

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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these are assumptions that must be made, and how they are made is determined by the worldview of the experimenter(s). Any historical science including creationism and evolution includes beginning assumptions whose reliability are unknown unless there is a clear record of an eyewitness account. We cannot prove or recreate things of the past; we can only interpret them in our respective worldview. That is why it is crucial that we recognize our presuppositions or bias and make sure it is the right one by measuring it against the one unchanging standard of truth God gave us in His Word.

To give more credence to an interpretation of the earth's past that has been determined by a model built on naturalistic

assumptions and presuppositions by fallible men who were not there—a model that actually conflicts with empirical science—than is given to the Bible's history which is an eyewitness account of someone who was there, someone who is perfect in knowledge, whose motives are pure and is infallible, is nothing short of arrogance. When we re-interpret Scripture to fit so-called science, that is exactly what we are doing. While it is possible for my understanding of Scripture to be wrong and should be corrected when so, I must never reinterpret Scripture. If there is a disagreement between science and Scripture, providing my understanding of Scripture is correct, then it is my science which must be altered. ■

Blessed Are the Hungry . . . cont'd.

the Word. As another brother reads and expounds on the truths of God's Word, the Holy Spirit can reveal truths to our hearts and fill us with heavenly manna.

Fellowship with other believers can also satisfy hunger. Sunday afternoons or evenings, and during the week can be times of spiritual nourishment. When brothers and sisters converse about the issues of life in light of the goodness of God, it leaves them completely refreshed and ready to press on.

Are you hungry? How many times a day do you feed your physical body? How often do you feed your spiritual body? Just as the natural body requires nourishment in order to thrive, so the spiritual body needs Manna for spiritual health. As we are nourished physically and filled with the things of God, we give of our energy to serve others and build God's kingdom. At the end of the day we say, "God, I am hungry." He promises to fill us, but we must take the time and the steps to allow Him to.

And we are blessed!! ■

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Brotherhood in Pilgrimage . . . cont'd.

4. It is a call to greater expectancy of our Lord's return.
5. It is a call to deeper commitment to divine revelation.
6. It is a call to live and serve according to ultimate values.
7. It is a call to keep in sharper focus the eternal goal, our heavenly home.

"I beg you, as those whom I love, to live in this world as strangers and 'temporary residents,' to keep clear of the desires of your lower natures, for they are always at war with your souls. Your conduct among the surrounding peoples in your different countries should always be good and right, so that although they may in the usual way slander you as evildoers, yet when disasters come, they may glorify God when they see how well you conduct yourselves" (1 Peter 2:11, 12).

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-18, NIV). ■

Person of the Month: *Lewis Shantz Weber* (1894-1963)



Lewis Shantz Weber was born on a farm north of Waterloo, Ontario, on October 8, 1894, to Joseph and Mary Ann Shantz Weber. Of the nine children in the family, Lewis was fourth from the youngest. When Weber was only five years old tragedy struck the family with the death of his mother. Later Joseph married Mary Ann's sister. The Lord blessed the family with the birth of four more children, making a total of seven boys and six girls. Lewis Weber experienced a spiritual atmosphere in his home. The children heard their father pray for them and each one had been dedicated to the Lord by the parents before the children were born.

Lewis came to know the Lord as his personal Saviour when he was 12 or 13 years of age under the preaching of S. G. Shetler. He was then asked to teach the boys' Sunday school class. Weber felt that the Lord would eventually use him in His service in the future.

Lewis successfully finished eight grades of schooling and passed his high school entrance exam with honors. While at home, Brother Lewis helped his father on the family dairy farm. One day while driving the retail milk wagon to Waterloo for his father, the Lord definitely spoke to his heart about discipleship and Lewis immediately told the Lord he would follow Him wherever He would lead. Lewis Weber was not interested in being a dairy farmer for the rest of his life so he went to work in Waterloo at a men's clothing store. Later he worked in a general store in Kitchener during the day and attended evening classes at the Business College, hoping to someday become a banker.

Along with a group of young people, Weber heard a stirring message by T. K. Hershey in the Waterloo Mennonite Church. It was at that meeting that Lewis consecrated himself to the Lord's service. In 1914, at the age of 20, Brother Weber attended Goshen College Academy, graduating in 1918 at the age of 24. That same year, after graduation, Lewis was ordained to the ministry to serve in rural mission work at Elmira, Ontario. While he was pastoring there he also attended Toronto Bible College so that he could better prepare for the ministry. In 1920 and 21 he attended Goshen College.

On June 14, 1922, at the age of 28, Lewis Weber and Edna Bowman of Waterloo were united in marriage. Shortly after their marriage the couple was asked to serve at the Mennonite Gospel Mission in Toronto. Having been appointed by the General Mission Board of Elkhart, Indiana, Lewis assumed the position of superintendent, serving faithfully in this role for nine years. While in Toronto Weber also attended McMasters University, where he graduated from English Theology in 1926. He then went on to receive his B. A. from Goshen College in 1927, and graduated from Toronto Bible College in 1931 at the age of 37. In 1932 he also wrote and published a book for youth.

In November of 1931 Lewis and Edna were appointed as missionaries to Argentina. This move involved a new experience and the learning of a new language. Lewis took great care and accuracy in his study of Spanish. Such effort would prove very helpful later in his writings and editorial work. While on the mission field he functioned in many different roles as pastor, teacher, administrator, writer, and counselor in every phase of the work in six different towns and churches. Brother Lewis taught many courses at the Bible College of Bragado.

(continued on page 18)

The Church's Response to Homosexuality

by Alex D. Montoya

A tidal wave of immorality has inundated the United States and the rest of the world, demanding that the church respond to homosexuality in four ways. First, it must expose the sinfulness of homosexuality as depicted in the New Testament. Second, it must clarify that the grace of God and forgiveness extends to homosexuals also. The New Testament also makes this clear. Third, the church must expel practicing homosexuals from its fellowship. For them to remain a part of the church activities is a blemish that cannot be tolerated because it would indicate moral compromise, a lack of courage in confronting sin, and a failure to exercise the biblical prerogative of excommunication. Fourth, the church must resist the assault of homosexuality on society as a whole. The purposeful effort to sell the homosexual lifestyle is organized and dangerous and needs a concerted resistance to halt that movement.

Fueled by the attitudes of free sex, abortion on demand, the acceptance of pornography, and the coming out of homosexuality into the public square, the sexual revolution of the 1960s unleashed a tsunami that threatens the moral basis of American life. All these have brought a tidal wave of immorality which is hitting America and the world, leaving unimaginable destructive effects in its wake, among which are:

- increased promiscuity
- millions of aborted babies
- millions of babies born out of wedlock
- a generation of blended families
- destruction of marriage and the family
- erosion of morals in schools and in public media
- promotion of homosexuality on an unprecedented scale

The almost universal acceptance of homosexuality as a normal and natural lifestyle is one result of the sexual revolution. Moral decay permeates every aspect of society from the White House to the schoolhouse. Consider what former Vice President Al Gore had to say about homosexuality:

I think gay men and women ought to have the same rights as heterosexual men and women—to make contracts, to have

hospital visiting rights, to join together in marriage. . . . I don't understand why it is considered by some people to be a threat to heterosexual marriage.¹

The passage of SB777 by the California legislature and its signing into law by the governor make the public schools a viable force in the promotion and protection of homosexuality in public schools. More recently, the California Supreme Court issued a ruling that the banning of gay marriages was unconstitutional, thus opening the door for the legalization of gay marriages and the demise of the traditional biblical union of husband and wife.

There is no question that the church faces a major issue on how to respond to homosexuality in our society and in the church. The church must rise to the challenges before it is rendered powerless by its apathy or before it is persecuted to inactivity for its lack of earnestness in stemming the tidal wave of moral corruption. She must heed the words of Scripture:

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath

of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light (Ephesians 5:5-13).

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The context today is much like it was in the Corinthian church. What God said to them is exactly what the church needs to hear today. We need to hear and we need to act. Just as the Corinthian church needed to respond to the moral corruption of its day so does the church need to do today. There are four responses to the onslaught of homosexuality needed today.

But before we consider the responses, we must also identify the attitudes which paralyzed the Corinthian church in its need to respond properly to the immorality it was facing. They were ignorant, deceived, arrogant, and apathetic to the moral corruption within the church. The church today has the same problem. It is ignorant of the biblical mandate, it is being deceived by both the Christian and secular thinkers, it is arrogant in its attitude toward God's Word and sin, and it is apathetic to the dangers it faces from the enemies of the gospel and of biblical marriage.

The biblical mandates found in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 5-6 demand from the church four responses to homosexuality.

1. The Church Must Expose Homosexuality as a Sin Against God

Homosexuality is more than a mere sexual preference, a social choice, a genetic predisposition as some say; it is a sin against Almighty God. It is a willful assault on the person and work of God. Homosexuality is against God in these four ways. First, *homosexuality is a sin against God's creative order*. God's Word is very clear about man's sexuality, about its purpose, and its nature. Consider these references:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Genesis 1:27, 28).

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh (Genesis 2:22-24).

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Matthew 19:4-6).

Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge (Hebrews 13:4).

Hence the Scriptures affirm that any violation of the creative purposes of God is a sin against Him. Furthermore, it proceeds to state categorically that homosexuality is not only sin but a perversion of the creative order.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the

truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Romans 1:24-27).

A second way that homosexuality is against God is that *homosexuality is a sin against God's law* (1 Timothy 1:8-11). The Scriptures clearly identify homosexuality as a sin which violates the express law of God. In Paul's discussion of God's law, he states,

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust (1 Timothy 1:9-11).

The apostle clearly makes homosexuality a sin which cannot be reconciled with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Scripturally, one cannot be a Christian and a homosexual.

The third way that homosexuality is against God is that *homosexuality is a sin against God's Kingdom* (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). The Apostle Paul informs an ignorant mind and corrects a deceived heart by stating clearly that homosexuality excludes one from inheriting the kingdom of God. In other words, a homosexual will not inherit eternal life and go to Heaven; instead, such will be guilty of sin and subject to eternal punishment in Hell. Note what it says:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor

revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

Finally, the fourth way that homosexuality is against God is that *homosexuality is a sin against God's holiness* (1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Peter 1:15, 16). The Bible is clear on God's expectation of His people:

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16).

This holiness pertains specifically to the area of sexuality:

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8).

Homosexuality is called an unrighteous and ungodly act (Rom. 1:18; 1 Cor. 6:9; 2 Peter 2:9; Jude 4). I have dealt with the revisionists' treatment of these verses in a previous issue, and so will not go into these discussions here.²

Hence, Christians are under obligation to know and to make known the sinfulness of homosexuality. They cannot be swept away by the tide of public opinion or public decrees; nor can they remain mute concerning the terrible consequences of those who practice homosexuality. They must make known to all the temporal wrath associated with homosexuality; that as a temporal judgment of God, it degrades the human nature and destroys the body in no uncertain terms (Rom. 1:18, 26, 27). They must also make known the eternal wrath which will be faced by those who practice this sin (Rom. 1:32; 2 Peter 2:2-11; Jude 4-8). They must be told that "the Lord is the avenger of all such" (1 Thess. 4:6), and that "whoremongers and

adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). As the watchman of Israel was warned not to be silent about the judgment coming upon the nation, so too, Christians dare not be silent about the dangers that homosexuals are facing (cf. Ezekiel 3:17-19).

2. The Church Must Extend the Grace of God to Homosexuals

Indeed, homosexuality is a sin against God, but it is also one of many sins against God, and it is a sin for which Christ died. This is a truth which the church must never forget. Believers are called upon by Christ to extend the grace of the cross to homosexuals, to assure them that God’s forgiveness, peace, and the hope of eternal life is available to them as well.

If the church is to be involved in bringing homosexuals into the fold of Christ it must be prepared to do the following: *The church must first learn to show compassion to the homosexual*. Tim Wilkins said, “Over time I’ve discovered that when it comes to homosexuality, Christians show great passion in one of two areas. Either they are passionate about extinguishing the pro-gay movement or about expanding God’s movement by introducing them to His Son.”³

The church can be guilty of the attitude of the Pharisees towards the sinners of their day. The Pharisees displayed an absolute lack of concern and compassion for those who were lost (cp. Luke 15:1-32). Christ taught compassion for the lost, and this includes the homosexual:

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:10-13).

R. Albert Mohler writes, “Homosexuals are waiting to see if the Christian church

has anything more to say after we declare that homosexuality is a sin.”⁴ Homosexuals are hurting people and need more than condemnation; they also need compassion.

In the second place, *the church must be willing to associate with homosexuals*. Here is where the church displays its ignorance and its arrogance when it comes to reaching out to homosexuals. The church can misunderstand what it means to be in the world but not of it. We may think that it means for Christians to have absolutely nothing to do with homosexuals. The Bible speaks of the opposite. It shows that it is unavoidable and in many ways necessary to associate with homosexuals if we are to present the gospel to them. Paul corrected the Corinthians when he said,

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world (1 Corinthians 5:9, 10).

Clearly we must dispel the label of being “homophobic” by not refusing to befriend and associate with homosexuals. We have nothing to fear and everything to gain for the gospel’s sake.

Thirdly, *the church must have the conviction of the power of the gospel to convert the homosexual*. That homosexuals are such by nature and therefore cannot change nor should society try to change them into heterosexuals has been exposed as utterly false. The power of the gospel has been rendered ineffective by the deception placed upon the church that homosexuals cannot be changed. Prior to the “sexual revolution,” no question existed about homosexuals being able to change. Jones and Yarhouse in their book *Ex-Gays?* state,

About four decades ago and earlier, the majority wisdom of the leading professionals in the mental health community was that homosexuality was a psychological disturbance of some kind that could, though perhaps with difficulty, be treated successfully, resulting in satisfactory readjustment to heterosexual experience and satisfaction.⁵

That majority opinion has now changed and the American Psychological Association now claims that homosexuality is not changeable.⁶ Again, this change took place without any scientific evidence. The study done by Jones and Yarhouse was done to challenge this myth and states that their study “produces significant scientific evidence that sexual orientation is in fact changeable for some, and this should trigger a considerable reexamination of many of the presuppositions about sexual orientation and sexual identity that hold sway in contemporary Western culture.”⁷

The Christian church has known this all along. It has always believed that the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). It is a truth in Scripture that wherever the sinfulness of sin is mentioned, the power of the gospel is also mentioned as that force which counteracts the power of sin to enslave and to condemn.

After the condemnation of homosexuality in Romans 1, Paul wrote, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:23, 24).

After the condemnation of homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9, Paul adds, “Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). The homosexual can experience regeneration through the Holy Spirit, the power to triumph over indwelling sin as described in Romans 6, and the full assurance offered to all believers in the justifying work of Christ (cf. Romans 8). Mark Christopher gives the church a great admonition when he states,

Homosexuality is not a greater sin than other sins and does not require a different plan on God’s part to save and redeem. What the above passage teaches us is that there is more grace in God than there is sin in your past! As someone once said, “He is a better Savior than you are a sinner”! The message of amazing grace is exactly what the Church needs to pro-

mote and practice.⁸

After the condemnation of homosexuality in 1 Timothy 1:10, Paul magnifies his own sin above all sins and says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15). If God can save the worst, then He can obviously save a homosexual.

Wherever man’s depravity and sinfulness are magnified, so also is the grace of God magnified so as to more than make up for man’s fallen nature. Consider the testimony of Ephesians 2:1-10 and Titus 3:3-7. These promises apply to homosexuals as well.

The fourth way that the church can extend the grace of God to homosexuals is for *the church to provide special discipleship for homosexuals*. The New Testament testifies to the possibility and frequency of a believer’s relapse into their former way of life. The convert from a homosexual lifestyle is no exception. Christians should not be surprised by the difficulties encountered by some in overcoming their former lusts, nor should they give up in their efforts to disciple them into the new life in Christ.

The rise of numerous support groups for homosexuals is testimony to the necessity of the church to focus on those who desire Christ and who desire to live a victorious life in Christ. Groups like Exodus, Regeneration, Genesis Counseling, Desert Stream Ministries, New Hope Ministry, Cross Ministries, and others exist to help those who want to leave the homosexual lifestyle. All these groups offer God’s grace and hope to those who desire a relationship with Jesus Christ. Andy Comiskey of Desert Stream Ministries writes, “We must renounce the unbelief prevalent in certain evangelical circles that resigns homosexual strugglers to little if any release from their tendencies. That perception of God is too small.”⁹

The success of special groups designed to minister to homosexuals and ex-homosexuals is clearly evident. Again, these groups testify that the “early hopes for instant healing have given way to belief that transformation occurs through a lifetime of discipleship.”¹⁰

They serve as an example and motivation for the church to become involved in the salvation of homosexuals and a subsequent discipleship in a new life in Christ.

Finally, if the church is to extend the grace of God to homosexuals, *the church must effectively incorporate converted homosexuals into the Body of Christ*. At times the church has allowed the stigma of homosexuality to follow the converted homosexual into his new life in Christ. They may not be welcomed nor easily assimilated into the fellowship of believers, or they may be subject to certain restrictions not given to other converted sinners. The Corinthian church serves as a model in the way it was composed of all sorts of sinners. Note how Paul addressed the church: "Such were some of you: but ye are washed" (1 Cor. 6:11). The "some" refers to the fact that the church contained some ex-fornicators, some ex-idolaters, some ex-adulterers, ex-effeminate, ex-homosexuals, some ex-thieves, etc. The phrase "such were some" indicates the conversion from a life of sin to a new relationship with Christ, and acceptance into the fellowship of believers in Corinth.

The church cannot adopt an arrogant attitude toward converted homosexuals, but instead deal biblically with their conversion, and in fact, rejoice that God has saved "some." Again, Andy Comiskey of Desert Stream Ministry gives the church this challenge: "We do need sexperts, counselors who can do things that small groups cannot . . . but for the church to say that help exists only outside our walls, that is not optimal. I think it has to be body life."¹¹ Alan Chambers of Exodus affirms: "The traditional pattern within Exodus has been a stepping-stone or launching pad to leave the homosexual lifestyle or a life of secrecy, to find camaraderie with others facing the same struggles, and then to go on to embrace the church. What if a church was so dynamic that a Sunday school class could do the same thing? What if people in church could become transparent, and people in those Sunday school classes became comfortable to share their stuff as well?"¹²

3. The Church Must Expel Practicing Homosexuals From the Fellowship

The tidal wave of sexual immorality has invaded the church, and the church has done little or nothing to deal with the cancer within. Sexual immorality in all of its forms can be found in the church, ranging from divorce, people sleeping together, lewdness, and even homosexuality. As in Corinth, the church today must also deal with the immorality within.

The church today is faced with the problem of moral compromise. The church in Corinth was tolerating a man living in an incestuous relationship with his father's wife. Instead of mourning over this sinful situation, the apostle accused them of arrogance (1 Cor. 5:2). The solution the apostle proposed was that the church exercise church discipline and remove the wicked man from their midst (5:13).

The church today is in a sad state of affairs. The debate today in some denominations is not the removal of the wicked from their midst, but as to whether or not they should appoint a homosexual to be a priest, pastor, or bishop in the church. Never mind the problem of immorality. Has the church lost its spiritual sense?

Furthermore, it is alarming how the church tolerates the blasphemies of certain so-called Christians and continues to give them recognition for these blasphemies and allow them to hold positions of influence in the church and its institutions. Consider the statement made by Horace L. Griffin, an Episcopalian priest and teacher at an Episcopalian seminary. In his argument for the black church accepting homosexuals, he says of the Apostle Paul,

Knowing that sexuality can be mysterious even when it is revealing, and recognizing that scientific and social research informs us about our bodies and sexual expressions in ways that were hidden from those who lived twenty centuries ago, it is reasonable that Paul could not have known about homosexuality as we know about it today. To accept this reality as responsible reasonable Christians, we can conclude that the apostle makes an uninformed judgment limited by his time and space.¹³

Such is the epitome of human arrogance, and the type of arrogance Paul found in the Corinthian church concerning some who were not willing to accept his authoritative and God-given teachings (1 Cor. 4:18-21). The theological landscape is littered with such revisionists who continue to call their arrogant blasphemies theological insights and relevant discoveries. The church should cry, "Enough," and put these wicked people out of the fold.

In addition, *the church must have the courage to confront the homosexual activist within and outside the church.* As we will discuss in more detail later on in this article, the homosexual community has an agenda aimed at the traditional lifestyle and at the Christian interpretation of sexuality and marriage. One of their aims is to silence opposition to their lifestyle. They do this with the weapon of intimidation. In an article in *Guide* magazine entitled "The Overhauling of Straight America," Marshall K. Kirk and Erastis Pill put forth an agenda to convert American culture and to demonize the opponents. One of their tactics is to intimidate the opposition. Here is what they suggest:

We can undermine the moral authority of homophobic churches by portraying them as antiquated backwaters, badly out of step with the times and with the latest findings of psychology. Against the mighty pull of institutional religion, one must set up the mightier draw of Science & Public Opinion. . . . Such an unholy alliance has worked well against churches before, on such topics as divorce and abortion.¹⁴

That is why they delight in calling some evangelicals homophobic, transphobic, and biophobic so that they will tone down our rhetoric. Even evangelical leaders have succumbed to their tactics. A recent profile of Rob Bell, pastor of Mars Hill, drew this assessment of his view on homosexuality. *Time* magazine said of Bell and evangelicals like him,

Polling by the evangelically oriented Barna research group shows that at least half of regular churchgoers ages 16 to 29 think their church is too judgmental, too political, and too negative about homosexuality. Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow describes today's young adults as spiritual "tinkerers." Bell, 37, is guilty

of none of the negatives. He is largely apolitical, thinks that only those with gay friends are positioned to judge homosexuality—and he tinkers marvelously."¹⁵

Since when does friendship qualify one to speak courageously against sin? We can see the extent that intimidation, deception, and arrogance have muted the voice of God's spokesmen. May it not happen to us!

Furthermore, *the church must have the conviction to practice excommunication on its own membership.* This was part of the solution to the immorality that had crept into the church at Corinth. The church's response was arrogance, tolerance, and the subtle deception that they were acting in love and Christian liberty. God's solution was the biblical practice of excommunication, or isolation from the life of the church. The sad truth is that most churches do not deal with the sin within their walls. The problem in the church today is not so much the onslaught of homosexuality as it is the toleration of any sin in the church. If we have not dealt with the other forms of immorality, why should the church deal only with homosexuality?

John MacArthur expounds on Paul's command to the church at Corinth:

Faithful believers are not to keep close company with any fellow believers who persistently practice serious sins such as those mentioned here. If the offenders will not listen to the counsel and warning of two or three other believers and not even of the whole church, they are to be put out of the fellowship. They should not be allowed to participate in any activities of the church—worship services, Sunday school, Bible studies, or even social events. Obviously, and most importantly, they should not be allowed to have any leadership role. They should be totally cut off both from individual and corporate fellowship with other Christians, including that of eating together (v. 11; cf 2 Thess. 3:6-15). No exceptions are made. Even if the unrepentant person is a close friend or family member, he is to be put out.¹⁶

The danger of deception is always present in the church. Paul's appeal to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is not only

a clarification of who is qualified to inherit the kingdom, but is also a warning to the so-called brother of 5:11. Every one of the sins committed by the so-called brother of 5:11 is repeated in 6:9, 10. A professing believer who lives a lifestyle of 6:9, 10 is most likely not a believer, and thus will not go to Heaven. The multitudes of “tares” that fill the pews of the church need this stern reminder. They may not be going to Heaven, and thus are greatly deceived.

4. The Church Must Resist the Assault of the Homosexual Community Upon Society

The Apostle Paul does not address a danger that exists today in our democratic society. The apostle could only tell the Corinthians that they had a responsibility to judge those within the church; those outside the church, God would judge (1 Cor. 5:12, 13). The Christians in Corinth had little if any influence in the civil affairs of the city. Today, Christians in a democratic society have a major role in determining the morality of their communities.

What Christians in America need to know is that the homosexual community has an organized agenda to change the moral fabric of American society. This organized effort has been well documented by David Kupelian in his *The Marketing of Evil*, an expose of Marshal Kirk and Hunter Madision’s book *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s*.¹⁷ A more recent book is *The Agenda: The Homosexual Plan to Change America* by Rev. Louis P. Sheldon, president of Traditional Values Coalition, who states, “The homosexual agenda is an all-out assault on everything we believe in and an attack on everything our Founding Fathers hoped to give us when they fought to establish this great nation.”¹⁸

The church needs to be aware of the purposeful effort to sell the homosexual lifestyle to America. David Kupelian shows the sophisticated strategy of Kirk and Madsen to change the way Americans think about homosexuality, and writes of three phases

called, “Desensitization,” “Jamming,” and “Conversion.” “Desensitization” consists of inundating the public in a continuous flood of gay-related advertising, presented in the least offensive fashion possible. “Jamming” is psychological terrorism meant to silence expression of or even support for dissenting opinion. “Conversion” is the conversion of the average American’s emotions, mind, and will, through a planned psychological attack, in the form of propaganda fed to the nation via the media.¹⁹

In “The Overhauling of Straight America,” Kirk and Pill offer these five strategies:

- Talk about gays and gayness as loudly and as often as possible.
- Portray gays as victims, not as aggressive challengers.
- Give protectors a just cause.
- Make gays look good.
- Make the victimizers look bad.²⁰

The effect this effort has had upon the number and nature of the exposures that homosexuality gets in public is already obvious. The news media is notorious for under-reporting any negative exposure of homosexuality.

The church must be made aware of an organized effort to sell the homosexual lifestyle to America. It is a known fact by now that the homosexual community comprises a very small segment of the population, less than 2% by some estimates, but not nearly the 10% that was originally proposed. Yet in spite of their small numbers, the homosexual community has been able to gain popular approval and support across the country. The reason behind this is their ability to organize themselves into an effective force for change and influence.

Consider a list of some organizations formed by the homosexual community, and their respective goals:

The Human Rights Campaign—Lobbying Political Action (called the world’s most powerful homosexual pressure group)²¹
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force—Grassroots Organization
Gay and Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN)—Transforming K-12 Schools/Colleges

Parents, Family, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)—Cultural Acceptance, Lobbying, Schools
 Lambda Legal—Changing the Law/Pro-homosexual Lawsuits
 ACLU Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Project—Lawsuits
 Service Members Legal Defense Network—Military
 Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD)—Media/Hollywood
 National Center for Lesbian Rights—Lesbian Parenthood/Child Custody
 National Lesbian and Gay Journalistic Association—Changing Media from Within
 Gender Pac—Redefining Gender Norms/Transgender “Lobbying”
 Soulforce—Redefining Biblical Beliefs as “Homophobic”/Propagandizing Christian Colleges
 Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders—Lobby/Law/Same Sex Marriage

These are some of the agencies which serve the homosexual community in accomplishing its agenda. An indication of how mainstream they are and to what degree of influence they have become is seen in the remarks of House Speaker Pelosi from California to the Human Rights Campaign: “God has certainly blessed America with the work of the Human Rights campaign.”²²

In addition, *the church needs to resist the political effort to sell the homosexual lifestyle to America.* It has been a major thrust of the homosexual agenda to have laws passed that will secure their status and protect their rights. The homosexual activists have been successful in having sodomy laws removed from numerous states. The recent passage of SB 777 in California is an evidence of their ability to get laws passed even when the majority is not in favor of their position. Even the Supreme Court has been swept into its arms. This statement by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia helps us understand the influence of the homosexual on the Supreme Court:

Today’s opinion is a product of a Court, which is the product of a law-profession culture, that has largely signed on to the

so-called homosexual agenda, by which I mean the agenda promoted by some homosexual activists directed at eliminating the moral opprobrium that has traditionally been attached to homosexual conduct.²³

Finally, *the church must be made aware of the dangerous effort to sell the homosexual lifestyle to America.* The homosexual agenda poses a physical, social, and moral threat to America, a threat that is quite obvious to the homosexual agenda but for which they take no regard. The homosexual community and those whom they influence and control have no desire to face up to the dangers of the homosexual lifestyle. In their promotion of homosexuality rarely is there ever a discussion on the dangers of the homosexual lifestyle. The life of a homosexual is far from gay.

The lifestyle of homosexuals is most harmful to the homosexuals themselves, evidenced by the diseases spread by homosexual on homosexual, and by the emotional and physical harms homosexuals bring on themselves. The *Washington Globe* on “World’s AIDS Day, 2007” paid tribute to:

The 500,000 Americans dead of AIDS
 The 1,000,000 Americans who are HIV positive
 The 15,000 dead in the DC area
 The 40,000 new HIV cases per year.²⁴

If any other single source was leading so many Americans to die or to contract such a deadly disease, a state of emergency would have already been declared in the land. The success of homosexuals has only led to their continual pain.

The homosexual is also a threat to the community, the heterosexual citizens of the land. A new strain of bacteria called MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus) has been discovered which has been shown to resist certain forms of antibiotics. This new strain has been growing in places like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other large centers of homosexuality. MRSA is a high-risk bacteria and 13 times more contagious in anal sex. “Once this reaches the general population, it will be truly unstoppable,” said Binh Diep, a researcher at the University of California, San Francisco, who led the study.²⁵

Matt Barber of Concerned Women of America states,

Homosexuality is an issue of morality. But it is also a fundamental issue of public health. The evidence is clear. American government, educational systems, and courts should note the facts presented in this paper and advance public policy and curricula that encourage sound behavior rather than offering special protection and endorsement to a behavior that threatens individuals as well as public health. The future of America hangs in the balance. If society is not willing to address the homosexual issue on moral grounds, then the medical evidence alone should be enough to convince the fair-minded that homosexuality is incompatible with good public health.²⁶

The church has no other option but to attempt to stem the slide of America to Sodom. Homosexuality threatens the sanctity of marriage and even marriage as an institution for society. Homosexuality even threatens the safety and security of children. Homosexuals account for almost half of all child abuse cases. Indeed, where will the homosexual recruit new partners for their sexual encounters?

Louis Sheldon offers this warning to the church today:

I do not exaggerate when I say that this trial by fire will determine the very survival of our culture and the fate of civilization as we know it. This is not a battle against foreign enemies or third world extremists, but against an even greater foe: the forces of darkness and legions of angry homosexuals and lesbians determined to abolish Christian virtue and moral judgment in any form. We must proceed with caution, and we must come forth with open hands.²⁷

What is to be the church's response to homosexuality? This writer has offered a fourfold response which is both biblical and balanced. The church can no longer remain ignorant, deceived, arrogant, or apathetic to this important issue facing it. There are no more "new worlds" for the modern pilgrims to flee to. The line has been drawn in the sand. The church must do what Jude asked it to do: "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Apathy is

not an option, neither is failure. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 19/2 (Fall 2008): 233-248.

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Wrinkles Don't Hurt

by Enos D. Stutzman

I am getting older. My joints ache when I get up in the morning. I get tired more quickly than I did. I cannot think as fast as I could at one time. My responses to stimuli have slowed down. My hair has turned white and become more unruly. My skin is becoming wrinkled in places and my chest has migrated south a bit. I find myself falling asleep whenever I relax. The truth of the matter is: my body is wearing out.

Yes, the aging process progresses slowly, and relentlessly. We may be able to slow it down with exercise, medication, and diet, but it seems that is all we can do. We can slow it down, but we cannot stop it—much less reverse it.

Incidentally, the cause of aging has been discovered. Yes, we now know exactly what causes it. It is caused by *survival*. Without survival, no aging would occur. Simple, is it not? So, we are left with one of two alternatives: We survive and age or we don't survive. Most of us would probably choose to survive.

Just suppose we could choose the best of both worlds. Suppose we could survive without aging. Suppose we would discover

what Ponce de Leon failed to find—a fountain of youth—one that really worked. Suppose we could be young all our lives. Then, barring an untimely accident or fatal disease, we could live forever on the earth.

Ponder such a prospect. How would one feel after several millennia on the earth, with no prospect of moving on to the eternal realm? Perhaps the glitter of the terrestrial would wane by that time. I think the attraction of perennial youthfulness would diminish eventually.

In reality, of course, no such thing appears possible. So far, no one has found a cure for aging. However, it is not for want of trying. We can dye the hair, fill the wrinkles with makeup, apply artificial blush to the cheek, or even undergo plastic surgery.

Whether or not the result is effective is a matter of opinion, but in many cases, the artificial appearance that results is worse than the condition it was meant to correct. But even if it were effective, the only result of all this fuss is a change of appearance. The aging process itself has not slowed down a bit. Only the outward signs have been affected, and even that is a

What awaits God's children when survival fails is far beyond anything we have experienced in this life!!

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losing battle. In a few short years, the attempts at preventing the appearance of aging fail anyway, as time takes its relentless toll. So essentially, the efforts are futile.

How important is youthfulness? Whom are we trying to impress? How does the Lord look at our attempts at denying outwardly what is taking place inwardly? If we look at the subject of old age in the Scripture, we find a great respect given to age. The hoary head is considered worthy of honor instead of shame.

We do well to accept the changes that time brings to our bodies. If our priorities are in order, growing older will not be of great concern to us. What awaits God's children when survival fails is far beyond anything we have experienced in this life. Certainly it is better than permanent youthfulness! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Calvary Messenger*, where article was first published. Taken from *The Mid-Atlantic Informer*, Jan. 2008.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

MARCH 1, 2009

A New Spirit, A New Heart

Ezekiel 11:14-21

The five lessons for March are taken from the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile, having been taken to Babylon as a young man when Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC. He was contemporary with Jeremiah (in Jerusalem) and Daniel (in Babylon). His prophetic ministry spanned 22 years. He was a powerful preacher and used many object lessons to drive home the point of his word from God. Many times throughout the book we find phrases such as: "The hand of the Lord was upon me," or "The word of the Lord came to me." His ministry helped purge the Jews of their idolatry. Ezekiel's message was a message of judgment and of hope.

In today's lesson context Ezekiel is transported in a vision to Jerusalem where he sees certain men and hears what they are saying (verses 1-3). These men were predicting a false security for their city and denying the

message of the prophets. Ezekiel was told (verse 4) to "prophesy against them." As our lesson text opens, God is speaking to Ezekiel, telling him what his compatriots in Jerusalem are saying about the exiles. The Jews of Jerusalem were smugly saying that they had advantage over the exiles since they were in the holy city, the location of the temple, the residence of God. By implication they were saying that the exiles were "far from the Lord" and that the land they had left was now theirs.

But, God says, while it is true that He has allowed the exiles to be dispersed among the heathen, far from their homeland, He will nevertheless be a comfort to them and provide security for them wherever they are. Further, He promises (v. 17) to eventually gather them out of the countries where they have been exiled, and return them to their homeland, the land promised as their possession through Abraham many centuries earlier.

Not only will they return, God says, but they will return with a new spirit and a new heart, having learned the lesson imposed by

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their exile. The purpose of the exile was to turn their hearts back to God. It is generally understood that the exile cured God's people of their idolatry. Instead of a stony, unyielding, unteachable heart, their new heart would be soft, pliable, and open to God's Word and will.

This new heart would establish a new relationship with their Father God. They would willingly walk in His statutes and keep His ordinances. They would honor God, and He would accept them and be their God—with all that implies. No longer would He be a distant Judge. He would now be a very present reality, providing and caring for them as a father does a child. (Recall how this happened in the subsequent history of God's people in their return from exile.)

But there is another side to this positive picture of the restoration of God's people to their homeland and to His favor. Those who persist in their waywardness will face the judgment of God upon their wicked ways. God will give them up to their folly and withdraw His favor from them. While God's mercy is infinite, His patience has an end. For those who continue to reject His mercy there awaits only His judgment.

The story of God's dealings with His people of old carries many lessons for people of all times. Don't fail to understand and apply these lessons to our day.

For thought and discussion

1. Read background on Ezekiel and his times to give you a better understanding of his messages.
2. Why is it not wise to become smug in thinking we have spiritual advantages over other people? Discuss.
3. Why was it necessary for God to use the harshness of exile to cure His people of their spiritual departure? What lessons are contained therein for us?
4. What does it take to develop in people a new spirit and a new heart, one directed wholly toward God?
5. What does this lesson teach us about the danger of imposing upon God's mercy? What is the eventual result?

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MARCH 8, 2009

New Leadership, A New Relationship

Ezekiel 34:23-31

Today's lesson comes from the last section of the Book of Ezekiel (Chapters 33–48) which deal primarily with the restoration of Israel. Ezekiel had previously denounced the nation's sins and prophesied the fall of Jerusalem. He also prophesied of judgment against foreign nations (Chapters 25–32) because they had despised God's people. In Chapter 33 God calls Ezekiel to be a watchman over His people, hearing His Word and faithfully delivering it to the people.

In the first part of Chapter 34 God denounces the false shepherds of His people Israel, condemning them for their unfaithfulness and lack of concern for the sheep under their care. He then states how in the future He will take a direct personal interest in His people and give them a faithful and enduring shepherd. That shepherd and the new relationship that will ensue with His leadership is the theme of our lesson today.

In contrast to the unfaithful shepherds of Israel, God now says that in the future time He will set up One shepherd over them who will feed and care for His people. This shepherd would serve in the manner of David, their former shepherd king. Certainly the Jewish people well understood the concept of shepherd and sheep. Sheep had for long been a vital part of every aspect of their lives, and the symbolism spoken of here was easily understood by them.

We must remember, too, that while this passage held very real present hope for the Jews in exile, it also carried a more far-reaching implication of God's Messiah and His care for all people of all time. However, it is unlikely that the people of Ezekiel's time, nor Ezekiel himself, saw the far distant impact of this message. Their anticipation was for release from bondage and restoration to their homeland. We read the Messianic implications into the message.

The job of the shepherd was total care for

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his flock. He led them, fed them, protected them, nursed them, and provided for their contentment. They were safe and secure under his watchful eye and all-encompassing care. The wilderness would hold no fear nor would wild animals harm them. So God promised all-encompassing care for His children under the leadership of His chosen Shepherd. They would dwell safely and the land would produce in abundance for their needs.

This new day, a future day for the exiles, would be a time of peace, safety, and abundance. There would be a wall of protection around them shielding them from their enemies just like the secure sheepfold with the shepherd guarding the door protected the sheep. They would live without fear, enjoying abundance and security.

All of these blessings would turn their hearts in recognition toward God. They will know it is He who provides and cares for them. They will acknowledge Him as their God and themselves as His most blessed children. There would be mutual understanding between them of their roles and relationships.

The picture was complete—the promise sure. There was a better day on the horizon for God’s people. A time of deliverance, of peace, of safety, of abundance. And even we today can carry the implications of these promises forward to a time yet distant when they will all come true for God’s children.

For thought and discussion

1. Imagine yourself in the discouraging position of the exiles in Babylon and the impact Ezekiel’s message would have had on them.
2. What is the advantage of using illustrations and symbolism in conveying a message?
3. This passage contains both a present message for the exiles, and a future message for all people. Be sure you understand both.
4. How can we be assured, other than that it is God’s Word, that the future aspect of Ezekiel’s message will come to pass?
5. Are you living with anticipation, as were the exiles, for the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy?

MARCH 15, 2009

God’s People Restored, God’s Name Vindicated

Ezekiel 36:22-32

In last Sunday’s lesson we noted how God planned for the blessing of His people by delivering them from bondage, returning them to their homeland, providing for them a Shepherd, and abundance to make life full and pleasant. In today’s text we note why God is going to do these things. It was not primarily to benefit Israel, although that would certainly be a result of what God did. The primary impact of God’s action was to vindicate His name which His people had profaned, resulting in their banishment to foreign lands. Today’s lesson is about the vindication of God’s holy name.

The people of Israel had sullied God’s name by their disobedience to His Word and will. In judgment upon their evil ways God banished them to heathen lands, there to suffer for their wrongdoing and in their punishment to learn obedience. (Read 36:16-20.) However, the impression of the heathen peoples was that the Israelites’ God was impotent to protect and care for them and that He was unable to defend them and keep them in their homeland. They did not see this God as different from their own gods in whom they trusted.

So God says here, through Ezekiel, “I will sanctify my great name which was profaned among the heathen.” He would prove that He was no impotent tribal god, but the sovereign God of Heaven and earth. The way He would do this was to take His people from the lands of their captivity and return them to their homeland. That would prove His power and restore His reputation among the nations.

Furthermore, in returning them to their homeland and to His favor, God would “sprinkle clean water upon them,” signifying the purifying of their hearts and the forgiveness of their sins. In that act of spiritual restoration they would be healed from idolatry and turn their hearts wholly toward God. Their restored, healed hearts would give them new desires, new motivations, an openness to

God's Word and will. God's Spirit within would effect that change. They would willingly walk in God's ways (see Jeremiah 33:8).

In addition to restoration, both physically and spiritually, God would protect and provide for them. Their security in the land would be the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham and their fathers many years before (see 37:25-28). He would multiply the fruit of the ground and they would experience no more famine or want. The new relationship between God and His people would provide complete satisfaction for them, and complete vindication of His power for Himself.

Then, God says, reflect on your past, the evil you did, the punishment you suffered, your banishment, and the estrangement which resulted. When they called all of that to remembrance, and contrasted it with their present situation, they would indeed loathe their former unfaithfulness. And by implication, praise and worship their loving, sovereign God.

But be reminded, God says, that I am doing this to vindicate My name, not because of your worthiness. That knowledge should keep them humble and submissive. God's goodness would also serve as a deterrent to unfaithfulness. Never again would God's people desire to be out from under His blessing of protection and provision.

For thought and discussion

1. Review the reasons, here in Ezekiel and elsewhere, for Israel's captivity and removal to foreign lands by heathen peoples. What lessons does that teach us about the penalty for unfaithfulness?
2. Think about the seriousness of profaning God's holy name. What are some ways this can happen? How can we honor God's name? Good for discussion.
3. Does God still provide or withhold material goods as a means of getting the attention of His people? Discuss.
4. Is there value in remembering our past sins? Dangers?
5. What should be the primary focus of God's children? Are we honoring and upholding God's holy name as we should? Reflect.

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MARCH 22, 2009

New Life for God's People

Ezekiel 37:1-14

This lesson comprises one of Ezekiel's most memorable allegories, the valley of dry bones. This vision immediately follows last Sunday's lesson where God says He will vindicate His name by returning the captive Israelites to their homeland and renewing them spiritually. In this vision He explains to Ezekiel how He will enliven His people and restore them to spiritual wholeness. Again, the purpose is that they "shall know that I am the Lord." The benefit was to be theirs—the glory, God's.

Ezekiel always makes it clear that his prophecies were "a word from the Lord" or a result of the "Lord's hand upon" him. He was speaking God's message, not his own, and he wanted to be sure God's people understood the source of his messages. That not only added authenticity to the message; it also took the burden of proof off himself.

The vision Ezekiel saw here in Chapter 37 of the valley full of dry bones was symbolic of the children of Israel in captivity—they were dead and hopeless. As Ezekiel walked among them the Lord asked an intriguing question: "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel's response to God was: "Thou knowest." Ezekiel didn't know, but he knew God was capable of acts beyond human understanding and capability.

Then God asked Ezekiel to do something equally absurd by human reasoning. He was to prophesy to these dry bones, to preach to them the Word of the Lord. Ezekiel was not one to question the commands of God so he did as he was asked. And as he prophesied to these dead, dry bones, an amazing thing began to happen. The bones came together with a great rattling noise and sinew, flesh, and skin covered the bones. But they were still nothing more than an army of dead, lifeless corpses. God then instructed Ezekiel to call for the wind to breathe life into these reconstructed corpses. The wind came and breathed life and this great army of

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rehabilitated corpses stood up on their feet.

Israel's condition at this point seemed hopeless. They were scattered from their homeland, captives in heathen lands, at a low spiritual ebb, and barely into their 70-year period of captivity. They were without hope. But God wasn't finished with His people yet. And here in this vision He gave Ezekiel a word of hope for His forlorn people. This vision represented Israel and, though now dead and hopeless, a time was coming when they would experience new life, a return to their homeland, and a restoration to God's favor.

This was not to be a one-sided experience, however. Through God's activity and Israel's renewed awareness of God's goodness they would turn their hearts toward Him. They would no longer lust after the gods of the heathen. They would have spiritually renewed hearts, desires, and motivations. A blessed experience awaited them in the future. Ezekiel's prophetic announcement was intended to revive their hope and keep it alive through their dark night of captivity.

Ezekiel's vision certainly carries Messianic overtones and depicts the rejuvenating influence of God's Spirit enlivening persons dead in trespasses and sin. We, today, reap the spiritual benefits of Ezekiel's vision. We who were once dead and dry can now be made alive through Christ's quickening Spirit.

For thought and discussion

1. Discuss the value of illustrative stories in teaching and preaching. Is there also a downside? What is it?
2. Did God ever ask you to do something that seemed absurd or unreasonable? How did you respond? What was the result of your response?
3. What is the alternative to obedience to God's wishes? Is it ever justified?
4. What added weight to Ezekiel's messages? Isn't that still a valid principle for God's messengers today?
5. How does this lesson help us maintain trust in God when we experience difficult times and uncertainties?

MARCH 29, 2009

The Healing Stream

Ezekiel 47:1-12

We are already aware that Ezekiel uses highly figurative language in his prophecies and that his messages are laced with many allegories. Today's lesson is no exception. At the beginning of Chapter 40 Ezekiel is transported in a vision to a high mountain overlooking Jerusalem. From there he was shown and described the restored temple, its measurements, and setting. There were also described to him the various offerings and the functions of the faithful Levitical priests.

Then, as our lesson text begins in Chapter 47, he was led by the man with the measuring line (see 40:3, 4) to the door of the temple where he observed water flowing from the altar and out beneath the threshold. The temple faced east and the waters flowed eastward toward the Dead Sea (v. 8) where, mingling with the brackish waters would effect their healing.

As this healing stream progressed it grew ever deeper, from a shallow, ankle depth to an impassable torrent. As though to encourage Ezekiel to draw a lesson from what he had just observed, the man asked him, "Son of man, hast thou seen this?" It was not just the increasing depth of the water that Ezekiel was to see, but rather what this increasing stream signified. There was a special meaning—for him, and for us.

That there was historical significance to what Ezekiel observed cannot be gainsaid, for throughout much of Ezekiel's prophecy God was proclaiming the restoration of His people and the fruitfulness of their land. However, it is obvious that there are also Messianic overtones in this message because not everything from Chapter 40 on fits a literal fulfillment of Israel's return and reestablishment in their land.

The parallel between this passage and John's Revelation in 22:1 and 2 cannot be missed. Ezekiel's passage speaks of spiritual healing, in addition to whatever may apply to Israel's restoration, either historically, or

in the future. Matthew Henry states: "Most interpreters agree that these waters signify the gospel of Christ, which went forth from Jerusalem and spread itself into the surrounding countries." Commentators Adam Clarke, Jamison, Fausset and Brown, Halley, and others agree. (See also Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8; and Acts 1:8.)

Several of Ezekiel's prophecies which we have already studied focus on God's restoration of Israel and the abundance He will cause the land to produce for their material well-being. We see that same principle at work here in today's text. There will be fish in abundance and the trees will produce fruit in every season, and the leaves of the trees will provide healing. The reference to the Tree of Life in Revelation is obvious.

So we come to the close of Ezekiel's prophecies. Some have been fulfilled; some await fulfillment. Through them all we see the two sides of God. His judgments against sin are certain and severe. His mercy and

grace are abundant and free. He exercises either in relation to man's response. The choice is ours. He waits to bless abundantly those who turn their hearts toward Him.

For thought and discussion

1. It would be a good exercise, if you have not already done so, to read the entire Book of Ezekiel. The broad picture of God's dealing with His people will serve you well as you study these lessons.
2. Why does God couch His messages in allegorical figures? Does He not want us to get the message?
3. Trace both the historical and futuristic aspects of Ezekiel's message here in Chapter 47. How does the historical add weight to the futuristic aspects?
4. What does this lesson teach us about how to read the Bible? Discuss.
5. Don't fail to apply Ezekiel's message to the ever-spreading, life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ. ■

LEWIS SHANTZ WEBER . . . cont'd.

In addition to spiritual tasks Lewis Weber also functioned in mission organizational and administrative roles while on the field. He and his wife also assisted MCC in their relief work in moving refugees to Paraguay. Brother Weber's most long-lasting benefit to the country of Argentina was his work done in Mennonite literature in Spanish. Beginning in 1934 Brother Lewis wrote numerous articles on the Christian life for the official publication of the Argentine Mennonite Church. He also edited a monthly Spanish tract published in Argentina from 1937-38. At one point this tract had a circulation of 25,000.

During part of his furlough Lewis Weber took postgraduate work at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, 1939-40. In 1944 the Argentine Church ordained him as their bishop and in 1945 he wrote a book about Argentina.

In 1949, at the age of 55, Lewis and his wife returned to the States after eighteen busy and fruitful years of service. Was it time for retirement? Definitely not! The list goes on: member of the editorial staff of Mennonite Publishing House, making a considerable contribution to Spanish literature both by translation and adaptation; articles for *Mennonite Encyclopedia*; putting together a book for 25th anniversary of the Argentine Mennonite Mission; in 1951 editor with Lester T. Hershey of Spanish paper founded by Hershey; in early 50s wrote youth and adult teachers' section of the *Herald Teacher*; retirement from editorial responsibilities in January of 1955; 1955-62, assistant director of Tract Department where Lewis and his wife served in literature evangelism; occasionally filled the pulpit at North Scottdale Mennonite Church; did several years of bishop oversight of Cumberland Mennonite Church, Cumberland, Maryland; and served in various General Conference activities.

Brother Weber was efficient in his work no matter what the task. He was a friend to all and was loved by the Argentine nationals. His sermons were much appreciated. He was noted for his integrity, deep sincerity, insight in spiritual matters, and wise counsel. Although he and Edna had no children of their own they had many spiritual children. (continued on page 23)

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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

The Cyanide Defense

“Wouldn’t it be amazing if a creature developed a chemical defense that is deadly to practically every other creature but itself—especially if that defense meant exposing itself and its enemy to deadly cyanide?”

“Yet there is a species of millipede called *Apheloria* that does just this. *Apheloria* has, on each segment of its body, special glands that produce the chemical needed for defense. When the millipede is attacked by an enemy, it mixes this chemical with a catalyst. The result is a chemical that is a mild irritant plus hydrogen cyanide gas—the same lethal chemical used in the gas chamber. In this defense the millipede, as well as his enemies, are engulfed in a cloud of deadly cyanide gas. His attacker dies, but the millipede simply walks away unharmed.

This truly amazing defense clearly has a purpose. Even more amazing, if evolution is right, the millipede developed this remarkable defense quite accidentally, and at the same time he became immune to deadly cyanide gas! This defense is completely unlikely to develop without a planner. The millipede’s immunity to cyanide makes sense if there was a planner, and it makes no sense at all if there wasn’t.

“God’s fingerprints are all over the creation as He seeks to draw us all to Himself.”

—Reprinted with permission from “The Cyanide Defense” on *CreationMoments.com*’s daily two-minute broadcast (<http://cli.gs/8j1tD4>)

* * * * *

Violence in the Gaza Strip

When Hamas militants punctuated the end of a six-month ceasefire negotiated by Egypt with a barrage of over 120 rockets, Israel responded with an intense bombing campaign that killed 350 and injured 1,400, according to the U.N. The campaign targeted Hamas’ (which most of the Western world lists as a terrorist organization) armed wing, arms depots, leadership, and smuggling tunnels. For a dramatic *YouTube* video (taken through the thermal imaging sights of an Israeli aircraft) of Hamas members loading rockets into a truck for transport and then getting wiped out by an Israeli airstrike, see: <http://cli.gs/BzULhD>.

Not all Hamas members, however, are created equal. Many members are such only because they want the economic opportunities afforded by Hamas membership, funded by huge donations all throughout the Arab world. Others are attracted to the religious fundamentalism (keep in mind that while we equate Muslim fundamentalism with violence, there are myriad other aspects—very good aspects—of Muslim fundamentalism across a broad range of moral issues) of Hamas, which contrasts strongly with the secularism of Fatah.

Two months ago when I was living in Jerusalem and teaching English in the West Bank, one of my students invited me to his village for the day. I went along with my brother Benjamin Mast and Michael Yoder, who were part of a visiting Institute

for Global Opportunities team. My student's whole family is Hamas and very religious. (His uncle who was a muzzein at their village's mosque is in a Fatah jail for being a Hamas member.) Through talking with them, I found that they are very interested in peace and living side by side with Israelis with open borders. (What I don't know is how they envision the details of that.)

Christians in the Gaza Strip are having very low-key Christmas celebrations this year because of threats of violence from Muslim groups. A prominent Christian leader in Gaza spoke anonymously (for fear he would be killed if he was quoted by name) to *World Net Daily* saying, "We were warned not to celebrate in the streets or ring the church bells, otherwise Christians would be targeted. We are living under a state of fear. We don't want to infuriate anyone." The anonymous preacher reported Jihadia Salafiya (an organization allied with Hamas, created to enforce Islamic Sharia law in Gaza) as the organization he believes made the threat, but when WND asked Abu Islam (the leader of JS) for comment, he, of course, denied it. He did comment, "Gaza is a Muslim state. Why do 3,000 Christians need to celebrate openly in a territory of 1 million Muslims? Any celebrations are clearly for missionary purposes and must not be tolerated." If JS is making these threats, it's not idly. They shot up a UN school in Gaza after they allowed boys and girls to participate in the same sports event. They are also suspected of killing a close friend of Ali and Gamal's (as I shall call two of my Palestinian friends): Ayyad, the brother that ran the Palestinian Bible Society bookstore in Gaza. About a year before he was killed, Ayyad's office was firebombed. Ali and Gamal's offices have been firebombed twice. Pray for their protection; they're doing great work there.

—Sources: *World Net Daily*, *Wikipedia*, *YouTube*, personal contacts

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How the Kassem People in Ghana Celebrated Their First Christmas

The following is an account from a Serving in Mission missionary from Ghana, Africa.

"Northern Ghana is not an easy place to live. The people suffer with drought, malaria, and heat. If you see them in the daytime they appear rather lethargic. But when the sun goes down, they come alive. Singing and dancing is perhaps the soul of the people. When asked which tribe or ethnic group they come from, they will respond, 'I sing in Kassem, and I dance in Kassem.'

"Many years ago, the Gospel was just coming to the Kassena people in Northern Ghana. A local SIM director came to visit us and the new believers put on a welcome dance for him. Soon after, we received a rather stern warning that we should not allow new Christians to dance. We were not so convinced. We could see that the people danced because it was their way of showing joy or happiness.

"A few months later, it was Christmas time. A leader came to visit us from SIM International. The Kassena believers invited our team to one of their villages to celebrate their first Christmas. We went, not knowing what to expect. They had a few songs, an African meal, and someone told the Christmas story. We were just about to leave when a solid 'thump, thump, thump' rang out in the night. A shot of embarrassment went through me! No! These people were not going to dance again!

"But they did. Out came the drums and they began their sophisticated rhythms. Each ethnic group had their own way of drumming—and this was definitely 'Kassem.' Very soon a long line formed and everyone joined their 'line dance.' In the moonlight, they danced back and forth—about 10 feet left and then about 10 feet right—back and forth.

"Then they began to sing their song. At first we didn't understand, but slowly we

worked out what they were singing. It was their first Christmas song: 'Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, and He is the Son of God.'

"All this of course came with the powerful sound of the drum that went right through you. You could feel the vibration. The music went right down into your soul. And it made you want to get up and move and shout it out with them: 'Jesus Christ is the Son of God! and He was born in Bethlehem!'

"Well, so much for my embarrassment. Whatever my superiors might think, this was absolutely beautiful to me! Here was a clear, sincere, indigenous expression of these believers on their first Christmas — Kassena style.

"I expected to face the disapproval of my mission leader. But as we drove home, he said, 'That was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.'

"And it was."

This article is not intended to endorse any viewpoints on musical styles or dancing, but rather it is a story—a snapshot of life when the Bible interacts with cultures other than our own—that is intended to make us think about the Biblical examples of instrumental music and dancing used in worship, sort our culture from the Bible, and have a firm Biblical belief and reasoning for why we believe what we believe. Why is the viewpoint in this article right or wrong? As always, I welcome feedback to hansmast@hansmast.com. All feedback is forwarded to the editor as well.

—Reprinted with permission from *SIM.org* (<http://cli.gs/bV58B5>)

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Other Notable Stories

Notable stories of the month not covered here are covered online:

"Billionaire Blowups of 2008" (<http://cli.gs/6NjsTj>) in *Forbes* details some of the dramatic drops in worth of the world's wealthiest.

"A Politically Incorrect Christmas in Baghdad" (<http://cli.gs/DMhN8d>) gives the

story of how the Iraqi government's city-wide celebration is centered on Christ, in contrast to American celebrations.

A *Newsweek* interview produces "Q&A: Somali Pirate Explains How To Steal Ships" (<http://cli.gs/mGYqd1>) and an interesting perspective.

An equally interesting perspective is given as China's official news agency *Xinhua* gives an overview and analysis of world events in 2008 (<http://cli.gs/mzEd2E>).

A medical study mentioned in the *New York Times* shows that an afternoon nap increases productivity better than coffee (<http://cli.gs/LNM9bB>).

The *UK Daily Mail* gives the story of two British surgeons—one on vacation at an island getaway and the other volunteering in Africa—and how the latter used his cell phone's SMS to text the former for instructions on how to perform a complicated amputation. Two terse text messages gave him the instructions (<http://cli.gs/yG8p2y>).

The Hill reports that the "Final Obama Cabinet pick worries Dems" (<http://cli.gs/pnh3VW>) which is part of an Obama trend to move to the center after the election; I've been much more excited about the post-election Obama than the pre-election Obama.

Newsweek reports that the Detroit auto industry is not the only one in the U.S., but that scattered through the South is another auto industry: foreign brands, but employing 39% as many American workers as the Big Three (<http://cli.gs/LBDyrb>).

We learn via *Slashdot* that Logitech has produced its billionth mouse (<http://cli.gs/NhEAsh>).

Forbes tells us about a Beverly Hills doctor who converted the liposuctioned fat from patients into biodiesel to power his SUV (<http://cli.gs/LUDAu6>).

Finally, the *Washington Post* examines the many connections between the Blagojevich scandal (indicted IL Democratic Governor Rod Blagojevich was caught on federal wiretaps trying to sell the Senate seat Obama is vacating) and Obama (<http://cli.gs/GJWvgz>).

Nonconformity to the World

by John Horsch

There is abundant proof in the source material that from its inception the Mennonite Church taught the principle of nonconformity to the world. Heinrich Bullinger wrote two books against the Swiss Brethren. In his first book, published in 1531, he says that they disapproved of dancing and all other forms of worldly amusement. Furthermore he states that they insisted on modest apparel and condemned outward adornment. In his larger work, printed in 1561, Bullinger wrote concerning the early Swiss Brethren: "They led their lives under a semblance of a quiet spiritual conduct, and reprov'd sharply covetousness, pride, profanity, the frivolous talking and inordinate life of the world." In another place he says: "They reprov'd earnestly all vain display, all intemperance in eating and drinking, all profanity and other sin." He states further that they had regulations in regard to clothing, and that "they rejected all wearing of costly clothing and ornaments." Their walk and conversation, he observes, "were of a serious turn and they were very outspoken in their testimony against the sensuality and unscrupulousness of the world."

Johannes Kessler, the chronicler of St. Gall, describing the origin of the Swiss Brethren church, says: "Their life was irreproachable. They shunned costly clothing. Their walk and conversation were quite humble." The chronicler Sebastian Franck, who lived in South Germany, wrote in 1531 that there were Anabaptists who followed regulations in respect to simplicity of clothing. In the following year, at the disputation held at Zofingen in Switzerland, the spokesmen

of the Swiss Brethren stressed their teaching that worldly conformity of any description should not be tolerated in the church. Again, in the great disputation held in 1538 in the city of Bern, the Mennonite representatives emphasized their rejection of worldly conformity.

Berthold Haller, the leading Zwinglian reformer of Bern, wrote in 1532 of the Swiss Brethren: "All their followers earnestly guard themselves against sin. They come together frequently and strictly conform to their rules." The preachers of the Protestant state church, assembled in a synod at Zofingen in 1532, admitted in a letter to the civil authorities, that the Swiss Brethren "have an appearance of outward piety to a far greater degree than we and all the churches which unitedly with us confess Christ." Wolfgang Capito, Zwinglian reformer of Strasburg in Alsace, wrote concerning the Swiss Brethren: "They are determined to shun the evil life of the world and to flee from that which is in conformity with the lust of the flesh and of the world."

August Pfeiffer, an early Lutheran theologian, wrote: "The Mennonites shun immodesty in dress, swearing, insincerity, intemperance, immorality, and discord. Judging from their lives you would suppose that they are all true and holy Christians." Concerning the life of the Brethren in the Netherlands, van Bentheim, a Dutch author, wrote in 1698: "We may learn from these people much that is good, namely humility, contentment, sobriety, and especially charity toward the needy. . . . Above all, they insist on modesty in respect to clothing."

George Thormann, a minister of the

Swiss Reformed state church, writing in 1693, says that the Swiss Brethren insisted on simple dress. In a mandate against the Brethren in the canton Bern, warning was given against giving aid to Mennonite fugitives; it was stated that they were readily recognizable at first sight; apparently they were known by their simple manner of life. In 1568 a conference of the Swiss Brethren held at Strasburg ruled that church members who were tailors and seamstresses should refrain from making clothing that was unbecoming for a Christian.

Menno Simons addressed the Muniterite sect of fanatic revolutionaries as follows:

The kingdom of the Lord is not a kingdom in which a swaggering show of gold, silver, pearls, silk, velvet, and display has any place, as is the usage of the proud, haughty world, and as also your leaders teach and permit under the pretense that it is harmless if the heart is not proud. . . . But in the kingdom of Christ—the kingdom of all humility—the outward adorning of the body has no place, but the inward ornaments of the Spirit are sought and coveted with great zeal and diligence, and with a broken, contrite heart.

Again Menno Simons wrote:

They say that they believe, and yet there are no limits nor bounds to their accursed wantonness, foolish pride and pomp with silk, velvet, costly clothes, gold rings, chains, silver belts, pins, and the like. Notwithstanding all this, they still desire to be called the Christian Church.

Regarding nonswearing of oaths the Swiss Brethren took a strict attitude. At times the government of various Swiss states demanded taking oaths of the whole population, in order to ascertain which individuals had conscientious objections against swearing. The objectors were accused of being Mennonites. It may be worth noticing in this connection that Ulrich Zwingli, in his earliest years as a reformer, believed that the

New Testament Scriptures forbade the swearing of oaths. Menno Simons, in many places of his writings, testifies against the oath.

In the disputation of Zofingen the Swiss Brethren condemned slavery as a feature of worldliness and contrary to Christian principles. Again, from a statement made by Martin Butzer it is clear that they disapproved of indulgence of luxuries while any of their neighbors were suffering want. The writings of Bullinger and other contemporary authors indicate clearly that the Swiss Brethren took a strict attitude regarding the sin of profanity. Bullinger says: "The Anabaptist should not be censured for their custom of reproving those whom they hear using profanity." He adds with regret, that the ministers of the national church "do little or nothing" against this sin, but that on the contrary some of the clergy themselves were guilty of profanity. It is of interest to notice from the source material that one who was accused of being an Anabaptist could clear himself of this charge by using profanity. Profane swearing was accepted as a proof of being untainted by "the Anabaptist heresy." Again Bullinger, as well as other writers of the state church, stated that the Swiss Brethren shunned the public houses where strong drink was sold. Menno Simons has much to say concerning the evil of "the accursed drink houses," to use his own words. ■

—From *Mennonites in Europe* by John Horsch. Copyright © 1942 by Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, PA 15683. Used by permission.

LEWIS SHANTZ WEBER . . . cont'd.

On November 20, 1963, at the age of 69, Brother Lewis Shantz Weber went home to be with his Lord. The funeral was held at Scottdale Mennonite Church followed by burial in the church cemetery.

—Gail L. Emerson



Counseling From the Word

The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism

by Richard Winter

While waiting to board a flight to England, I found myself searching for something to read. I noticed a young woman standing alone in front of a whole wall of the latest women's magazines. One cover proclaimed: "The Search for the Perfect Woman." I wondered what it must be like to face such an onslaught of "perfect" models and celebrities with whom to compare one's body, face, clothes, and hair.

As I browsed the magazine rack myself, I encountered images and articles about "perfect abs" and huge biceps that made me feel like a wimp! Other articles highlighted the inadequacies and imperfections of my own life and made me long for a stylish, powerful car and a dream house.

Although I know that the photographs of models in magazines are computer enhanced and the decorated homes are far from reality, I want to look like those people. I want to live in that house. I want to believe that it is possible to be bright and beautiful in a world where brains and good looks are recognized and rewarded.

The Triumph of Technology

We live in a world where technology helps us overcome many barriers to living a more perfect life. We hold in our hands the tools to create flawless com-

plexions, perfectly shaped bodies, highly efficient cars, beautiful homes, and instant communication. Not only do the advances of technology enable us to overcome distance, time, everyday wear and tear, and just plain old forgetfulness; technology promises to improve us at the genetic level as well.

In the not-too-distant future we will be able to enhance the brain with microscopic computer implants, improving memory and cognitive ability. The era of designer babies is already here. Today, human eggs and sperm are marketed with a high value on the donor's intelligence and looks.

In the worlds of business, academia, and athletics, striving for excellence is greatly valued and highly productive, giving an edge in a very competitive arena. But could there be a dark side to this striving for perfection?

Is Anything Wrong With Perfectionism?

There is debate about the assets and liabilities of perfectionism in the academic and popular literature. Some see all perfectionism as unhealthy and bad; others see perfectionism on a spectrum where only a certain degree of perfectionism is unhealthy or neurotic. The latter view is illustrated by a study of 820 academically

excellent, gifted sixth-graders.¹ The study found that 25 percent of the children were “dysfunctional” (neurotic, unhealthy) perfectionists; 42 percent were healthy perfectionists, pursuing excellence but not to a neurotic degree; and 33 percent were non-perfectionists.

It is important to note that one can have different degrees of perfectionism affecting just one or two areas—such as how we look or the grades we achieve—or perfectionism may affect every part of life.

To be more specific, **normal, healthy perfectionists** are usually full of energy and enthusiasm, have a positive self-image, and rarely procrastinate over decisions. They are realistic about their own strengths and weaknesses. They are driven more by a (positive) motivation to achieve than by a (negative) fear of failure.

In contrast **neurotic, unhealthy perfectionists** set unrealistically high standards. Their sense of self-worth depends entirely on their performance and production according to the goals they have set for themselves. Continuous self-criticism, in the form of concern over mistakes and doubts about doing the right thing, is a distinguishing mark of unhealthy perfectionism.

Non-perfectionists are people who have little or no shame or guilt about failing to reach high standards or to be organized. They are relaxed, easygoing, and fun to be around, though perhaps sometimes so laid-back that they are perceived as being disorganized, unreliable, and lacking in self-discipline.

Having repeatedly discussed with friends and colleagues the issue of whether all perfectionism is unhealthy, I believe it is more practical to accept the spectrum paradigm showing differing degrees of perfectionism. This is certainly the view that underlies most of the latest research on perfectionism, which also describes three

main types of perfectionism:²

The **self-oriented perfectionist** demands perfection for him- or herself—this type of perfectionist is trying to live up to his or her own high, and often impossible, standards. The **socially prescribed perfectionist** is the person who has the “ghost” of a critical parent looking over his or her shoulder or some type of voice

from the outside drives this person to meet the expectations of others. Finally, the **other-oriented perfectionist** thinks, “Why can’t people live up to my standards and do things the way they should be done?”

Each of the above three types of perfectionism may vary in intensity and in some people there is a combination of all three.

The Perils of Perfectionism

Let me say again that not all perfectionism is unhealthy. It is good to enjoy high standards and pursue excellence in life. But sadly, the negative and unhealthy aspects of perfectionism can be very destructive and crippling. Problems arise when we live under the tyranny of a belief that perfection is possible, when we have standards that are so high that they are impossible to attain. When a person’s self-worth depends on reaching those high standards, it is an inevitable script for self-defeat and creates his or her own personal hell of repeated failure and eternal regret. Perfectionism can also lead to all sorts of other problems, such as anxiety, depression, phobias, indecision, procrastination, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, difficulties recovering from failure, and suicidal impulses.

Vince Foster, the lawyer to the Clinton White House, was first in his law school class and considered a person of impeccable integrity. He is reported to have possessed:

Problems arise when we live under the tyranny of a belief that perfection is possible, when we have standards that are so high they are impossible to attain.

. . . impressive intellectual capacities, intense loyalty, and powerful personal strength . . . he would research each case he worked on extensively, going through 20 drafts if needed. In a commencement address to the University of Arkansas law school he said, "The reputation you develop for intellectual and ethical integrity will be your greatest asset or your worst enemy. Treat every pleading, every brief, every contract, every letter, every daily task as if your career will be judged on it. I cannot make this point to you too strongly: there is no victory, no advantage, no fee, no favor which is worth even a blemish on your reputation for intellect and integrity. Dents to the reputation in the legal profession are irreparable."³

The series of events in the Clinton White House which led Foster to being criticized in the *Wall Street Journal* caused him to sink into depression. Eventually he committed suicide because he felt he was a complete failure. This sort of all-or-nothing, black-or-white thinking is typical of a perfectionist.

Some perfectionists, like Vince Foster, are very **driven** to achieve their goals, and this may be healthy. But, pushed to an extreme, this type of perfectionism, especially when other-oriented, can lead to controlling and self-centered behavior. Others may be described as **defeated** perfectionists because they have given up trying to reach their impossible standards. In fact they may think of themselves as the complete opposite because their home is such a mess. Their all-or-nothing thinking causes them to believe that "if it cannot be perfect then there is no point in even trying to make it so." The driven perfectionist, under pressure, can switch to the hopelessness of the defeated perfectionist.

Hope for Change

I strongly believe that there are practical steps we can take to confront

unhealthy perfectionism in our lives, but it is important, first, to put those strategies on a solid theological and philosophical foundation. Almost all of the great religions of the world have in them an awareness that we need to be better than we are. The difference between the religions, though, is the path we take toward becoming better, healthier people.

Many religions prescribe rules and rituals which have to be followed to make us good enough to be acceptable to some deity. Christianity is profoundly and wonderfully different because the Biblical picture shows that people can never be good enough. Francis Schaeffer often used to say that Christianity is both the easiest religion and the hardest. It is the easiest because we come with nothing, with empty hands, to the foot of the cross. And yet it is the hardest, because our pride says, "I want to do something to contribute to my salvation, to being good enough."

So, when our drive for perfectionism leads to yet another defeat, we can call out to the Lord who accepts, forgives, loves, and values us *not* for what we do or achieve. In Christ, God offers us total acceptance as we are, because He has achieved perfection on our behalf. He gives us Christ's righteousness when we turn to Him in faith.

The divine dilemma is that God is pure goodness and perfection, and we are deeply flawed, imperfect, and wanting our own way, wanting to be in control. This, ultimately, is at the root of sin. We deserve punishment and need rescue from this dilemma. The amazing thing is that God sent the perfect sacrifice—Christ Himself. Scripture says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Because of His sacrifice there can be restoration of relationship with God. This is the true pathway to perfection.

This road to Heaven involves letting

go of ultimate control and giving up trying to be God ourselves. It is about accepting His grace, love, and forgiveness. When we know that we are accepted and loved with all our imperfections, we are set free to pursue excellence without fear of failure or rejection, and with gratitude to God.

So, my worth in the eyes of God does not depend on my works. I do not need to live under law but under grace. Many perfectionists still live under the law. They find it hard to accept the grace of God because there is often a basic insecurity with deep fears of rejection, of failure, and of being out of control. But all these deep fears are dealt with by returning to a relationship with a loving God who accepts us, with all our failures and imperfections.

But you may say, "Surely there is a proof text for the perfectionist in Jesus' own words, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (Matt. 5:48)." The Greek word here is *teleios*, meaning "mature, reaching an appointed goal." We are called to maturity and holiness, and Jesus was pointing us in that direction. The Apostle Paul recognized that perfection is not here yet: "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Cor. 13:10). One day we will be perfect, but not now. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12). We have been saved and justified; we are now in the process of being changed, renewed, and perfected.

We are called to have our minds renewed (Rom. 12:2). Old habits of thinking die hard. Insecurity, feelings of insignificance, desire to control, fear of rejection and failure—all of these things are based on lies that must be replaced with the truth. God gives us the Holy

Spirit as the great Counselor. He also gives the practical help and support of the community of faith in this renewal process which will only be completed when we are with the Father in glory.

Strategies for Change

There are some practical things that people who struggle with perfectionism can do to learn to live with imperfection. First, we must confront reality. Perfectionists can do this by evaluating the pros and cons of perfectionism—the advantages and disadvantages. Perfectionists often have a difficult time seeing the disadvantages of this way of coping with life. They are convinced that their way of thinking protects them from mediocrity and prevents mistakes. They do not see clearly the negative consequences of self-criticism, dissatisfaction, broken relationships, and vulnerability to depression. When the advantages and disadvantages are carefully defined, it is usually easy to see that the costs outweigh the benefits.

Perfectionists can also take steps toward healing by recognizing all-or-nothing thought patterns, such as "I must do everything right or not at all." "Are the walls in this room completely dirty, or are there just a few dirty marks?" New habits of thinking and feeling take a long time to be established in the heart. Patience is needed. It is helpful to keep a journal of habitual thoughts and feelings. Until we record the pattern of our neurotic and sinful tendencies, we often do not realize how frequently they occur.

As individuals seek to deal with perfectionism it is helpful to create little goals. If one's goal is to be less of a perfectionist about appearance, then it helps to break this down into sub-goals, like not taking more than 30 minutes to get ready to go out, being willing to miss a workout, or gaining a few pounds without becoming upset.⁴ One can get wise input by reading

*In Christ,
God offers
us total
acceptance
as we
are . . .*

books and going to a counselor, but the optimum environment for change is in the context of a relationship with God and other people. A community or an alternative family can be a great source of healing. If you have never experienced acceptance and grace in your own family of origin, then I pray that you will find a church where people will accept you with your faults and imperfections.

It is there that the lies a perfectionist has accepted can be replaced with the louder voice of grace and truth. We all need a safe place to take risks without fear of rejection.

I am reminded of the wonderful story of the *Velveteen Rabbit*, in which we meet the toys in a children's nursery. The old Skin Horse, we are told, was balding and showing some of his seams. He had seen many other toys come and eventually break apart and pass on, but being old and wise he knew about the "strange and wonderful" nursery magic.

"What is REAL?" asked the Velveteen Rabbit one day when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender. . . .

"Does it mean having things that buzz inside you, and a stick-out handle?" [appearance and performance]

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real, you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse, "you become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily or have sharp edges or who have to be carefully kept [Perfectionists!]. Gener-

ally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly except to people who don't understand."⁵

It is the love of God that surrounds and accepts us just as we are. And we also have the promise that we are being perfected by God—or sanctified—and one day we will be complete in perfection. For "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18) little by little, day by day. One day, in glory, even our bodies will be transformed so that they will be like His glorious body. Until that day we groan for glory (Rom. 8:23). We wait "eagerly" and "patiently" for that day when the Lord will return, and He will give us the perfection we long for and that He desires for us. ■

Old habits of thinking die hard. Insecurity, feelings of insignificance, desire to control, fear of rejection and failure . . .

ENDNOTES

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4. Martin Antony and Richard Swinson, *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping With Perfectionism* (Oakland, Calif.: New Harbinger, 1998), 124-5.
5. Margery Williams Bianco, *The Velveteen Rabbit* (New York, Avon, 1975), 16-17.

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Blessed Are the Hungry

by Kevin Bauman

From a physical aspect, we all know what hunger means. It is something we could identify from birth (even though we did not fully understand it at that point). And it has continued. Who of us has not uttered or heard the words, “I am hungry”? For those of us with children at home we frequently and freely hear the phrase, “I am hungry!” We are quick to take care of our hunger pangs. We see restaurants full of people, grocery stores in abundance, and our cupboards full of food. Food satisfies our physical hunger.

Now what about the spiritual aspect of hunger? Do we know what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

Jesus said, “*Blessed are they* which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6). We see from this Scripture that the first criterion for being filled is to have an appetite. In order to have a hunger we need to be emptied. The songwriter says, “Emptied of sin and self may I be.” We need to recognize the fact that we cannot be filled with self if we plan on being filled with manna from Heaven. Therefore we must be willing to lay down any earthly passions and desires in order to be filled.

Secondly, we need to find time. The songwriter admonishes, “Take time to be holy.” Planning and scheduling earthly meals is important. How much more should we determine that we will spend time with God. Quiet time with God cannot be left to chance or it will not happen. The alarm clock is an excellent tool to assist us with spending time alone with God.

Thirdly, we need to go where the food is. Spend time reading God’s Word. This time is commonly referred to as personal devotions. Reading the Word nourishes the spiritual man. This discipline must be exercised daily in our journey of spiritual growth.

Neglect results in spiritual shallowness. We cannot afford to miss this important meal every day. Let us lay aside the cares and plans for the day and listen attentively as we read God’s Word. Dig for the truths that are hidden in each verse. Read and reread them. Dig deep. It is amazing how God reveals Truth to us one step at a time, as we meditate on His Word. During this time we will slowly feel hunger pangs subsiding.

Then let us stop and make practical application of the things we have read. Ask the hard questions: What principles are taught in this passage? What are practical applications of this principle for my life? If we cannot make practical applications of the Scriptures in our life, then people will not be able to see God in our everyday living.

We must also spend time with God in prayer. Let us praise Him for who He is and thank Him for what He has done for us. Just as we feel blessed when people thank us for a deed we have done, so God is pleased with our thanks for deeds He has done. Let’s ask Him to meet our daily needs—spiritual and material. Allow God to bring to our attention the many needs that are around us. And notice, that as we go through this experience, the hunger pains are diminished. Does this take time? Oh, yes it does. But the blessings are worth it all.

Worship services are another place where hunger pains can be relieved. We must come with a desire to worship God from the heart. Worship through singing. Allow the message of the song to sink into our hearts, and it will draw us closer to God. Follow carefully, word for word, and again we will feel the hunger pains diminish as the message of the song speaks to us. Oh, the blessedness of the hymns of the Church! Feast through the reading and teaching of

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Sermon of the Month



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

The Brotherhood in Pilgrimage

by John R. Mumaw

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his possession, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

“By faith Abraham, even though he was past age—and Sarah herself was barren—was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. . . .

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. . . . They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” (Hebrews 11:8-16, NIV).

The experience of Abraham provides a model for the contemporary church. He moved from the familiar to an unknown country. He traveled light. He lived in temporary housing. He accepted the challenge to become a blessing to others. He looked for a city “whose builder and maker is God.” The Christian Church is called to exercise faith in God in the face of an unknown future. It must learn the great lesson of moving in prompt obedience. It must engage in responsible decision making. It must cultivate a perpetual awareness of its temporary nature. It is waiting for the entrance into eternal habitations. It finds its security in the promise of God. It is concerned with the ultimate meanings of life. It is committed to eternal values.

1. Pilgrims are committed to prompt obedience (v. 8a).

When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, he knew nothing of his destination. His response to the call held no reservation. He had a high regard for the will of God. His obedience set the standard of faith for all time. To believe in God means a willingness to entrust one’s self to His directions.

There is in today’s society a widespread resistance to any mandate that calls for such full obedience. It is resisted on all sides as an encroachment on personal rights and privileges. People do not want to be told where to go or what to do. The rash of reactions against “the establishment” is a token of the larger demands for independence and self rule. It is a mood that militates against the spirit of submission and explicit obedience. We have too

long forgotten the divine condition set before Israel when God said, "If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land."

2. Pilgrims are committed to decisive action (v. 8b).

"Abraham went out not knowing where he was going." This was an act of faith. He took God at His word and in decisive action followed divine directions. Having been convinced who it was that called him he refused to ask where or why.

This reference to Abraham remains an example from the long history of God's people to illustrate the believer's relation to his world. It introduces the pilgrim lifestyle. There is no abiding place on earth for the people of God. We are in transit. We hear the God of history constantly calling the redeemed to move on toward the eternal city.

Of all the images used in the New Testament to describe the church, the pilgrim model stands out in bold relief. It helps the church identify itself in relation to God and to the world. This image represents a universal and cosmic status in human affairs. It defines the Church's sphere of belonging. It is in the world but not of it. We say the Church is in mission. We speak of its servanthood. We declare its brotherhood. We define its fellowship. But none of these concepts are complete without the added meaning of pilgrimage.

Pilgrims do not travel alone. They identify with people traveling the same "Way." A common faith and similar goals establish vital relationship. The sharing of a common life and mission creates a sense of brotherhood. The feeling of togetherness in a common cause and the conviction of a common purpose in mission are essential to the meaning of our pilgrimage. We use the same light for our journey. We inspire in each other the needed courage to face unknown crises. We support each other while wrestling with principalities and powers. We seek together to follow God's leading.

3. Pilgrims are committed to temporary residence (v. 9).

Abraham lived as a stranger in a foreign

land. He trusted God when leaving his home in Chaldea, believing that obedience would yield the larger blessing. In his new environment he lived in tents. As one writer says, "He dwelled permanently in temporary type residences." He was detached from his former ways and committed to the will of God.

One of the current issues in Church dialogue is discernment of responsibility in contemporary world affairs. How does the Christian evaluate what is happening in today's world? Much has been said lately about involvement, participation, witness, influence, change, and renewal, as they pertain to the relationship of the church to the world. It is all a part of trying to learn what it means to be in the world without being a part of it. In fact, the phrase is often inverted to describe our position as being in the world and, therefore, we cannot escape being a part of it. We are urged to get into positions of influence and help to reform society. We are told to observe where things are happening and get with it. So long as this topic of conversation gets priority it will be necessary to assert the voice of pilgrimage. It must be remembered that "Heaven is my home."

Can it be that we have moved so far out of the line of vision of heavenly verities that we are losing sight of Heaven itself? What do the recent deviations from traditional practices of the church say to us about respect for the truth of divine revelation? We have turned from elements of simple faith in the Bible to propositions of philosophic thought. We have accommodated our behavior to a style of life that emphasizes material prosperity and social security. More and more the church is becoming a misfit in the Kingdom of God.

4. Pilgrims are committed to confident waiting (v. 10).

Abraham was willing all his lifetime to dwell in temporary housing. He could do this without complaint because he was waiting for the city built with foundations. Its architect and builder is God. This represents the pilgrim character of God's people,

waiting for the final consummation of glory.

The pilgrim pattern was applied in Apostolic days. The early Christians had a deep sense of calling to the lordship of Christ. They followed “the Way” without knowing what was down the road. Their mobility was essential to the Cause. They lived in constant expectation of Christ’s return. They gave priority to eternal values.

Redemption is found through turning from idols and the world to the living God, to serve His purposes, and to promote the extension of His kingdom. The Church is so engaged while it waits for His Son from Heaven (1 Thess. 1:9, 10). Our citizenship is in Heaven from whence we look for the coming Redeemer (Phil. 3:20, 21). And everyone that has this hope in Him purifieth himself as He is pure (1 John 3:3).

The prophetic voice of the church needs to be heard more clearly and more often. Too many of us will be caught at the Second Coming with too much love for the world and too many entanglements with worldly alliances. Abraham’s faith in the city of God affected his attitude toward temporal affairs; they were secondary in his consideration. The church cannot afford to overlook the danger of becoming too deeply involved in the affairs of this world. The Heavenly Jerusalem, our final home, must have first consideration in all our decisions.

5. Pilgrims are committed to divine promise (v. 11).

Abraham was certain that God is able to keep His word. He took Him at His word and acted upon it, both in His calling and in His promise. Faith always rests on a promise. Abraham’s faith was put to his account for righteousness because he took God’s promises seriously and acted accordingly.

Pilgrims on the Way rely upon the promises of God. This means having full confidence in divine revelation. Our pilgrimage is on the narrow way of New Testament teaching. It leads to life everlasting.

The pilgrim process is determined by spiritual considerations. One of these is brotherly admonition, the kind of interac-

tion within the brotherhood that leads to self-understanding. Another is the expression of group compassion in alleviating the hurts and tragedies in the world. We are also identified by our ministry of caring. Whatever we do, wherever we go, let it be done in the Name of Jesus.

At this point a wholesome tension emerges over the extent of temporal involvement. Modern voices are urging the church to get its schedule of activity from the world’s agenda. They insist it must determine its mission and message by happenings in history. It may be the church has already listened too long and too well to the secular society. Are we not in danger of giving too much attention to this world and time, and lose sight of the great Beyond? The secular ferment has attracted so much attention that we tend to overlook the Spirit operations. Some ecclesiastical leaders have been so nearly convinced that man by his own choice and ability can manage his future that they no longer need God and call Him dead. This is a call to reassessment of spiritual resources. It is a call to renewal of spiritual dynamics. The towering events of our time must be seen not only in terms of their contemporary meaning but also in the light of their eternal significance.

6. Pilgrims are committed to ultimate meanings (vv. 13, 14).

Confessing that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth declares plainly that we seek a better country. We look beyond the transitory to see the implications for the future. To find meaning for the present we must read the signs for the future.

Many people are in desperate search for meaning. They feel impelled to make some kind of response to the predicament of a troubled world. In the midst of tensions, frustrations, discriminations, hatred, and all kinds of carnal indulgences, man struggles for meaning. Indeed, it may very well be that this search is the most important goal in this life. But while the world is struggling with the problem of meaning for today, the Christian pilgrim

is in search for ultimate meanings.

The Church has a responsibility to provide for itself the kind of spiritual leadership that holds a long-range view. Decisions in a pilgrim church are made in the light of eternity. While the secular man is grappling with the threatening dimensions of his existence, the man in brotherhood pilgrimage transcends the earthly fog and looks to the skies lighted with eternal meaning. He marches on to Zion, living and serving with ultimate values in view and in constant relationship to eternity.

It is in the very nature of Christianity that Christians are strangers and pilgrims in this world. The disciples of Christ are committed to the standards of the Kingdom. We receive our orders from Heaven. In that sense the Church is in a colonial position (a colony of Heaven). It has no legal rights to administer the world's program. It can never be truly "at home" in the world. Its life and mission deliberately crosses national, cultural, economic, and racial boundaries and its goal lies along the eternal shores.

In all the work of the Church we must keep in mind the pilgrim togetherness for our time. Let us face the challenge of developing the pilgrim character in the urban church. Let us keep the pilgrim image explicit in our organizational structures. Let us be pilgrims in our worship. Let us assume obligation to apply pilgrim principles in our relation to the state. Let us be aware of our pilgrim character in relation to social action. Let us keep alive a theology of pilgrimage in relation to mission (evangelism).

7. Pilgrims are committed to heavenly habitations (v. 16).

God is not ashamed to be called our God if we identify clearly with His kingdom. He has the eternal city in preparation and is extending His grace to all who are moving in Christian pilgrimage.

The crucial point in applying the pilgrim concept to brotherhood is to hold eternity in view. Is it possible we may have been searching for contemporary meanings at the expense of finding the final meaning?

Have we been so busy tracing the church's lines of relevance to this world that we are losing sight of eternal dimensions? Has the concept of a "worldly" Christianity blurred our vision of the heavenly Church? Have we heard so much about the demands of a secular world that we are forgetting about the requirements for entering the better world? Are we becoming so accustomed to accepting change that we are forgetting how to contain the changeless? Have we heard so often that action in the world is God's doings that we are no longer aware of Satan's strategy? Have we become so accustomed to the attractions of social action that we forget the Church has its center of gravity beyond the grave? Are we getting so thoroughly schooled in the secular faith that we miss the call to the holy sanctuary? Have we talked so much about God's lordship over history that we have denied Christ's lordship over personal experience? Instead of guiding our actions in the light of the world, let us take our direction from Heaven. Instead of making our decisions in the light of today's knowledge let us make our decisions in the light of eternity.

Heaven is our home. Our present attitudes and behavior must demonstrate that belief. It is not enough to talk about it; it must be the realistic goal.

The pilgrim vision is a look beyond the present. It looks for a goal. It holds in sharp focus the shape of eternal habitations. The pilgrim community must hold an awareness of God's presence and promise. The promise is pointing to Heaven.

From these observations I sense a call to spiritual renewal and Christian commitment. It is a call to greater sensitivity in brotherhood and greater dedication in discipleship.

1. It is a call to reinstate a more vigorous practice of obedience.
2. It is a call to a more consistent application of the principle of nonconformity to the world.
3. It is a call to greater sacrifice in performing our Christian mission.

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Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

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

Glory and Honor and Majesty



by Sylvan Ressler

Guest Contributor

Lyrics: The words for this hymn were born out of a desire to give the Lord an offering of praise that seems to be missing in Christian hymnody today. I am experiencing a certain amount of frustration with the current wave of contemporary music that lacks depth, vibrancy, and vitality that should be a part of every enthusiastic Christian who is aware of his position in Christ. The contemporary scene takes some Scripture and with instrumentation and repetition comes up with a concoction which does not give proper respect to a Holy God, and often reveals an immature Christian experience. While the singing of Scripture has its place, the present Scripture songs seldom in themselves embody all the attributes that should be gloriously sung to the Lord in a worship service on the first day of the week.

I am also disappointed in the lack of hymns being written today. The light gospel song has taken over and it is probably safe to say that there are twenty gospel songs being written to every hymn. We have been blessed in the Mennonite church with two of the greatest hymnbooks that can be found anywhere—the *Church Hymnal* and the *Mennonite Hymnal*. That we had men with the foresight to formulate a book with the quality of

hymns that these books carry is a credit to our former church leaders. It is discouraging to me to watch our churches turn from these books to songbooks that are from the Protestant camp. Also, most of these are poorly formatted and do not represent the Anabaptist tradition and views. I have also witnessed many churches that only have one songbook that is not a *hymnbook*. It is disappointing to me that gospel songbooks have made their way into our racks. This is largely due to the fact that many do not know the difference. In my opinion, it is certainly acceptable to have a gospel songbook in the racks, as long as we have an excellent hymnbook to complement it for our Sunday morning worship services.

I can only say that these lyrics were given to me by the Lord, and I trust that the Lord might use them to bring the glory and honor due Him. May the Lord raise up many more individuals in the church who would produce genuine hymns that produce a sweet-smelling savor to our God.

Music: I have spent my life in music from my childhood till now. My father was renowned in the Mennonite church for his work in music. I grew up appreciating music and it has always been a part of my

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

Glory and Honor and Majesty

SYLVAN RESSLER

SYLVAN RESSLER

1. Glo - ry and hon - or and ma - jes - ty Give to the king of kings.
2. Praise Him ye hea - ven of heav'ns a - bove, Praise Him ye earths be - low.
3. High in the Hea - vens there on Thy throne See - est Thou all man - kind.

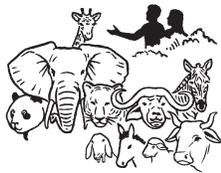
5
Che - ru - bim, ser - a - phim, all the host Loud with ho - san - nas ring.
All of cre - a - tion in an - them strong Praise from our hearts o'er - flow.
Know - ing our hearts and our thoughts al - ways, Who wilt Thou faith - ful find?

9
Bless - ing and hon - or we bring to Thee Worth - y, oh worth - y art Thou.
Na - tions may spurn Thee and shun Thy grace, Yet wilt Thou faith - ful prove.
All Thy cre - a - tion and all Thy works Show forth Thy sov - 'reign - ty.

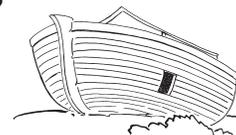
13
Thou hast re - deemed us from sin and death, Na - tions be - fore Thee bow.
Those who will yield to the Shep - herd's call, He will their sins re - move.
Give our de - vo - tion and all our lives To - tal - ly, Lord, to Thee.

life. However, it is only recently that I attempted to write music. I simply attempted to write a melody that would compliment the lyrics and then harmonized it. These songs are public domain and may not be copyrighted. I do not intend to benefit or profit from that which the Lord gave to me. Anyone wishing to use

them is free to copy them for any occasion. I only hope the Lord is able to use them to bring honor and glory to Himself. I feel that there is a dearth of good hymns today, and I would love to have a part in resurrecting that which dare not be lost in our Mennonite church. ■



Beginning Issues



What Is True Science?

by John Mullett

A common claim of evolutionists today is that evolution is science while creationism is religion. I've touched on this some in previous articles including my article two months ago. In that article I specifically pointed out how our worldview/bias determines how we interpret evidence. It is impossible for anyone to be totally objective; our worldview colors every decision we make. In this article I want to expound a little more on what true science really is.

To define science and illustrate its practical limitations I am going to talk about two different types of science. The first one I will call *operational science* and the second *historical science*.¹ While evolutionists do not generally differentiate between the two types it is vital that we note the differences in order to understand the implications each has in our interpretation of the world around us.

When referring to *operational science* I am talking about observations, testing, and obtaining verifiable results all in the present. We could also call this *empirical science*. Again it is defined by the fact that findings are obtained by tests and experiments done in the present and verified or falsified by obtaining repeatable results and observations. This kind of science can be very helpful and leads to the development and production of things such as computers, aircraft, safer cars, advances in medical care

and many more things that improve our quality of life every day. It helps us discover and comprehend things like natural laws such as gravity and other natural phenomena that we would otherwise be unable to understand.

Historical or origins science, on the other hand, is fundamentally different in that it takes present-day evidence and processes and projects an interpretation of those onto the past in an attempt to obtain an understanding of events and processes that occurred in the past that are not directly observable in the present. When dealing with historical events in which there are no eyewitness accounts available to verify all the necessary factors such as conditions and rates of natural processes, then we must begin by assuming some of those required factors. A prime example of this can be seen in attempting to measure the age of a rock. If I don't know anything of the rock's history and formation then I must make a number of assumptions before I can even begin to measure its "age" regardless of the dating method used. I must assume the rock's conditions at formation; that the rate of decay of the radioactive material being measured has been constant; and that it has always had a closed environment in which no daughter (decayed) content has escaped or been added by external processes. All of

¹ Terms *operational science* and *historical science* are often used by *Answers In Genesis Ministries* and borrowed here because they best capture what I am trying to define.