other words, it is not physical descent from Abraham that makes you part of the covenant people of God but faith in Christ.

And Peter says that our inheritance comes not through marriage and offspring but through the work of Christ and the new birth: “*According to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you*” (1 Peter 1:3, 4).

So Jesus and Paul and Peter all say: Children are born into God’s family and receive their inheritance, not by marriage and procreation, but by faith and regeneration, which means that single people in Christ have zero disadvantage in bearing children for God, and may in some ways have a great advantage. The Apostle Paul was single in Christ, and he said of his converts, “*For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel*” (1 Cor.s 4:15). Paul was a great father, and never married. And let him speak for single women in Christ in 1 Thessalonians 2:7: “*But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children.*” **So it will be said of many single women in Christ: She was a great mother and never married.**

A Radical Relational Reordering

Take heed here lest you minimize what I am saying and do not hear how radical it really is. I am not sentimentalizing singleness to make the unmarried feel good. I am declaring the temporary and secondary nature of marriage and family over against the eternal and primary nature of the church. Marriage and family are temporary for this age; the church is forever. I am declaring the radical biblical truth that being in a human family is no sign of eternal blessing, but being in God’s family means being eternally blessed. Relationships based on family are temporary. Relationships based on union with Christ are eternal. Marriage is a temporary institution, but what it stands for lasts forever. “*For in the*

resurrection,” Jesus said, “they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30).

And when his own mother and brothers asked to see Him, Jesus said, “Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!” (Matthew 12:48, 49). Jesus is turning everything around. Yes, He loved His mother and His brothers. But those are all natural and temporary relationships. He did not come into the world to focus on that. He came into the world to call out a people for His name from all the families, into a new family where single people in Christ are full-fledged family members on a par with all others, bearing fruit for God and becoming mothers and fathers of the eternal kind.

“A certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it” (Luke 11:27, 28). **The mother of God is the obedient Christian—married or single! Take a deep breath and reorder your world.**

“And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29, 30). Single person, married person, do you want children, mothers, brothers, sisters, lands? **Renounce the primacy of your natural relationships and follow Jesus into the fellowship of the people of God.**

Let Him Who Is Able to Receive This Receive It

What shall we say then in view of this great biblical vision of the secondary and temporary nature of marriage and procreation? We will say what Jesus and Paul said. Jesus said in Matthew 19:12: “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made

eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” We need not take this (“made themselves eunuchs”) to mean any kind of physical sterilization any more than we take Jesus’ words “tear out your right eye” to mean physically blinding ourselves. **But it does mean that Jesus approves that some of His followers renounce marriage and sexual activity for the sake of serving Christ’s kingdom.** “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

“That is what Paul chose for himself and what he encouraged others to consider in 1 Corinthians 7. “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. . . . But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. . . . And this I speak . . . that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction” (1 Cor. 7:8, 32, 33, 35). In other words, some are called to be “eunuchs” for the kingdom of God. Paul speaks about each having his own gift: “one after this manner, and another after that” (1 Cor. 7:7). In other words, “Let him who is able to receive this receive it.”

Better Blessings

So now we end where we began with all this Scripture in our mind. God promises those of you who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children.

If someone asks, Wouldn’t it be better to have both? The blessings of marriage and the blessings of heaven? There are two answers to that question. One is that you will find out someday, and better to learn it now, that the blessings of being with Christ in heaven, are so far superior to the blessings of being married and raising children, and that asking this question will be like asking: Wouldn’t it be better to have the ocean and the thimble full? **And the second answer is that marriage and singleness both present us with unique trials and unique opportunities for our sanctification. There will be**

unique rewards for each, and which is greater will not depend on whether you were married or single, but on how you responded to each.

So I say it again to all singles in Christ: God promises you blessings in the age to come that are better than the blessings of marriage and children.

Uniquely Displaying the Glories of Christ

And with this promise there comes a unique calling and a unique responsibility. It is not a calling to extend irresponsible adolescence into your thirties. It is a calling to do what only single men and women in Christ can do in this world, namely, to display by the Christ-exalting devotion of your singleness the truths about Christ and His kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than through marriage. As long as you are single, this is your calling: to so live for Christ as to make it clearer to the world and to the church:

1. That the family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ;
2. That relationships in Christ are more permanent, and more precious, than relationships in families;
3. That marriage is temporary, and finally gives way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—the way a picture is no longer needed when you see face-to-face;

4. And that faithfulness to Christ defines the value of life; all other relationships get their final significance from this. No family relationship is ultimate; relationship to Christ is.

To him be glory in the Christ-exalting drama of marriage and the Christ-exalting drama of the single life. Amen. ■

ENDNOTES

1. I borrow here from the expression of Barry Danylak, "A Biblical-Theological Perspective on Singleness" (PDF), p. 15: "The propagation of the people of God in the New Testament occurs not through physical procreation as in the Old Testament, but rather through spiritual regeneration." This is an unpublished paper and reflects Barry's present doctoral studies at Cambridge University. This sermon has drawn heavily on Barry's approach to the issue of singleness in the Bible.
2. The literal translation of the Hebrew is: "within my walls a hand and a name better than sons and daughters." For the sense behind the word *hand* (translated as monument), compare 2 Samuel 18:18 where Absalom says, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's hand to this day" (literal rendering, usually rendered "monument"). Absalom had built this memorial by himself and for himself (v. 18a). So he had extended his memory into the future by his own hand. Perhaps then the idea of hand is that the good that comes to us in the future or the memorial that keeps us in remembrance in the future is our ongoing effect as though our hand were still active.
3. Danylak, p. 9.

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A Look at Happy Single People

by David L. Martin

And so they got married and lived happily ever after." So ends the fairly tale. Even happily married people smile at this uncomplicated conclusion. Happy single people smile even more. They do not think that for their story to end happily, they must get married—ever.

There are always those single people who are not happy—who think of their lives as second best. They take a resigned, "Thy will

be done" attitude toward their singleness and pray for grace to bear it. But the wiser unmarried ones take no such gloomy view. They think the single life is best—not for everybody, but for them. That is the way the Apostle Paul felt. He received permission from God to give his opinion that single people are probably the happier ones (1 Cor. 7).

"But," he said in verse 7, "every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this

manner, and another after that." He meant, "If you are happily married, that is God's gift to you, but my ability to be single is also a gift." Single people with Paul's outlook do not like to hear others say, "It's better to be unmarried than to be unhappily married." As if the frying pan is better than the fire.

The fact is, some people are single by choice. Others who never had the opportunity to marry believe that even if they had it, they would have chosen to be single. Still others who would have gotten married if the right opportunity had come will tell you, "The Lord's choice is my choice. I am satisfied."

What goes through the minds of these contented people when someone dangles matrimony before them as the best thing that one could have? For one thing, they do not take the attitude of the fox in Aesop's Fables who jumped and jumped to reach a bunch of grapes just out of reach and finally walked away muttering, "Sour grapes." As far as they are concerned, marriage is fine, but just not for them. They enjoy other people's marriages. They like to visit in their homes. They hope their married friends enjoy being married as much as they enjoy being single. They know that muddying the grass on the other side of the fence will not make the grass greener on their side. What other secrets do happy single people know that make them eager for another day?

They enjoy the present. For them, life is living, not longing. They haven't sorted through their hope chests lately. How sorry they feel for single friends who have a three-hundred-dollar kettle set they cannot use. If some friends urge them to "buy this dish while it is on sale," they likely reply, "There will be other sales. In the meantime, I'll save a lot of excess baggage."

One reason such singles enjoy the present is because they realize it will not last forever. When they die, how many of the heavenly Father's kind blessings will they wish they had paused to appreciate? Or suppose that God should lead them to get married. What would they regret not having enjoyed while

they were single? One person said, "This gift is for this day. The life of faith is lived one day at a time, and it has to be lived—not always looked forward to as though the real living were around the next corner."

They avoid self-consciousness. Happy singles do not care overly much what people think of them. They realize that some people who tease them about getting married have less-than-happy marriages themselves. Why should they feel embarrassed in front of people like that? Other friends whose marriages are very happy are the kind who accept singles as they are.

Unhappy singles do not realize this. Actually, the main reason they feel self-conscious is not because of thoughtless friends but because of themselves. Likely, no friend has ever told them they are odd, but they feel odd just the same.

Why? They have told themselves that they are odd. Once they have convinced themselves so, they find it only a small step further to believe that every glance or smile their friends give them really means, "You're an odd character, but I love you in spite of it."

True, some people are unmarried because they are odd, but nobody is odd purely and simply because he is unmarried. Think of the Apostle Paul, of Jeremiah, Elijah,

Elisha, Daniel, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Not to mention our Lord Jesus Himself, who lived the most perfectly balanced and complete life that any man ever lived.

No doubt some single people become more and more hermit-like or crotchety as they grow older. But that is the fault of their not keeping close enough touch with sensible people. It is not the fault of their being single.

Remember, too, that people in the minority always tend to feel self-conscious. If there were only one married couple per thousand people, then who would feel self-conscious?

They make things happen. Single people should not sit waiting for situations to get busy. Surely, it is pleasant if someone calls and says, "You're just the right person to

What goes through the minds of these contented people when someone dangles matrimony before them as the best thing that one could have?

read to the blind lady in the nursing home.” Or, “You’re interested in helping retarded children. Why don’t you help the Weavers with theirs?” But other people do not always make the first move to get their single friends involved. So, rather than be offended, capable singles simply volunteer.

When traveling, they think of taking along some less capable person who would never take a trip on his own. When making a cake, they might make a double batch and give the extra to a neighbor they know can use it. Rather than feeling isolated when invited to a picnic where each family brings its own food, they bring something to share with others.

They find ways to sacrifice. Well-adjusted single people do not congratulate themselves with the thought, “I have it good. I don’t have to get up in the middle of the night with sick children, or spend money to dress and feed a family. I don’t have to sacrifice.” For sacrifice is what makes life meaningful. As one poet said, “Measure thy life by loss instead of gain.” Of course, sacrifice is much more than “doing without.” It means giving yourself to something important. It means being tied down, if not by marriage, then by some other worthy cause.

Since singles cannot sacrifice for families they do not have, what doors are left open to them? Well, an unmarried schoolteacher has the opportunity to sacrifice time and patience for his students. He may sacrifice sleep, at times, for an extra busy time in his schedule. Other unmarried people do little extras for the families they live with. Still other singles sacrifice their evening hours by writing letters or counseling troubled friends. They sacrifice a sense of security by being available for mission work on short notice. They sacrifice money by lending to some struggling family.

How much more elevated this is than fulfilling the urge to sacrifice by buying a costly poodle, interrupting tasks to let him out every hour or so, and sitting up nights with him when he is sick. How much more noble, too, than a single person spending a lot of money on travel, photographs, furniture, cassettes, spare sweaters, and dashboard trinkets.

Even people of the world understand this

principle. If a man spends all his money on himself, people do not say he sacrificed it; they say he “blew it.” But if a single person gives himself to a good cause, people admire him. We all agree that when Jesus “poured out his soul unto death,” it was a good investment.

They accept the hurts of their calling. Single people face particular problems such as loneliness, uncertainties, and unfulfilled wishes. But one thing that cheers wise ones is their sense of purpose. They think that to serve God as a single person is a calling, not the absence of a calling. Why should they not go through painful disciplines? People in other callings certainly do. Muscular struggle helps make a man strong. Tedious drill helps make an efficient typist. No honor comes without sacrifice.

It is much wiser to think of a single life as a calling than to think of it as a scapegoat. Just as some people find it handy to blame the world’s troubles on the Jews or the Catholics, some people find it handy to blame their singleness on everything, and that is not realistic.

It is also easier to accept the disciplines God gives us if we realize He is disciplining other people too. Married people go through uncertainties, for example, when their children are born or are deathly sick. Single people certainly need not feel picked on.

Happy single people do not brood over what they do not have. Of course there is nothing wrong with experiencing heart hunger for marriage sometimes. Nearly everybody does; if nobody did, nobody would get married. But to think about it too much is like scratching a mosquito bite. You become more conscious of it rather than less.

Nothing makes a child hungrier than pressing his nose against a candy store window. Or, if you please, nothing makes a day colder than standing around shivering and wishing you were indoors. Once you get into a good brisk walk, you decide the air is not as cold as it is fresh. Besides, the sky is blue, and birds are singing. You feel almost sorry that others are not out to enjoy it with you.

They take a God’s-eye view. We all know what a pleasure it is to teach a child a game he really enjoys, or to introduce him to a new food that makes him smile. We are glad