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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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Why is being comfortable so . . . well—comfortable? While we're asking questions, let's ask a few more:

- Is the work of God done better by people who make comfort a priority than by people who follow God beyond their comfort zone?
- Do those who find adventure in their walk with God always avoid paths that others before them have taken?
- Does God have the right to ask us to go be with Him where the future looks uncertain?

I thank God that my great-grandfather, Daniel E. Mast, addressed his comfort zone. In 1886, he believed God was leading their family to move west. When his young wife died shortly before their planned departure, he faced a very difficult decision. Should he give up what he and his late wife thought God was leading them to do? Should he take the young family and go West even as a widower? The farm was already sold. They'd have to make other arrangements if they didn't go ahead with the move. He must have wrestled mightily with questions! Finally, he went ahead, leaving their newborn daughter, Sarah, in the care of a friendly neighbor, a childless couple. In spite of other neighbors who helpfully urged him to give up his insane idea, D. E. Mast left the beautiful, productive hills of Ohio and moved to the plains of Kansas.

Here he broke sod with a walking plow and worked hard in many other ways to make a living in this sparsely-populated, wind-swept land that we still call home. Whether or not he enjoyed the adventure, Great-Grandpa Mast somehow overcame his fear of the unknown.

I do not enjoy pushing out of my comfort zone. I must not have inherited Great-Grandpa's courage. It seems that's how it is for many of us. We don't like the discomfort of the unknown. We want things predictable and safe. When the unexpected comes up that disturbs the status quo, we hope someone will quickly set things straight.

Is there something bad about being cautious? I don't think so. But several extremes must be acknowledged and avoided.

We must avoid the extreme of independence. The work of God depends on direction from the Holy Spirit. When Jesus

gave the Great Commission, He promised His direction and power to those who lean on Him. This promise applies across the years to the end of time and across the miles to the ends of the earth.

We must avoid the extreme of primarily seeking adventure. Man's desire for adventure does not justify every new undertaking. Sheer adventure is not reason enough to do anything, but if God calls us to a task, we honor Him when we trust Him to supply our needs and to lead us forward in it.

We must avoid the extreme of always avoiding risk. No one knows what all life will bring, but we can come to a place of fully committing everything to God—come what may. When special needs arise, God will be there and He will give us what we need in abundant measure. Our anxious fears, hugged to ourselves, do not foster God-honoring faith.

We must avoid the extreme of telling God what to do. The faithful Christian follows God's agenda, not his own. Although it is not in our power to earn salvation, *we can obediently follow His Word and this we must do.*

Proverbs 3:5 and 6 speak meaningfully to this struggle: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Fortunately, God's willingness to help us doesn't seem to disappear when we wait longer than we should to say "Yes!" to Him.

With confidence in God's boundless wisdom and love, we can venture where we have not gone before. If He asks us to do something new, He will give us what we need for the assignment.

I've been noticing that when I'm yoked to Christ, He takes the heavy end of the load.

I wish I could always honestly say with Paul, "When I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). I'm working on it. Whenever duty calls me out of my comfort zone, I mean to claim this promise, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Fortunately, the man who walks with God always gets to his destination! ■

—Taken from *The Calvary Messenger*, Feb. 2009.

Person of the Month:

Melchior Hoffman (1498-1543)

Melchior Hoffman was born in 1498 at Schwalisch-Hall. He acquired a good elementary education and was able to go on and become a tanner or furrier by trade.

Early in his life he had a great interest in religious literature, especially that of mystics. He also had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and was quite moved by the writings of Martin Luther and became a zealous follower of the reformer.

In 1523, at the age of 25, he traveled to Livland in connection with his tanner's trade. There he made association with those in the Reformation movement. There was a need for Protestant preachers so he entered into service that way by preaching at Wolmar until he was persecuted, imprisoned, and expelled from the country. As a result of his preaching some followed what he had taught them, because he wrote admonitions to them from Sweden.

In the fall of 1524 he went to Dorpat where he preached against the use of images. As a result there were many who began breaking down idols on January 10, 1525. Hoffman himself was not engaged in such activity and the people stood up for him against the church authorities, which averted his arrest and was considered a victory for the Protestant cause. The City Council demanded that recognized theologians approve Melchior's doctrine, so he contacted Knopken and Tegetmeier who agreed to give their approval. Hoffman also went to Wittenberg where Luther gave confirmation to his preaching.

Luther and Bugehagen wrote to the churches in Livland and informed them that Melchior had a strong emphasis on justification by faith alone and stressed sanctification of life, which must be lived out in all the fruits of the Spirit. These men also mentioned Hoffman's opposition to violence, his allegorical interpretation of the Bible, and his belief that Christ would return to earth to reign during the millennium.

At the age of 27, Melchior Hoffman returned to Dorpat in the late summer of 1525 with Luther's recommendation, but he was not well accepted by the Lutheran clergy of the city and they refused to recognize his authorization. Hoffman accused them of being self-seeking and denying the faith by the way they lived. Melchior saw himself as a prophet and preached about the imminence of the final judgment by calling for repentance. He also referred to Enoch and Elijah as the two witnesses of Christ's return and began to see himself as being one or the other of them. His most violent opponent was Tegetmeier, one of the theologians who had approved his doctrine to the Dorpat City Council a year earlier.

Again, he left Dorpat, this time going to Reval in the fall of that year. People there had been well introduced to the Reformation and there were no preaching posts left to be filled so Melchior devoted himself unselfishly to the service of the church. When he had earlier preached in Dorpat he had accepted no salary but had worked as a tanner to support himself. Before long the Lutheran clergy in Reval found fault with him as well. They accused him of heresy because in addition to faith he insisted on the necessity of holy living. Hoffman also disagreed with the Lutheran view of communion. Melchior Hoffman again doubted the salvation of these clergy because of the lack of the fruits of faith. He also began to doubt whether the Lutheran church was the true Christian church. He thought about separating himself from them but before he could do so he was expelled from Livland.

Early in 1526 Hoffman's situation began to look brighter. There appeared to be the prospect of success in his trade in Sweden so he traveled to Stockholm. *(continued on page 3)*

In Spirit and in Truth: Let's Talk About Worship!

by Robert Leslie Holmes

It's often amazing—the things that separate Christians.

Many North American churches are divided in the so-called worship wars. Worship happens to be the most important thing Christians do, and it's one thing that the devil and his emissaries hate more than anything else. Worship continues as an important event because God demands it of His people and because worship brings purpose and meaning to our lives. Worship reminds us of our human limitations and of our Maker's limitless greatness. Worship brings salvation and assurance to believers and instructs us how to live and set our life's priorities. Worship exists as one of God's primary ways of infusing us with the abundant life that Jesus promises in John 10:10. Worship is practical; it fills us with a desire to serve God and others and remains as the one thing we carry from this life into the life to come.

Yet great confusion over worship continues in the church today. Tragically, when the church battles over worship (or anything else), truth becomes the first casualty and the devil prevails as the final victor.

Worship is not about you or about me or about what we like; and worship is certainly not about entertaining us. Worship is about God alone. Until we understand this point, we will be like spiritual cave dwellers. Our attempts at worship will be boring, meaningless, and futile. So, let us begin thinking about worship by looking at the most basic question.

What Is Worship?

The Bible, as God's basic handbook on life, becomes our most important worship sourcebook. Scripture has more to say about worship than one short article can cover, but we need to start somewhere. Let's, then, start with Jesus. When Jesus met the woman at the well, He told her, "A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23, 24 NIV).

This is our beginning point. The Scriptures teach that worship gives us an appreciation of God—for who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing:

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever . . .

Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the
LORD . . .

I will give you thanks, for you answered
me; you have become my salvation . . .

You are my God, and I will give you
thanks; you are my God, and I will
exalt you.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

— Psalm 118:1, 19, 21, 28, 29 NIV

Contemporary versus Traditional

What comes to mind when you think about worship? Do you think about attending church services? Or about the whole content of your life as a Christian? Is your

mind picture of worship a coming together in a former warehouse with a praise band? or a fine Gothic building complete with stained glass, well-ordered liturgy, and a grand pipe organ? When you hear that the music in such-and-such a place is worshipful, do you envision new Christian songs and choruses? stately old hymns? toe-tapping Southern gospel melodies?

Let us set straight a couple of terms about worship that have crept into our modern vernacular and that have helped fan the flames of controversy. These flames, first kindled in the late 1960s, are now spreading like wildfire.

We hear about “contemporary” and “traditional” worship. Interestingly enough, these words are never applied in the Bible either to worship or to anything else. Why? Authentic worship is contemporary—or of-this-moment—and at the same time traditional or established. This explains the meaning behind Jesus’ words that worship must be “in spirit and in truth.”

To define some worship as contemporary implies that other worship has passed its “sell-by date.” That can never be true. What makes worship “contemporary” is not a music style or a way of dress, but the presence of the Lord God in the midst of His people when they praise Him. What makes worship traditional is that it follows a timeless form that God Himself prescribes in Holy Scripture.

In short, if God is not present in our wor-

ship, then it is not worship at all, regardless of how new the music. Furthermore, if worship does not follow the Bible’s pattern for praising God, then it cannot be worship at all, no matter how old its form or how many times we have done it that way.

The worship Jesus speaks about to the Samaritan woman at the well includes the abandonment of ourselves—including all our pet bywords—to the Lord God Almighty. “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:7, 8). Worship—whether led by a one-hundred-voice, well-trained choir and orchestra followed by a robe-adorned preacher, or by a guitar-strumming, drum-beating music group that plays before someone preaches with his shirttail hanging out—can never be called a *spectator sport*. The success of worship cannot be measured by the number of people who come because it is offered for an audience of One—and that One is the triune God.

Worship becomes far more than a 60-minute morning vaudevillian event, for true worship consists of a life dedicated to serving the living God. Until we understand this point, we will never be “true worshipers,” regardless of our worship style. ■

—Article first appeared in the Jan. 2009 issue of *Ministry*,[®] International Journal for Pastors. www.MinistryMagazine.org. Used by permission..

— MELCHIOR HOFFMAN . . . cont’d from page 1 —

There the German Lutheran Church conferred upon Melchior the office of preaching. He also was married there and eventually had a son born to him and his wife. He had hoped that his stay in Stockholm would be permanent but such was not the case.

Space will not allow expansion of the details of his life from this point forward. Suffice it to say that by 1526 he began to put forth views which could be called “Anabaptist,” such as his view of communion, his rejection of force, and the matter of the oath. In June of 1529, in Strasbourg, he was considered a supporter of Zwingli’s view of communion.

By 1530, now at the age of 32, Melchior Hoffman had come into contact with the Mennonite movement and felt a kinship in his spirit with their beliefs. Even though he had not yet joined the Anabaptists he petitioned a city council in Holland, where he was then living, to assign a church to the Anabaptists. He also asked not only for toleration for them but also equal rights with the Dutch state church.

(continued on page 11)

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Is This the Best We Can Do?

by Steve Gallagher

Someone sent me a DVD the other day about Christian men who had been addicted to pornography. The quality of the production was excellent. And the guys who were interviewed adeptly articulated the consequences of their former addiction: i.e., the guilt and shame they carried through life, the spiritual deadness they felt inside, the pain it caused loved ones, etc.

I'm sure porn addicts who saw this video could really relate to those men. It is always helpful to hear others express their struggles once they have come out the other end of the process. However, the value of empathy only goes so far.

I waited with anticipation for the men to convey how God set them free. Struggling people need concrete answers—a biblically-based roadmap to freedom. After awhile, they finally shared what helped them. As if on cue from the producer, they all talked about the importance of the one solution any secular therapist would offer: accountability.

Now it goes without saying that accountability has its place in the process of overcoming an addiction. During the period of

time that the addict is fighting his way out of his bondage it is vital that he bring his struggles into the light. After all, Satan operates in the kingdom of darkness.

Nevertheless, accountability is NOT the solution to finding lasting freedom in Christ. Of course, we all understand that a secular therapist has little more to work with than behavioral modification gimmicks. As for leading a person to real inner transformation, the counselor is limited to forms of psychological quackery such as getting in touch with your inner child or holding a conversation with an imaginary person from your past.

It is amazing to me how seriously these people take themselves. The field of psychology's propensity for presenting theories as if they are tried-and-true facts is reminiscent of other areas of secular study. For instance, in the 1940s, Alfred Kinsey so bamboozled the American public with his scholarly presentation of his perverted ideas about human sexuality that he birthed the sexual revolution. To this day we are still suffering the consequences of his scam. And ever since the Scopes Monkey Trial of the

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1930s, evolutionists have successfully foisted upon a naive public their skewed data regarding man's origins.

So it should come as no surprise that the field of psychology would employ the same methods of presenting faulty theories with an outlandish amount of academic pretension.

One would certainly think that any Christian with a degree of spiritual discernment would fully understand that unbelievers are clueless about the Lord's power to transform a person from the inside out. What do they know about His ability to flush the filth out of the heart of a sexual addict and leave innocence and purity in its wake? What understanding do they have of the power of God to change a hopeless drunk or drug addict into a sober-minded man? What unbeliever has the slightest comprehension of the way the Lord can transform a thief into a man of

virtue, a liar into a lover of truth, a mocker into a serious-minded man or an arrogant braggart into a meek lamb?

We understand that God has the power to transform a life from the inside out, so why are we still looking to the pathetic offerings of humanistic psychology for our solutions? Why aren't we seeing videos where men are talking about the miraculous way God has utterly changed their lives? Could it be that many of those who are working in this area of need in the Church don't have a very clear understanding about the power of the Cross?

We have so much to offer those who are struggling. Scripture contains the answers. God's presence provides the power. Calvary offers the needed grace. Why would we turn to the world for help? ■

—Taken from *Unchained!*, Winter 2009, a publication of Pure Life Ministries, www.purelifeministries.org

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

Introduction to May Lessons

The five lessons for May are all taken from the Book of Ephesians. The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul in prison and sent by the hand of Tychicus. Paul had briefly visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey, and later spent approximately three years there teaching and preaching the gospel to all who dwelt in Asia. It seems likely, then, that this epistle was not intended exclusively for the church in Ephesus but was intended for the broader audience of the entire region of which Ephesus was a part.

The letter to the Ephesians easily divides into two main sections. The first three chapters (and our first three lessons) deal with doctrinal issues—the last three with issues of a more practical nature, how the Christian life is to be lived out.

It doesn't take long to read the Book of Ephesians. Your study will be enhanced as you gain an understanding of the book as a whole. Your life will be enriched as you study this gem of the epistles.

Additional Teacher Help

In an effort to provide cohesion and unity for these lessons we are offering the following brief lesson guidelines:

If I were teaching these lessons I would emphasize:

Lesson 1: That God in His mercy has chosen us and provided a way for us to become His children through the salvation secured by His Son.

Key verses: Ephesians 1:4, 5

Lesson 2: That it is alone by God's grace that we can be delivered from the bondage of sin and placed into a right relationship with Him.

Key verses: Ephesians 2:8, 9

Lesson 3: That God's mercy extends to

all men and that once saved we should eagerly accept the task God assigns.

Key verses: Ephesians 3:6-8

Lesson 4: The timeless principles God has established for harmony in the Christian home.

Key verse: Ephesians 5:21

Lesson 5: The seriousness of the struggle against sin and the adequate provisions God has made for our victory.

Key verses: Ephesians 6:10, 11



MAY 3, 2009

Chosen in Him

Ephesians 1:3-14

The focus of this lesson is the security of the believer in Christ. We have been chosen, redeemed, forgiven, and sealed. In these first 14 verses Paul unfolds the complete and glorious plan of God for man, from concept to reality. Paul exults in the blessings of the believer in Christ, spiritual blessings lavished upon the believer by God the Father.

If the focus of this passage is on the security of the believer, the content is that of praise. Paul used the word *praise* three times in this passage, emphasizing the theme of praise to God, the common God of both Jew and Gentile. This God has given to the believer "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." These blessings are ours (all believers) because of our association with the risen Christ.

This association was foreordained by God the Father before the foundation of the world. His desire was for a holy, blameless people He could call His own through the redemption secured by His Son (v. 7). As individuals accept the redemptive

power of Christ's blood they are made fit to become part of God's family (v. 5). The distinguishing characteristics of God's children are holiness and separation from the surrounding evil world. This was all "according to the good pleasure of God's will." To realize that He would so provide for us is reason enough for praise. God formed the plan; man is privileged to become the eternal beneficiary.

Paul, a Jew, is writing to Gentile believers. Here he states (v. 9) that their acceptance into God's family, without the necessity of observing the rites of Jewish religion, but simply at God's pleasure, was a new revelation, a disclosing of the mystery held close by God until the fulness of time (see Chapter 3:1-9; Colossians 1:26, 27). This was something new and revolutionary to Jewish thought. This issue (which we note from other New Testament passages) caused considerable concern and turmoil within the emerging church (see Acts 15 and Galatians 2).

But it was God's purpose and plan to bring together men from all backgrounds, racial origins, and languages to become one body in Christ. It is through Him that is secured our eternal inheritance, the privilege of enjoying endless and unbounded

blessings in the presence of our Redeemer. This was all done simply “after the counsel of his own will.” No outside consultation. God’s plan alone. Again, is it any wonder Paul was so thrilled at what had been revealed to him?

Verses 12 and 13 combine both Jewish and Gentile believers in the body of Christ, the church. Both come the same way. Both enjoy the full privileges and blessings. Both have received God’s Holy Spirit as a guarantee of current position and of future blessings. Both are to “the praise of His glory.” Our blessing, God’s glory. Praise Him!

For thought and discussion

1. Notice the pronouns in this passage: *we*, *us*, *ye*, *our*; and note the significance of their usage.
2. Be sure you understand the use of the term *predestination* in these verses. It is a blessed and precious concept when understood from God’s perspective.
3. Why did the concept of Gentiles being favored by God and accepted by Him without coming through the gate of Judaism cause so much friction in the early church? Do we hold similar prejudices today? Discuss.
4. It seems as though Paul almost struggles to adequately express his praise to God for His indescribable blessings. Are we praising God as we ought? Think about it.
5. Perhaps list for yourself some of the blessings and privileges that are yours as a redeemed child of God. Share.

MAY 10, 2009

New Life in Christ

Ephesians 2:1-10

Paul continues in Chapter 2 on the high lyrical note of praise with which he expressed himself in Chapter 1. (Read the verses between the lessons and the rest of Chapter 2.) In Chapter 1 he explains the believer’s position and secu-

rity in Christ. Here in Chapter 2 he explains how we arrive at that place and emphasizes again God’s mercy, love, kindness, and gracious selection. He also gives some insight in verse 10 into God’s purpose behind His munificence.

Paul declares that his Gentile audience had at one time been spiritually dead, hopelessly lost in sin. (See also v. 12.) But, through the gracious and bountiful provisions of a loving and merciful God, they had been quickened, made spiritually alive and alert. Their previous life had followed the pattern of the surrounding evil society whose lifestyle was dictated by “the prince of the power of the air.” That spirit continues its work in “the children of disobedience,” those living according to the desires of the flesh (v. 3), and at odds with the holy God.

Paul acknowledges in verse 3 that all, Jew and Gentile alike, at one time followed the desires of the flesh and were at that time under God’s wrath. It was a hopeless and helpless state. But then there are those comforting words, pregnant with meaning: “But God.” The loving, merciful God stepped in and provided a way out of man’s dilemma. He made it possible through the redemptive work of Christ (Lesson 1) for man to be lifted out of the entrapping morass of sin and “made to sit together with him in heavenly places.”

This was totally at God’s initiative (see v. 4) for the purpose of making “Believers . . . an eternal display of the grace of God” (v. 7)—Ryrie. The benefit was man’s; the glory God’s. God’s rich grace and His loving kindness are displayed to man through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Verses 8 and 9 get to the heart of the gospel. Salvation, the moving of the soul from the death of sin to life in Christ, is the result of man’s faith in God’s grace. Salvation is the free gift of God, His gracious and unmerited gift. Man had nothing to do with it. It cannot be earned, lest man boast of his achievement. It must

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simply be accepted by faith, without reservation or doubt. This simple principle seems difficult for man to accept. He feels he must “do” something to merit God’s favor. But for the glory to be God’s, it must be all of God.

God’s purpose is outlined in verse 10. The saved individual is God’s workmanship, proof of what He alone can do in transforming man from sinner to saint. This is done for the purpose of man then performing good works out of the gratitude of his heart in response to God’s mercy. As Barclay says: “All the good works in the world cannot put us right with God; but there is something radically wrong with the Christianity which does not issue in good works.”

This is God’s purpose and plan. This is the result of new life in Christ.

For thought and discussion

1. Explore the full range of the meaning of “quicken” as used in this passage (vv. 1, 5). Perhaps good for some class discussion.
2. Passages such as Galatians 5:19-24 and Ephesians 5:1-8 will help you see the great contrast portrayed in today’s lesson between “the course of this world” and new life in Christ.
3. Do you fully understand man’s helpless condition outside the mercy of God? Thank God again for His mercy and grace.
4. Do you understand the relationship between grace and works? Perhaps some class discussion will help to clarify the issues.
5. How are your works stacking up against God’s mercy and grace?

MAY 17, 2009

The Messenger of God’s Grace

Ephesians 3:1-13

Paul concludes Chapter 2 by expounding on God’s grace to the Gentiles and

how they now, through Christ, stand on equal footing before God with the Jews. (Read 2:11-22.) As we move into Chapter 3 Paul here expands on what he calls the mystery of the gospel (v. 6), and the wonder that he has been chosen by God to explain and expound this “mystery” revealed to him.

In verse 1 Paul explains his status. Though bound by Rome, in reality he is not their prisoner, but Christ’s. And he announces to his Gentile audience that his status is for their benefit. In fact, his imprisonment was a direct result of his commitment to take the gospel to the Gentiles (see Acts 22:21ff). Paul certainly did not feel himself constricted by his bonds. In spirit he was free. And his imprisonment gave him continuing opportunity to minister in other ways than preaching.

Paul reminds his readers that he had been commissioned by God to bring the message of salvation to them (see Acts 9:15; 13:46; Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:7, 8). And that to him had been revealed the truth that now in Christ the Gentiles had equal status with Jews. This was a new revelation by God’s Spirit, made known in God’s timing in the development of the church.

Verse 6 explains God’s plan: “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.” This was a tremendous truth to those long thought unworthy of God’s favor, or who could only hope to enjoy God’s favor through the avenue of Jewish ritual. Christianity is the great leveler, as portrayed in Galatians 3:26-29.

Paul marvels in the fact that God chose him to be a channel of divine blessing to man (v. 8). He recognizes that it was totally by God’s grace that he, a former persecutor, should be called to “preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” It humbled Paul. But it certainly didn’t stifle his enthusiasm.

Paul emphasizes again in the closing

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verses of this passage how God had formulated this plan from the beginning of the world and chose at this time to reveal His plan to all mankind. It also seems, from verse 10, that the intention was to enlighten the angels in Heaven as to the scope and wisdom of God's plan for the church to encompass all men regardless of race or nationality (see also 1 Peter 1:12).

Paul glories in the confidence we can now have in bold access to Christ, the One through whom God worked His will and plan for the church. He also encourages his readers not to be discouraged over his troubles, his imprisonment. He was confident in God's will and His sovereign care. What his readers and Paul himself could not see, and that we now see, is that his imprisonment birthed this tremendous epistle of the exposition of God's grace, the oneness of believers, and the practical aspects of the Christian life.

Paul's tribulations certainly resulted in glory beyond even his expectations.

For thought and discussion

1. We think of imprisonment as confining and limiting. How did Paul redeem the time while in prison? Would he have been more useful if he had been free? Ponder. Discuss.
2. Do we carry prejudices today that deem certain classes or races of people as less deserving of God's favor than ourselves? Think clearly about this and ask God to help you overcome any prejudices which may be lurking in your heart.
3. Why do you think God chose Paul to be "the apostle to the Gentiles" over other of the apostles?
4. Paul rejoiced in his privileged ministry, yet he was humbled by God's choice of him. Let us be careful to also be humble in the ministry God has called us to.
5. What was the secret of Paul's enthusiasm for the gospel? How can we develop more enthusiasm in our living and witnessing? Discuss.

MAY 24, 2009

Harmony in the Home

Ephesians 5:21-6:4

Here in Chapters 5 and 6 Paul has moved into the more practical, everyday aspects of the life of the believer. A Christian does not live in isolation; he lives in community. The smallest and, hopefully, most stable unit in community is the home. Our lesson today outlines timeless principles for achieving and maintaining stability and harmony in the Christian home. These principles affect all of us in some way. Let's look at them carefully and determine to the best of our God-given ability to live up to their demands and make our homes the beacon light so desperately needed in the self-centered, independent-minded society of our day.

As Paul begins the more applicational part of his epistle he encourages his readers at the beginning of Chapter 4 to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith [they] are called." He then goes on in the following chapters to spell out what that "worthy walk" means in everyday life—in the church, in the community, and in the home.

Wives, husbands, and children are the focus of today's text. Each plays a vital role in fulfilling God's requirements for stable, harmonious family living. Neglect or usurpation of roles leads to chaos and breakdown of the very elemental building block of society, the home.

Godly fear (reverence) should be the motivating factor in family relationships. That is the starting point for harmonious interpersonal relationships (v. 21). The short word for the obligations addressed here are: wives submit, husbands love, children obey. As these principles are practiced in an atmosphere of mutual love and respect they will guarantee harmonious functioning of the Christian home.

Paul's argument here is based on God's established principles of order as outlined in 1 Corinthians 11 and other scripture

passages. Order is absolutely necessary for the smooth functioning of any organization and is especially relevant in the home where young lives are being influenced and molded in ways that will dictate their actions as adults.

Paul's call for submission on the part of wives is not to a groveling subjection to the whims of her husband, but a respectful acknowledgment of his role in guiding and decision making in the affairs of the home. The husband's response, to wife and children, must be tempered by love and an understanding of the full range of the needs of each.

The husband-wife relationship Paul likens to that between Christ and the church and emphasizes self-giving love as the standard to be followed. The parent-child relationship is to be one of respect, and careful, diligent instruction in the ways of the Lord, preparing them for useful roles and submission to God. The child's response is to give respectful, willing obedience to the instruction and guiding process. There is a promise from God in response to that obedience.

Let's each give due diligence to establishing and maintaining godly Christian homes, for the benefit of each member and as a witness to surrounding society.

For thought and discussion

1. Why is stable home life such an important element in society? Think through and discuss.
2. What determines the way the believer lives in relation to other people?
3. What does it mean to "walk worthy of our calling" in light of the principles outlined in today's lesson? How does it flesh-out in daily life? Discuss.
4. Think through the significance of the various roles established here and the impact of each on the desired goal of a harmonious Christian home. Is any one role more significant than the others? more difficult?
5. What is the key ingredient to stable, harmonious home life?

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MAY 31, 2009

Prepared for Conflict

Ephesians 6:10-18

As Paul comes to the close of his epistle he has some final words of encouragement and warning for his readers. He has explained their position in Christ, and shown how that status works out in everyday living and interpersonal relationships. Now, as he closes his letter, he is concerned that they do not lose out in the faith they have embraced. He reminds them that the Christian life is a constant struggle between the forces of evil and the will of God. It is a battle that takes place in the mind.

They are warned that they dare not engage this conflict in their own strength because their chief adversary is none other than Satan. He is a wily foe. It is his chief aim to derail God's purposes for man. The Christian must therefore be strong in the Lord and depend upon His power for victory. He must also avail himself of the armor God provides as protection against the onslaughts of the enemy.

Interestingly, Paul had a ready-made object lesson for his discourse. He was chained to a Roman soldier. And although the soldier was not likely dressed in full battle regalia simply to guard a prisoner, Paul had had ample opportunity to see such (see Acts 22 and 23). As he observed the various pieces of armor he made application of each to the protective battle gear needed by the Christian in his struggle against the spiritual forces of evil.

Paul makes it clear that we must employ the "whole armor of God" in order to withstand the evil forces arrayed against us and be able to remain standing once the battle is over. The first and undergirding element of armor is truth. Truth is what God says and must form the standard of our understanding and responses. Righteousness, or holy living, must encompass the whole of our lives if we are to withstand the enticements to

SWORD AND TRUMPET

evil from our adversary. A soldier without good supporting footwear is at a disadvantage. He must be able to advance, or stand and fight, well-supported. The gospel of Jesus Christ provides that firm stability for the Christian soldier.

The shield of faith is the Christian soldier's first line of defense. It is held in front to deflect the fiery darts of doubt or temptation from the enemy. Complete trust in the soldier's commander is essential for victory in any conflict. The helmet of salvation protects the most vital part of the body. The "hope" of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8) stimulates consistency and bravery for the struggle, with an eye to ultimate victory.

Thus far we have looked only at protective gear, but there is one offensive weapon mentioned, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." That sword must be wielded to effectively counter the deceit of the enemy as Jesus did in His temptation by Satan. "God says" will strike down the false claims and tempting thrusts of the enemy.

Paul closes by calling the Christian warrior to prayer. This prayer should be for strength and guidance. And it will extend to one's fellow soldiers also, for an army

fights best as a cooperative unit working together to defeat a common enemy.

The success of any endeavor depends largely on adequate preparation. Paul understood this principle and here applies it to the Christian life. To be adequately prepared is to assure success. Paul wishes that for every believer in his struggle against the forces of evil.

For thought and discussion

1. What are the reasons—and there are many—why people fail in the Christian life? Use this lesson to stimulate discussion on why failure happens and what can be done to avoid it.
2. Explore the value of using object lessons, as Paul did here, to get one's point across. What are the advantages? the disadvantages?
3. Do we understand as clearly as we ought the strength of the spiritual powers arrayed against us? What can we do to heighten our awareness without succumbing to their seductions?
4. There is no piece of armor mentioned for the soldier's back. Why is that?
5. Which piece of armor do you feel is the most important? Which one do you employ most often? ■

— MELCHIOR HOFFMAN . . . cont'd from page 3 —

That same year he finally was baptized and joined with the Anabaptists, while Luther sent a sharp letter of warning to the officials in East Friesland where Hoffman had arrived in May. By June Melchior was preaching in the town of Emden where he is considered the founder of the Anabaptist church there, which it is said, still exists. He wrote a booklet about this time in which, for the first time, he shows his Anabaptist view. He recognizes justification as well as sanctification, imitating the life of Christ, baptism for believing adults only, and the requirement of church discipline.

In the course of his many travels, trying to avoid persecution, Hoffman came into contact with Obbe Phillips who became one of his followers.

In spite of all his activities and travels Melchior did much writing. In his exposition of the Book of Romans he lets it be known that he believes in nonresistance as well as obeying the government in obedience to the Lord.

It seems that he spent the years from May of 1533 until late in 1543 in jail in Strasbourg. It was there that he died as a martyr for his faith.

Although his doctrine was imperfect in some cases, Melchior Hoffman, in many respects, represented to the world of his time the basic tenets of the faith we hold so dearly today.

—Gail L. Emerson

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

Offshoring's Benefits Manifested

For years, I have been a strong proponent of offshoring low end jobs. I believe it to be a symbiotic win-win situation for both the U. S. and the poor countries which receive those jobs. The U. S. increases its workforce skill level and income and the poor countries get a huge influx of cash and an increase in standard of living. I believe those protectionist naysayers who are against offshoring are shortsightedly missing the fact that while offshoring brings temporary pain, as those in the lowest wage tier lose their jobs in the U. S., they are forced instead to train for and take higher paying jobs for a long-term gain. This belief that offshoring strengthens the U.S. economy has received a recent boost as the liberal *Washington Post* columnist Harold Meyerson points to an additional unexpected benefit of offshoring in this economic downturn:

"We are hemorrhaging jobs just now, but by historic standards, unemployment may look a little low. The official unemployment rate (which understates actual unemployment, to be sure) is at 7.6 percent, a far cry from the 10 percent-plus during the downturn of the early 1980s. In those years, Midwestern manufacturing shed more jobs than it is shedding today. Where's the comparable unemployment now?

"It's out there, and then some. Only, it's in East Asia. We've offshored it."

To be sure, Meyerson is a staunch opponent of offshoring; while he points to the benefit of lower unemployment because of those low-paying jobs having been offshored, he believes that the low-paying manufacturing jobs have been replaced by even lower-paying jobs. This is belied by a \$247 average annual inflation-adjusted increase in mean income per person since 1988, according to the Census Bureau.

—Excerpt from "Dysfunctional Duo" by Harold Meyerson in the *Washington Post*, Feb. 18 (<http://cli.gs/pbR4H2>)

Source: *U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, Per Capita Money Income, All Races: 1967 to 2007* (<http://cli.gs/MYhqX9>)

* * * * *

Man Killed by "Exploding Mobile Phone"

"A man has died after his mobile phone exploded, severing a major artery in his neck, according to reports.

"The man, thought to be a shop assistant in his twenties, at a computer shop in Guangzhou, China, died after he put a new battery in his phone. It was believed that he may have just finished charging the battery and had put the phone into his breast pocket when it exploded.

"Local reports said that this was the ninth recorded cell phone explosion in China since 2002. In the most high profile recent incident, in June 2007, a 22-year-old welder, Xiao Jinpeng, died from

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Job #10800
Signature

chest wounds when his mobile phone exploded while he was at work at an iron mill in Gansu province.

“A local government inquiry found that the mobile phone battery had exploded due to the heat of the iron mill. Lithium batteries are widely used in mobile phones—but if they are over-charged or exposed to heat, the inflammable liquid inside can explode.”

—Excerpt from “Man killed by ‘exploding mobile phone’” in the *Times of London* (<http://cli.gs/ZhteS6>)

* * * * *

British, French Subs Collide

Two super-stealthy nuclear submarines collided in February despite their state-of-the-art sonar. The sailors realized they had collided with something, but at first didn’t realize it was the fulfillment of the infinitesimally small chance of running into another submarine. Not until they got back to port and compared stories did they realize what had happened.

Source: *AFP*

* * * * *

Federal Obligations Exceed World GDP

As the Obama administration pushes through Congress its \$800 billion, deficit-spending, economic-stimulus plan, the American public is largely unaware that the true deficit of the federal government already is measured in trillions of dollars, and in fact its \$65.5 trillion in total obligations exceeds the gross domestic product of the world.

The total U. S. obligations, including Social Security and Medicare benefits to be paid in the future, effectively have placed the U. S. government in bankruptcy, even before new continuing social welfare obligations embedded in the massive spending plan are taken into account.

The real 2008 federal budget deficit was \$5.1 trillion, not the \$455 billion previously reported by the Congressional

Budget Office, according to the “2008 Financial Report of the United States Government” as released by the U.S. Department of Treasury.

The difference between the \$455 billion “official” budget deficit numbers and the \$5.1 trillion budget deficit cited by “2008 Financial Report of the United States Government” is that the official budget deficit is calculated on a cash basis, where all tax receipts, including Social Security tax receipts, are used to pay government liabilities as they occur.

But the numbers in the 2008 report are calculated on a GAAP basis (“Generally Accepted Accounting Practices”) that include year-for-year changes in the net present value of unfunded liabilities in social insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

“The federal government’s deficit is hemorrhaging at a pace which threatens the viability of the financial system,” [economist John] Williams added. “The popularly reported 2009 [deficit] will clearly exceed \$2 trillion on a cash basis and that full amount has to be funded by Treasury borrowing.

“It’s not likely this will happen without the Federal Reserve acting as lender of last resort for the Treasury by buying Treasury debt and monetizing the debt,” he said.

“Monetizing the debt” is a term used to signify that the Federal Reserve will be required simply to print cash to meet the Treasury debt obligations, acting in this capacity only because the Treasury cannot sell the huge amount of debt elsewhere.

The Treasury has been largely dependent upon foreign buyers, principally China and Japan and other major holders of U.S. dollar foreign exchange reserves, including OPEC buyers purchasing U.S. debt through London.

“The appetite of foreign buyers to purchase continued trillions of U.S. debt has become more questionable as the world has witnessed the rapid deterioration of

the U.S. fiscal condition in the current financial crisis,” Williams noted.

“Truthfully,” Williams pointed out, “there is no Social Security ‘lock-box.’ There are no funds held in reserve today for Social Security and Medicare obligations that are earned each year. It’s only a matter of time until the public realizes that the government is truly bankrupt and no taxes are being held in reserve to pay in the future the Social Security and Medicare benefits taxpayers are earning today.”

Calculations from the “2008 Financial Report of the United States Government” also show that the GAAP negative net worth of the federal government has increased to \$59.3 trillion while the total federal obligations under GAAP accounting now total \$65.5 trillion.

The \$65.5 trillion total federal obligations under GAAP accounting not only now exceed four times the U.S. gross domestic product, or GDP, the \$65.5 trillion deficit exceeds total world GDP.

“In the seven years of GAAP reporting, we have seen an annual average deficit in excess of \$4 trillion, which could not be possibly covered by any form of taxation,” Williams argued.

“Shy of the government severely slashing social welfare programs, federal deficits of this magnitude are beyond any hope of containment, government or otherwise,” he said.

—Excerpts from “Federal obligations exceed world GDP” in *World Net Daily* (<http://cli.gs/RQR2D0>)

* * * * *

Buddy, Can You Spare a Trillion?

The inside-the-beltway types are throwing around billion-dollar spending packages like it’s rock salt being used to clear a New England driveway.

So while we are ready to bail out all these poorly managed megabusineses with multimillion-dollar-paid executive teams, we have to wonder who will generate the taxes to make them solvent?

There are more Americans employed by small businesses than all the big conglomerates combined. And, yes, there are more taxes being paid by small businesses than by the big boys as well. Trouble is, small businesses don’t have hundreds of tax lawyers and accountants to find the loopholes.

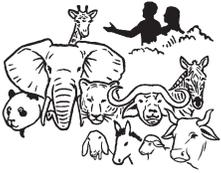
They also don’t have teams of lobbyists in Washington, and the big boys have lots.

So get ready. You, the small-business owners of this country, along with other individuals, will be paying for the bulk of the bailout. And how much will that be? Well, we really don’t know just yet. One thing for certain, however, is that it’s going to be north of \$1 trillion. I saw some recent calculations via the Congressional Budget Office that put the possible deficit we will be facing as a result of the forthcoming spending spree to be as high as \$1.9 trillion.

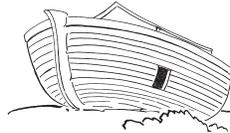
So let’s stop and think about this for a second or two. Just how much is \$1 trillion? We don’t have any trillionaires, so we can’t ask them. It’s also too much for any handheld calculator that I have. But go through this exercise with me. If a single individual were to be asked to pay off a \$1 trillion bill and worked out an installment plan of paying the government a dollar every second, when would that person have had to be born in order to pay off the debt by the end of this year? A single individual charged with paying back a dollar every second would have had to have been born in the year 29,700 B.C. in order to pay off a \$1 trillion deficit by the end of this year. Think about that the next time your elected representative votes for additional bailout dollars that could drive the payback amount even higher.

—Excerpts from “Buddy, Can You Spare a Trillion?” in *CRN Magazine* (<http://cli.gs/HNQ2qR>) (Thanks to Sanford Yoder for sending me this article.)

Feedback: hansmast@hansmast.com



Beginning Issues



Can God Be a Loving God in a World of Suffering? Part 2

by John Mullett

The Greatest Tragedy

In last month's article, as I raised the question in the title, I ended with a few of the common questions our culture tends to raise. In this article I want to attempt to answer those questions. Here is part of the last paragraph from that article for a little refresher.

Many are quick to point to death and suffering as evidence that a loving personal God cannot exist. They say if God is omnipotent then He cannot be a God of love because of the bad things He's allowed to happen. Is this true? Or is it possible for bad things to happen while an omnipotent and loving personal God exists?

Under what scenario or conditions could an omnipotent and loving personal God exist in harmony with the realities of the harsh and cruel world we observe? Actually, there is one, and it's revealed to us as history in the Bible to help us understand and make sense of the world we live in. God tells us in the first three chapters of Genesis how He made the universe and everything that is in it and in doing so He describes it with the clarity and detail we need to answer this question. God says when He created the universe, the earth and all that is in it, it was very good. There was no sin or death in the world. God created everything in perfection.

However, Genesis 3 reveals the unfolding of a drama that is nothing short of the greatest tragedy to ever unfold in the history of mankind: it gives the historical account of the

fall of man which occurred when Adam (the first man) chose to rebel against the clear command of God not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If we study the Bible, even a little, it is very clear that it teaches that the entire universe, not just humans, was affected by that one choice.

As we look at the curse that came as a result of Adam's choice, inducing the intrusion of sin and death, the responsibility for the presence of evil, suffering, and death in our world takes on a frightening aspect and begins to strike eerily close to home. With a little additional study of Scripture we suddenly find ourselves looking in a mirror of responsibility. In what was likely the shortest letter to the editor in response to an article by *Time Magazine*, G. K. Chesterton captured this so well when he wrote, "In response to your article on what's wrong with the world, I am. Yours Truly, G. K. Chesterton."

We are the ones who opened the door for the suffering we see. If God were always to intervene to prevent all suffering and death we would still be living in a perfect world. With the right foundation (a literal historical Genesis) the world we live in is perfectly logical with the historical accounts God gives us. Over the last 150-200 years the church has compromised and said we can believe in both long ages and the Bible, that it doesn't matter whether we take Genesis literally or not. However, with the foundation of a literal

(continued on page 17)



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.

Nearer, My God, to Thee

by Adams/Mason



Lyrics: The history of this famous hymn includes many stories of its being sung or played by people facing certain death or calamity. The most famous example of such a legend is the sinking of the *RMS Titanic*, when the ship's band allegedly played this hymn as the ship sank. This has not been proven, and there were many survivors who argued for other pieces of music.¹ However, it is fairly certain that this hymn was sung by the passengers of another sinking ship, the *SS Valencia*, which sank off the coast of Vancouver, British Columbia, in 1906. Some scholars argue that this is the origin of the *Titanic* legend.² The last words of the assassinated President William McKinley are reported by the attending doctor to have been the first few words of this hymn. Other notable performances of this hymn include the burial of fallen soldiers at the Battle of Las Guisimas in 1898 and the funerals of Presidents James Garfield and Gerald R. Ford.

With the abundance of such legends surrounding this hymn, our modern culture has almost relegated it to the place of "swan song." To much of the world, it is the song that you sing or play just before you die. However, this hymn does not describe a last-minute prayer for grace, but the desire to live a life that is ever growing closer to God. The writer draws her inspiration from Jacob's dream at Bethel, where he experienced God in a way he never had before. In that vision, God was preparing Jacob for a life of commitment to Him, not quickly preparing him for death.

The main point of "Nearer, My God, to Thee" is summarized in the fourth verse with the line, "Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise." The knowledge that God can take our own pillows of stone and turn them into monuments to His glory is the central idea of this famous hymn. Although it may not seem so at the time, the most difficult times in our lives are usually when the most spiritual growth occurs..

Music: Lowell Mason's tune "Bethany" (printed here) is one of several tunes used with this popular hymn. In Britain, it is most commonly associated with the tune "Horbury," by John B. Dykes. Arthur Sullivan wrote two tunes for this text, and his tune "Proprior Deo" is still used by many Methodists as the preferred tune for this text. The number of tunes associated with this text raises the interesting question of which tune was played in the legend of the *Titanic*. The band leader was a British Methodist, so it was unlikely that he even knew the tune that Americans normally associate with this hymn. Many musicologists argue that it was most likely Sullivan's tune, "Proprior Deo," that would have been played on the *Titanic*, if indeed the hymn was actually played.³ The modern depictions of the sinking vessel that use the tune "Bethany" are probably historically inaccurate. ■

1. www.cyberhymnal.org

2. Richard Howells, *The Myth of the Titanic*

3. wikipedia.org

Nearer, My God, to Thee

Draw nigh to God. —James 4:8

MRS. SARAH F. ADAMS, 1840

BETHANY 6. 4. 6. 4. 6. 6. 4.

LOWELL MASON

1. Near - er, my God, to Thee, Near - er to Thee; E'en though it
 2. Tho' like a wan - der - er, Day - light all gone, Dark - ness be
 3. There let the way ap - pear, Steps up to heav'n; All that Thou
 4. Then with my wak - ing tho'ts Bright with Thy praise, Out of my
 5. Or if on joy - ful wing, Cleav - ing the sky, Caught up to

be a cross That rais - eth me; Still all my song shall be,
 o - ver me, My rest a stone, Yet in my dreams I'd be,
 send - est me In mer - cy giv'n; An - gels to beck - on me,
 sto - ny griefs Beth - el I'll raise; So by my woes to be,
 meet my King, Swift - ly I fly, Still all my song shall be

Near - er, my God, to Thee, Near - er, my God, to Thee, Near - er to Thee.

Can God Be a Loving God in a World of Suffering? . . . cont'd from page 15

Genesis removed and an evolutionary foundation in place in which death and suffering have always been present, suddenly our faith in a loving personal God is a logical fallacy.

*"If God is omnipotent and omniscient, why didn't He start the universe out in the first place so it would come out the way that He wants? Why is He constantly repairing and complaining? No, there's one thing the Bible makes clear: the biblical God is a sloppy manufacturer. He's not good at design, He's not good at execution. He'd be out of business if there was any competition."*¹

—Carl Sagan

In an article on Ted Turner the *New York Times* wrote, "Turner is a strident nonbeliever, having lost his faith after his sister

. . . died of a painful disease. . . . 'I was taught that God was love and God was powerful,' Turner said. 'And I couldn't understand how someone so innocent should be made or allowed to suffer so.'"²

The beliefs of these two men is the natural fruit of those who do not accept the Genesis account of origins. Had these men had a biblical foundation for their thinking they would have understood things differently and most likely would have come to different conclusions.

(to be continued)

1. Sagan, C., *Contact*, Pocket Books (Simon & Schuster, Inc.), New York, 1985.
2. <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/apr/17/news/cl-51879>

The Theology of a Mere Worm

by James R. Haga

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel" (Isaiah 41:14).

When Isaac Watts wrote his classic hymn, "Alas and Did My Saviour Bleed," he penned the words below:

Alas, and did my Saviour bleed?
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?

Newer hymnals have changed the last line to read, "For someone such as I" or "For sinners such as I." The thought of calling people something as lowly and insignificant and helpless as a "worm" is offensive to the modern hearer. Was Isaac Watts unique to this "worm theology"? Hardly!

William Carey (1761-1834), known as the father and founder of modern missions, developed remarkable gifts as a linguist. He became the first missionary to India sent out by the Baptist Missionary Society. His motto was: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." In his will, Carey directed that the following words be cut on his tombstone:

WILLIAM CAREY,
BORN AUGUST 17, 1761: DIED
"A WRETCHED, POOR AND
HELPLESS WORM,
ON THY KIND ARMS I FALL."

Charles Wesley (1707-1788), brother of John Wesley, the most famous poet and hymn writer of all time, died in his eighty-first year. A few days before his death, he dictated the following lines to his dear wife who wrote them down as they came from the lips of her slowly dying husband:

In age and feebleness extreme
Who shall a sinful worm redeem?
Jesus, my only hope. Thou art,
Strength to my failing flesh and

heart;

O could I catch a smile from Thee
And drop into eternity.

Before he dropped into eternity he said:

Come, my dearest Jesus, the nearer and most precious, the more welcome, I cannot contain it! What manner of love is this to a poor worm? I cannot express the thousandth part of what praise is due Thee. It is but little I can give Thee, but, Lord, help me to give Thee my all. I will die praising Thee, and rejoice that others can praise Thee better: I shall be satisfied with Thy likeness! satisfied! satisfied! satisfied! O my dearest Jesus, I come.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), in his great sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," said, "Oh! then, what will be the consequence? What will become of the poor worm that shall suffer it [the fierce wrath of God]?"

Richard Baxter of Kidderminster, who preached as a dying man to dying men and women, wrote many of his most useful works between 1682 and his death in 1691. Notwithstanding his wasted, languishing body, Baxter continued to preach; and the last time he did so, he almost died in the pulpit. While upon his deathbed, the saintly Baxter gave utterance to some of the most precious truths ever to leave his anointed lips: "I am the vilest dunghill worm that ever went to Heaven. Lord! What is man; what am I, vile worm, to the great God!"

The problem is that modern men don't want to face the truth of what they are and modern ministries don't want to tell them because their audience will go where they can hear polite things which don't offend.

(continued on page 20)



Counseling From the Word

Passion or Passivity?

by Eugene Sommers

Porcupines are generally a perfect picture of passivity. While living at Mill Hall, PA, helping to get the Bald Eagle Boys' Camp started, I had my first of several encounters with porcupines. Our dog soon learned not to challenge a porcupine. One day he came home with a mouthful of quills. Having put the dog to sleep, the veterinarian embraced the task of removing more than forty quills, half of which were inside the dog's mouth.

On another occasion while I was driving up to the Boys' Camp one day, a fat porcupine waddled across the lane in front of me. I drove close to it and honked, but he seemed unconcerned about the danger behind him. He waddled just a bit faster, but still seemed unconcerned.

The story is told of a family of porcupines that were in real danger. A red squirrel scampered up a tree and frantically began to give off a series of vocal alarms accompanied by a frenzy of foot stomping and tail-jerking. He saw a fisher lurking in the shadows eyeing his favorite forest meal: porcupine meat.

The porcupine family paused momentarily and glanced at the noisy chatterbox with an air of annoyance, completely unaware of the danger behind them. The fisher quickly dug a snow tunnel straight toward the porcupines. With blinding speed he lunged from his snow tunnel, viciously tearing into the underbelly of one of the porcupines. The red squirrel watched as the fisher contentedly licked his paw on top of the blood-stained snow. The porcupine became a victim of passivity. He was completely unaware, unconcerned, and unprepared for

the need of the hour.

God daily gives us the choice of living our life with *passion* or *passivity*. Jesus gives us a very clear picture of the outcome of these two choices. In Matthew 25:1-30 we have two parables: The parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the talents. In the first parable, each of the ten virgins had a lamp and oil in it. All ten began life equally equipped. Five of the virgins took life seriously and prepared for the future. They wanted to be fully prepared for every occasion. They took "extra" oil with them. They loved Jesus with a passion. They wanted to make sure they were fully prepared to meet Him. The five foolish virgins, however, were passive. They embraced a life of Christianity for what it would offer them. Instead of being serious about life, they were careless and passive. As a result, they were unprepared to meet Jesus. They became victims of passivity and were forever barred from the presence of Jesus. How sad!

In the second parable, we have the picture of two men that lived life with a passion. One was given five talents and the other two talents. Each man doubled what was given him. They took life seriously. They wisely used what was given them. I can picture these men aggressively investing their lives in the lives of others. They loved. They cared. They were prepared to meet their Master. Because they were faithful, they were rewarded. But alas! The third man failed. He was given one talent. He did not use what was given him. He was careless, uncommitted, and unprepared. He was also a victim of passivity. Jesus had a very sad and sober message for him. He said, "Take

therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:28-30).

Our problem is not that we choose passivity. Our problem is that we do *not* choose to become passionate about Jesus. Paul says in Romans 12:1 and 11, "I beseech [appeal, beg] you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present [make a decisive decision] your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Not slothful [never lag in zeal] in business; fervent [be aglow and burning, be passionate] in spirit, serving the Lord." When we do not choose passion, passivity naturally takes over. What makes passivity so dangerous is that it happens gradually and undetected. It overtakes us before we realize it. We become so self-centered, satisfied, carefree, and unconcerned that we are completely oblivious to the conditions and dangers around us. In that state we become just like the porcupine. We end up becoming the victim of our enemy. So what is the answer to passivity? How can we choose passion? How can I become "hot" for Christ?

1. Admit my needs—my sinfulness! It should scare me when I catch myself lying, lusting, gossiping, being prideful, and lukewarm.
2. Confess my sins! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from **ALL** unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).
3. Beware of the spiritual battle (Eph. 6:12).
4. Put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11-18).
5. Keep my focus on Jesus (John 15:6).
6. Learn to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16).
7. Grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus (John 14:21).

Jesus will make Himself *real* to you, if you are *passionate* about loving and obeying Him. ■

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THEOLOGY OF A MERE WORM . . . cont'd.

Because of this modern trend to exalt man and not call him anything offensive, scriptural words which do exactly that have disappeared from modern preaching and modern music. Some of these are: "wicked" (Isaiah 48:22), "wretched" (Romans 7:24), "vile" (Isaiah 32:6), "lewd" (Acts 17:5), "evil" (2 Timothy 3:13), "brutish" and "fools" (Psalm 94:8).

Since this is the truth of Scripture, are we not doing people a real disservice in not telling them the truth of their condition before a holy God? Is it not when people finally realize that they are absolutely wicked to the bone, wholly guilty before God and totally unable to do anything about it themselves, that they turn to Jesus, their only hope and righteousness? This demonstrates the real beauty of grace: God's love and forgiveness offered to sinful men who don't deserve it and have not earned it.

Using scriptural terms to describe man also exalts God's salvation in Christ. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).

Not using the scriptural description of man robs people of the help that they so desperately need. When God said, "Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel," He also went on to say, "I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:14).

When people realize that they are, in fact, humble, lowly, and powerless as a worm, then they will turn to the Almighty Lord God who can bring real change and real help. Self-sufficient modern man will not tap into this power of God. The fact of this is evidenced by the lives that most lead.

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Psalm 22:6). ■

—Excerpts taken from *Last Words of Saints and Sinners* by Herbert Lockyer. Author Pastor James R. Haga, Shoreview, MN. Taken from *Morning Glory*—Hauge Lutheran Innermission Federation.

SWORD AND TRUMPET

A READER'S REVIEW OF THE SHACK

by Tim Challies

Introducing *The Shack*

The Shack is the unlikeliest of success stories. The first and only book written by a salesman from Oregon, it was never supposed to be published. William P. Young wrote the tale for the benefit of his children and after its completion in 2005, it was copied and bound at Kinko's in time for him to give it to his children for Christmas.

Shortly after he completed the book, Young showed the manuscript to Wayne Jacobsen, a former pastor who had begun a small publishing company. After the manuscript was rejected by other publishers, Jacobsen and his co-publisher Brad Cummings decided to publish it themselves under the banner of Windblown Media.

The three men, with only a \$300 marketing budget at their disposal, began a word-of-mouth campaign to let people know about the book. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since its first publication *The Shack* has gone through printing after printing. There are now over a million copies of the book in print and its popularity continues to rise. The book has climbed as high as #8 on the *USA Today* bestseller list and at least as high among all books at Amazon.com where it is also approaching 500 reader reviews. Windblown Media is negotiating with film studios about the possibility of a movie version of *The Shack*. The publisher has also recently signed a distribution agreement with Hachette Books, which has now begun to handle sales, marketing, distribution, licensing, and manufacturing. The book is set to go even farther and climb even higher in the months and years to come.

The Shack has been received among Christians with decidedly mixed reviews. While many have acclaimed it as a groundbreaking story that brings to life heart-

stirring theology, others insist that some of what it teaches is patently unbiblical. Where Eugene Peterson, Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver says it "has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* did for his," Dr. Albert Mohler, President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary says, "This book includes undiluted heresy." While singer and songwriter Michael W. Smith says, "*The Shack* will leave you craving for the presence of God," Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle says, "Regarding the Trinity, it's actually heretical."

In this booklet I hope to guide you through *The Shack*. We will look at the book with a charitable but critical eye, attempting to understand what it teaches and how it can be that opinions about the book vary so widely. We do this not simply to be critical, but as an exercise in discernment and critical thinking. We will simply look at what the author teaches and compare that to the Bible.

If you have not yet read the book, you may wish to read the short summary of it which follows. Those who have already read it will probably wish to skip directly to "Fact and Fiction."

Let's enter *The Shack* together!

***The Shack* in 500 Words (or Less)**

The Shack is a book that seeks to provide answers to the always timely question "Where is God in a world so filled with unspeakable pain?" It is a tale that revolves around Mack (Mackenzie) Philips. Four years before the story begins, Mack's young daughter, Missy, was abducted during a family vacation. Though her body was never found, the police did find evidence in an abandoned shack

to prove that she had been brutally murdered by a notorious serial killer who preyed on young girls. As the story begins, Mack, who has been living in the shadow of his Great Sadness, receives a note from God (known in this story as Papa). Papa invites Mack to return to this shack for a time together. Though uncertain of what to expect, Mack visits the scene of the crime and there experiences a weekend-long encounter with God, or, more properly, with the Godhead.

Each of the members of the Trinity is present and each appears in bodily form. Papa, whose actual name is Elousia (which is Greek for *tenderness*) appears in the form of a large, matronly African-American woman (though near the book's end, because Mack requires a father figure, she turns into a pony-tailed, grey-haired man). Jesus is a young to middle-aged man of Middle Eastern descent while the Holy Spirit is played by Sarayu (Sanskrit for *air* or *wind*), a small, delicate, and eclectic woman of Asian descent. Mack also meets for a time with Sophia, who, like Lady Wisdom in Proverbs, is the personification of God's wisdom.

The reader learns that Mack has been given this opportunity to meet with God so he could learn to deal with his *Great Sadness*—the overwhelming pain and anger resulting from the death of his daughter. There is very little action in *The Shack* and the bulk of the book is dialog. The majority of the dialog occurs as the members of the Trinity communicate with Mack, though occasionally the author offers glimpses into their unique relationships with one another.

As the weekend progresses Mack participates in lengthy and impactful discussions with each member of the Trinity. Topics range from the cross to the Trinity and from forgiveness to free will. He finds his understanding of God and his relationship with God radically and irrevocably altered. His faith is dismantled piece by piece and then put back together. As we might expect, he leaves the cabin a changed man.

Fact and Fiction

The Shack is a fictional tale. Though the story's narrator is identified as "Willie"

(referring to William Young, the book's author), never is the reader expected to believe that the story is real. Yet though *The Shack* is fiction, it is clearly intended to communicate theological truths. It is meant to impact the way the reader thinks about God, about love, and about life. It is not a book that was written only to share a story, but to share theology.

Fiction has often been used to communicate important truths. In his endorsement for this book Eugene Peterson references John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* which stands as perhaps the most obvious example of theological fiction. We might also point to the works of C. S. Lewis and especially to the words of Jesus Christ, who often used stories and parables to communicate truth.

Those who read reviews of this book will soon find that people are claiming it has changed their lives and changed their understanding of God. Despite the book's genre, it is clearly communicating to people on a deeply spiritual level. It is impacting the way people think of God. The book's narrator admits as much where, in the After Words he says, "I don't think there is one aspect of my life, especially my relationships, that hasn't been touched deeply and altered in ways that truly matter." Examining the reviews posted by readers at Amazon.com and elsewhere across the Internet will reveal how deep an impact this book is making. Because of the book's impact we must be willing to examine it not only as a story but also as a tool for communicating information about the character and the work of God. And that is just what we will do.

What Is Theology (And Why Does It Matter)?

The word *theology* is one that is undoubtedly not very popular today. It is a word that comes loaded with all kinds of baggage. This is unfortunate, though, because whether we like it or not, we are all theologians.

The word *theology* is derived from two little Greek words. The root *theos* means "God" and the suffix *-ology* comes from the Greek word for "speak." So when we use the word *theology* we mean "speaking of

God” or as has become the more popular definition, “the study of God.” That doesn’t sound so bad, does it? Anyone who has thought about God or who has spoken about God has been engaged in theology.

Of course theology is not enough; it is a means rather than merely an end. We do not wish to only know about God, but also wish to show evidence that we know Him. We give evidence of this in the way we live our lives. Oftentimes those who say they do not like theology are those who have known people like Mack’s father—a man who claimed to love God, but whose life showed little evidence of the transformation we’d expect from someone who had truly met with God. There are many people who claim to be Christians but who have separated theology from practice, knowledge of God from the practice of serving Him. No Christian can deny that we are called by God to learn more about Him and to study His ways. The more we learn of God, the more we are able to live in a way that pleases Him.

Of course there is good theology and bad theology. Good theology is theology that is consistent with what the Bible teaches us; bad theology is theology that is different from what the Bible teaches or that is even in direct opposition to what the Bible teaches.

Though *The Shack* is not a textbook for theology, and though it may not appear on the outside to be theological, as long as it discusses the nature and the plan of God, it must be so. In this guide we will look at the theology of *The Shack*, stopping often to consider the book in relation to the Bible. Theology is not often a good or noble end in itself, so we will look to the theology as the means to a greater end—letting that theology inform our lives. When we know God as He is, we can honor God in the way we live. And isn’t that what we all want?

The way to avoid being like Mack’s dad is not to avoid theology, but to love and to embrace and to pursue it. Those men and women who live most like Christ are not the ones who know the least about Him, but the ones who know Him best. We wish to be Christians who know God deeply and intimately. And to know Him in that way we turn first to the Bible.

Entering *The Shack*

In this section of the guide we will look at The Shack and examine some of the underlying ideas and theological concepts within it. We will use care and discernment, simply comparing what this book teaches to what we find in the Bible.

SUBVERSION: UNDERMINING THE FAITH

We will soon turn to three key theological concepts and examine what *The Shack* has to say about each of them. The topics we will look at are *revelation*, *salvation*, and *the Trinity*. Before we do so, though, I would like to address one particularly disturbing and underlying aspect of this book. As I read the book I saw that, from beginning to end, *The Shack* has a quietly subversive quality to it. The author very subtly criticizes many aspects of the church and contemporary Christianity before replacing the concepts he criticizes with new ones. He criticizes seminary education (“Mack struggled to keep up with [Papa], to make some sense of what was happening. None of his old seminary training was helping in the least” [91].), the Bible (“God’s voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellectuals” [65-66].), Sunday School (“This isn’t Sunday School. This is a flying lesson” [98].), the church as a body (“You’re talking about the church as this woman you’re in love with; I’m pretty sure I haven’t met her . . . She’s not the place I go on Sundays” [177].), the church as individuals (“For Mack these words were like a breath of fresh air! Simple. Not a bunch of exhausting work and long list of demands and not the sitting in endless meetings staring at the backs of people’s heads, people he really didn’t even know. Just sharing life” [178].), family devotions (“Images of family devotions from his childhood came spilling into his mind, not exactly good memories . . . He half expected Jesus to pull out a huge old King James Bible” [107].), theological certainty (“I have a great fondness for uncertainty [said Sarayu]” [203].), the word *Christian* as a descriptor (“Who said anything about being a Christian? I’m not a Christian [said Jesus]”

[182].), and on and on.

Perhaps this statement from page 119 serves as an apt description of many of the book's subtle undertones: "I will tell you that you're going to find this day a lot easier if you simply accept what is, instead of trying to fit it into your preconceived notions." Though we certainly do need to maintain some objectivity when we study Scripture, God has also told us many things with certainty and we need to cling tightly to these. Many preconceived notions are theologically sound and informed by biblical truth. The reader of *The Shack* must be careful that he does not simply accept "what is," at least as William Young describes it, without critical thinking and spiritual discernment.

REVELATION: HOW CAN WE KNOW GOD?

There are few doctrines more important to settle than the doctrine of revelation. It is this doctrine that teaches us how God has chosen to reveal Himself to human beings. While every theistic religion teaches that God chooses to communicate with humans, they vary radically in the ways He does so. Christians are known as being a people of the book, people who cling to the Scripture as the revealed will of God. The Bible, we believe, is a unique gift given to us as an expression of God's love—as an expression of Himself. Not surprisingly, revelation is central to *The Shack*.

Christians hold to the belief that the Bible is the only infallible source of God's revelation to us. The Bible alone teaches all that is necessary for our salvation from sin and is the standard by which all Christian behavior must be measured. The best place to begin with understanding the Bible is to learn what it says about itself.

The Bible testifies to its own uniqueness and sufficiency. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). It testifies to its own perfection and power. "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7). It testifies to its

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own completeness. "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18, 19).

Clearly the Bible demands for itself a place of prominence and preeminence. It demands that it be held as God's most important revelation to us. Some people believe, though, that the revelation given to us in the Bible needs to be supplemented or superseded by fresh revelation. This is especially a temptation in an age like ours where we tend to value what is new more than what is ancient. A question worth asking is this one: Does *The Shack* point Christians to the unfailing standard of Scripture or does it point them to new and fresh revelation?

Ever since humans fell into sin, the history of God's communication with people has been a history of mediation. Mediation is a concept we encounter often today. We hear of sports contracts being settled by mediation; we hear of lawyers becoming involved in mediation between divorcing couples. These hint at mediation as we understand it from the Bible. In rejecting God's goodness and benevolence and in putting himself in place of God, our forefather Adam erected a barrier between himself and God. The close communion that had once existed was ruptured and destroyed. No longer would God come walking with humans in the cool of the day; no longer would He allow them to stay in His Garden. He forced them out and barred the way so they could not return. The very next passage of Scripture relates the first murder. Human history had taken a drastic, horrifying turn for the worse. The lines of communication had been shattered.

From that time, God no longer allowed people to commune with Him in the same way. From that point on, man could no longer approach God as he had in the Garden. He had to approach God through a mediator. When we think of mediators we

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may think first of Moses, a man to whom God revealed Himself and a man whose task it was to then make the will of God known to the Israelites. After Moses was Joshua, and after Joshua were judges and prophets. There were priests to stand between God and man, offering to God sacrifices on behalf of the people and bestowing God's blessings and curses on His behalf. Always there were mediators, always there were people standing between God and man. Always people must have realized their inability to approach God as they were. Always they must have wondered, "How can we approach God directly?"

God's revelation to us is now mediated communication. We may long for immediate or unmediated communication, but today our sin stands between us and the Holy God. God has given His full and perfect and sufficient revelation in the Bible. It is in the Bible that God gives us the rule as to how we may know Him and how we may live in a way that honors Him. How will God reveal Himself to us according to William Young? "You will learn to hear my thoughts in yours" (195), says Sarayu. "You might see me in a piece of art, or music, or silence, or through people, or in Creation, or in your joy and sorrow. My ability to communicate is limitless, living and transforming, and it will always be tuned to Papa's goodness and love. And you will hear and see me in the Bible in fresh ways. Just don't look for rules and principles; look for relationship—a way of coming to be with us" (198). He may reveal Himself savingly through stories that merely and loosely parallel the story of Jesus' sacrifice (185). Young consistently downplays Scripture at the expense of personal experience. What Young indicates in *The Shack* is that we must expect God to reveal Himself in unmediated ways. God will reveal Himself to us in the Scripture, but only as one way out of many. Nowhere is Scripture given the place of prominence or uniqueness that it demands of itself. But without the Scripture as our norm, as our rule, we are subject to every whim. Only when we maintain the superiority of the Bible can we measure all of our behavior and all of our beliefs against the perfect measure given to us by God.

Despite the Bible's testimony to its own unique qualities, the majority of *The Shack's* references to Scripture are negative in their tone. They do not affirm the Bible as God's perfect revelation to us, but instead focus on its abuse at the hands of those who profess Christ or on supposed old-fashioned notions about it. Early in the book, for example, the reader learns that Mack has a seminary education, but one that downplayed the means God uses to reveal Himself. "In seminary he had been taught that God had completely stopped any overt communication with moderns, preferring to have them only listen to and follow sacred Scripture, properly interpreted, of course. God's voice had been reduced to paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects. It seemed that direct communication with God was something exclusively for the ancients and uncivilized, while educated Westerners' access to God was mediated and controlled by the intelligentsia. Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. Especially an expensive one bound in leather with gilt edges, or was that guilt edges" (65-66)? Yet nowhere would the Bible indicate that it is God's voice "reduced" to paper. Nowhere would the Bible downplay its own importance as written revelation. There is nothing reductionistic about the Bible or the fact that it is written revelation! We must not downplay the beauty, the power, or the sufficiency of the Bible.

SALVATION: WHAT HAS CHRIST ACCOMPLISHED?

Though the cross is central to the Bible and central to the Christian faith, it appears only sparingly in *The Shack*. A person who is unfamiliar with the Christian faith will not be able to glean from this book a biblical understanding of what the cross was for and what Jesus' death accomplished. Nor will he understand how God saves us and what He saves us from.

The Bible is clear that the cross is the very apex of the Christian faith. It is on the cross that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin. On the cross Jesus took upon Himself the sin of those who were His children and

there He faced the penalty for such sin. The penalty He faced was the just wrath of the Father—the punishment due to those who would turn their backs on the Creator. On the cross we see that great mystery of Jesus becoming sin and of being separated from His Father so He might satisfy the demands of justice. This is the gospel! This gospel message is one that requires a response of faith. In faith we believe this and by grace we receive all the benefits of what Christ accomplished on that cross.

The Shack offers only hints as to the importance of the cross and to its function within the faith. “Honey,” says Papa, “you asked me what Jesus accomplished on the cross; so now listen to me carefully: through his death and resurrection, I am now fully reconciled to the world.”

“The whole world? You mean those who believe in you, right?”

“The whole world, Mack. All I am telling you is that reconciliation is a two-way street, and I have done my part, totally, completely, finally. It is not the nature of love to force a relationship but it is the nature of love to open the way.”

What then is the nature of this reconciliation? Young never tells us in any clear way. What is clear, though, is that the God of *The Shack* is not a God who could have punished His Son for the sins of others. After all, Papa says, “Regardless of what he felt at that moment, I never left him” (96). He is not a God who could have poured out upon His Son His just wrath for sin. In fact, God does not need to punish sin at all, says Papa. “I don’t need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring from the inside. It’s not my purpose to punish it; it’s my joy to cure it” (120).

We might now ask, Who can be reconciled to God? What is necessary for those who would establish a relationship with God? “Those who love me come from every stream that exists. They were Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans and many who don’t vote or are not part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions” (182). Mack asks for clarification. “Does that mean . . . that all roads will lead to you?” “‘Not at all,’ smiled Jesus . . . ‘Most roads

don’t lead anywhere. What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you’” (182). While these words cannot rightly be said to actually teach universalism, the view that *all* men will go to Heaven, neither do they clearly deny it. Is Jesus the only way to be reconciled to God? The book is less than clear on this point. Jesus says to Mack, “I am the best way any human can relate to Papa or Sarayu.” Jesus does not say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” as He does in John 14:6, but merely states that He is the best way.

We are left with an incomplete gospel; a gospel message that says little of sin and of justice. It is a gospel message that says nothing of how we may be saved from the sin that pollutes us.

The Shack also muddles the concept of redemption. Redemption, according to Young, is not something that happened once and for all on the cross. Rather, he claims that God has already forgiven all men for their sin, but that it remains for humans to accept this forgiveness. “In Jesus, I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me, but only some choose relationship” (225). “When Jesus forgave those who nailed Him to the cross they were no longer in his debt, nor mine. In my relationship with those men, I will never bring up what they did, or shame them, or embarrass them” (225). Only when men choose to embrace God’s offer of forgiveness will they be redeemed. “[H]e too is my son. I want to redeem him” (224), says God of the man who killed Mack’s daughter. Yet the Bible makes it clear that redemption has already been accomplished. The redemption of God’s children was accomplished once and for all when Jesus died on the cross. All that awaits now is the application of that redemption to the children of God.

Taken together, Young’s muddying of redemption and his incomplete gospel message presents a troubling view of salvation. *The Shack* certainly does not make plain what is made plain in the Bible—that Jesus Christ is the one and the only way to be reconciled to the Father and this only by faith in Him. The book presents less than the full gospel message. It teaches that God died for the sins of the whole world and that He now

waits for us to respond to this potential gift. It teaches that God does not punish sin, but that sin is sufficient punishment in itself. It opens the possibility that people can come to God in ways other than a saving faith in Jesus Christ. It obfuscates the doctrine of salvation that the Bible makes so clear and so central. It muddies the very heart of the faith.

TRINITY: WHO IS GOD?

While Christianity is a faith that encompasses many doctrines that are difficult to understand, there is none so difficult as the doctrine of the Trinity. Neither is there a doctrine that is so foundational to the faith. Though Christians have long acknowledged that we can never know the fullness of this doctrine, there is much we can know and know with confidence. What I share in this section is what has been taught as orthodox through the long history of the church.

Though definitions of the doctrine of the Trinity may vary, at its heart must be three statements: God is three persons. Each person is fully God. There is one God. In these statements we affirm that there is one God but three persons who together make up the Godhead. Each member of the Trinity is equal in the divine attributes; each is fully God. The only differences between them are in the ways they relate to one another and the ways they relate to what has been created. There is one “what” but three “who’s.” That is, there is one God but three persons.

The Trinity is a central concept to *The Shack* and many who are reading and reviewing it are testifying to its power in helping them understand, perhaps for the first time, the true nature of the Trinity. But does *The Shack* teach what the Bible teaches? We will look now at *The Shack*’s teaching about the Trinity and will do so under several headings.

Portraying God

The emotional power of *The Shack* depends upon a face-to-face encounter between God and man. God the Father is represented as Papa, an African-American woman; Jesus is in the form of a man of Middle-Eastern descent and the Holy Spirit is portrayed as an Asian woman named Sarayu.

Yet the Bible is clear that God cannot and must not be portrayed in an image. It is impossible to make the creator a part of His creation and the Bible clearly and repeatedly forbids us from even attempting to do this. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,” says Jesus in John 4:24. The third of the Ten Commandments likewise forbids attempting to make any visual portrayal of God. To worship such an image, to acknowledge it as God, or even to pretend it is God is to commit the sin of idolatry. It is to worship a creation rather than the Creator. So while Young’s portrayal of Jesus may be based on some fact, his portrayal of the Father and the Holy Spirit in human form is sinful and expressly forbidden within the Bible. It is no small matter. Describing unrighteous people, the Apostle Paul says, “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things” (Romans 1:22, 23). While claiming to be wise, sinful men portrayed God in the image of man. Paul says that the wrath of God is poured out against all who would do such a thing. How then can we support such a portrayal of God in this book?

We have already seen how the Bible places emphasis on mediation. The history of man’s relationship to God is a history of mediation. In *The Shack*, though, we find unmediated communication between man and God and this despite the Bible’s clear teaching that man cannot approach God without a mediator. “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Because we are polluted by sin, we have no right to stand before God without the presence of a mediator. And that mediator must be Jesus Christ, the One who, by His death and resurrection, proved Himself worthy and able. His mediation is the only mediation God will accept. We may boldly approach God as our Father, but only through Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 4:14-16). To suggest we can approach God in an unmediated way is to suggest that we are worthy of approaching God face-to-face despite our sin; it is to suggest that the

mediation of Jesus Christ is unnecessary. To do this is to make much of ourselves and to make little of Christ.

Roles and Hierarchy

It is critical that we look to the Bible to properly define the roles carried out by each member of the Trinity. When we do this, we see that while the members of the Trinity work together in perfect harmony, each has unique functions. Thus in creation we see that each of the members of the Trinity was active, the Father speaking the words that brought the universe into being, the Son carrying out the work of creation, and the Holy Spirit sustaining it or manifesting God's presence over it. The Trinity is active also in redemption, the Father planning redemption and sending His Son as redeemer; the Son being obedient to the Father and accomplishing the work of redemption; the Holy Spirit being sent by the Son in order to apply redemption to God's children.

One thing stands out. In each case we see that the Father is the one who takes the lead. Much as a father relates to a son, the heavenly Father relates to *His* Son. The Father leads and directs and exercises some degree of authority over the Son. The Son is obedient to the directives of the Father and submits to Him. Just as the citizens of a nation are subordinate to the authority of the President, and just as the difference is not in their being or worth but in their role, in the same way, the Son is subordinate to the Father. This is the way it always has been and, according to 1 Corinthians 15:28, the way it always will be. Theologian Bruce Ware says rightly that "the most marked characteristic of the trinitarian relationships is the presence of an eternal and inherent expression of authority and submission." From this we learn that both authority and submission are good, for both are expressive of God Himself. And we must then affirm that equality of essence does not conflict with the distinction in roles. The Son may submit to the Father and the Spirit may submit to the Son and the Father, even while maintaining absolute equality in worth and essence.

Such a view is not only lacking in *The Shack*, but is flatly contradicted. While the

author affirms the equality of each of the members of the Trinity, he denies that submission can be present in such a relationship. "Mackenzie, we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a *circle* of relationship, not a chain of command or 'great chain of being' as your ancestors termed it. What you're seeing here is relationship without any overlay of power. We don't need power over the other because we are always looking out for the best. Hierarchy would make no sense among us" (122). Young goes so far as to suggest that submission is inherently evil—that it is possible only where there is sin. "You humans are so lost and damaged that to you it is almost incomprehensible that relationship could exist apart from hierarchy. So you think that God must relate inside a hierarchy like you do. But we do not" (124). Scripture says otherwise and it says so clearly. "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). In John 6:38 Jesus says, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" and in 8:28 He makes the astounding claim that "I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things." This is a Saviour who is equal to the Father in essence but subordinate in role. The Father does not obey the Son but the Son obeys the Father. William Young gets these relationships entirely wrong.

Denying roles and hierarchy within the Trinity is an error that has implications that may reach to the very foundations of human relationships. When we properly understand the hierarchy within the Godhead we understand that hierarchy and submission are not products of sin but are present even within the most perfect relationship. This teaches us that we may and must submit in our human relationships and that we can do so without sin. The trinitarian relationship is a model to us of how we honor God by submitting to Him and to the authorities He has seen fit to place over us.

Distinction

While we affirm that there is only one God, we must maintain distinction between the

persons of the Trinity. The Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father. When we blur these distinctions we wind up with a view of God that begins to lose any sense. Yet it seems that within *The Shack* the distinctions are lost and the persons and the roles begin to blend together. Some have suggested that William Young falls into a heresy known as modalism. While I am not convinced that he goes quite so far, I do find that his view of the Trinity blurs important distinctions. It may be that he does cross the line into modalism and if he does cross such a line, he does so when he maintains that each of the members of the Trinity somehow took on human flesh. Scripture, though, maintains that it was only the Son who did this and only the Son who ever could have done this.

In one of his first encounters with Papa, “Mack noticed the scars in her wrists, like those he now assumed Jesus also had on his” (95). Note that these scars were present on the wrists of the Father and not just the Son. Explaining this Papa says, “Don’t ever think that what my son chose to do didn’t cost us dearly. Love always leaves a significant mark,” she stated softly and gently. “We were there together” (96).

How could this be that the Father was on the cross? It becomes clear just a few pages later where Papa remarks, “When we three spoke ourself into human existence as the Son of God, we became fully human. We also chose to embrace all the limitations that this entailed. Even though we have always been present in this created universe, we now became flesh and blood” (99). Yet nowhere in Scripture do we find that the Father spoke Himself into human existence; nowhere do we find that the Holy Spirit spoke Himself into human existence. It was only Jesus who became human, even while maintaining His divinity. He is the God-man, God made flesh. We should not say and cannot say, as Mack does to Papa, “I’m so sorry that you, that Jesus, had to die” (103). Jesus died on that cross; the Father did not. We cannot believe that “Papa has crawled inside of your world” (165). We must maintain proper distinctions between the members of the Trinity. Without such distinctions we allow ourselves to believe in a false God—a God other than the

One who has revealed Himself in the Bible.

Identity

Young chooses to portray God the Father as feminine, yet with the masculine title Papa. Here is how Papa explains this mystery. “Mackenzie, I am neither male nor female, even though both genders are derived from my nature. If I choose to appear to you as a man or a woman, it’s because I love you. For me to appear to you as a woman and suggest you call me Papa is simply to mix metaphors, to help you keep from falling so easily back into your religious conditioning” (93). Because God is Spirit and does not have a body, Young is correct that He is neither male nor female, at least insofar as it relates to anatomy. Clearly God does not and cannot have male or female anatomy. Yet God has chosen to reveal Himself as masculine. Nowhere in the Bible would we find any suggestions that God expects us to relate to Him in anything *but* masculine terms. Nowhere is God known as our Mother. Nor does the Bible give us the leeway to re-imagine God as female—as a Goddess. God has given us revelation of Himself and we re-imagine Him only at our own peril.

Young also teaches a strange view about the very nature of God. He draws upon the name of God as God revealed Himself to Moses in the familiar words of Exodus 3:14. “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” Quoting Buckminster Fuller, a Unitarian-Universalist who wrote a book entitled *I Am a Verb*, he has Papa say, “I am a verb. I am that I am. I will be who I will be. I am a verb! I am alive, dynamic, ever active, and moving. I am verb” (204). Papa explains further saying, “If the universe is only a mass of nouns, it is dead. Unless ‘I am,’ there are no verbs, and verbs are what makes the universe alive” (204). By implication this would seem to indicate that God is not a person or a being, but a *force*. Verbs are not what make the universe alive; rather, verbs describe the actions of beings that are already alive and active. It is God who makes the universe what it is by being who He is. Though we affirm that God is

alive and active in the world, He is no verb. Such a teaching casts doubt on the personhood of God. We can only relate to God as a person, as a noun, and not as a verb.

The Glory of God

One of the most disturbing aspects of *The Shack* is the behavior of Mack when he is in the presence of God. When we read in the Bible about those who were given glimpses of God, these people were overwhelmed by His glory. In Isaiah 6 the prophet is allowed to see “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah reacts by crying out, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5)!

Isaiah declares a curse upon himself for being a man whose lips are willing to utter unclean words even in a world created by a God of such glory and perfection. When Moses encountered God in the burning bush, he hid his face for he was afraid to look at God’s glory (Exodus 3:6). In Exodus 33 Moses is given just a glimpse of God’s glory, but God will show only His back saying, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20). Examples abound. When we look to the Bible’s descriptions of Heaven we find that any creatures who are in the presence of God are overwhelmed and overjoyed, crying out about God’s glory day and night.

But in *The Shack* we find a man who stands in the very presence of God and uses foul language (“damn” [140] and “son of a bitch” [224]), who expresses anger to God (which in turns makes God cry) (92), and who snaps at God in his anger (96). This is not a man who is in the presence of One who is far superior to him, but a man who is in the presence of a peer. This portrayal of the relationship of man to God and God to man is a far cry from the Bible’s portrayal. And indeed it must be because the God of *The Shack* who has only a vague resemblance to the God of the Bible. There is no sense of awe as we, through Mack, come into the presence of God.

Gone is the majesty of God when men stand in His holy presence and profane His

name. Should God allow in His presence the very sins for which He sent His Son to die? Would a man stand before the Creator of the Universe and curse? What kind of God is the God of *The Shack*?

Summary

Focusing on just three of the subjects William Young discusses in *The Shack*, we’ve seen that errors abound. He presents a false view of God and one that may well be described as heretical. He downplays the importance and uniqueness of the Bible, subjugating it or making it equal to other forms of subjective revelation. He misrepresents redemption and salvation, opening the door to the possibility of salvation outside of the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are left with an unbiblical understanding of the persons and nature of God and of His work in this world.

But this is not all. The discerning reader will note as well that the author muddies the concepts of forgiveness and free will. He introduces teaching that is entirely foreign to the Bible, often stating with certainty what is merely speculative. He oversteps the bounds of Scripture while downplaying the Bible’s importance. He relies too little on Scripture and too much on his own theological imaginings.

All this is not to say there is nothing of value in the book. However, it is undeniable to the reader who will look to the Bible, that there is a great deal of error within *The Shack*. There is too much error.

That *The Shack* is a dangerous book should be obvious from this review. The book’s subversive undertones seek to dismantle many aspects of the faith and these are subsequently replaced with doctrine that is just plain wrong. Error abounds.

I urge you, the reader, to exercise care in reading and distributing this book. *The Shack* may be an engaging read but it is one that contains far too much error. Read it only with the utmost care and concern, critically evaluating the book against the unchanging standard of Scripture. *Caveat lector!* [Let the reader beware!] ■

—Taken from an open article by the author and endorsed by *Focus on the Family*.



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.

Preaching as Expository Exultation for the Glory of God

by John Piper

In this chapter I will first reflect on the kind of preaching that I long to see God raise up in our day—the kind that is shaped by the weight of the glory of God. Second, I will try to portray the glory of God, which affects preaching this way. Third, I will offer my biblical understanding of how people awaken to this glory and are changed by it. Finally, I will explain how all of this calls for a kind of preaching that I call *expository exultation*.

Reflections on the Kind of Preaching Produced by the Weight of God’s Glory

George Whitefield believed in preaching and gave his life to it, and by his preaching God did a mighty work of salvation on both sides of the Atlantic. Whitefield’s biographer, Arnold Dallimore, chronicles the astonishing effect that Whitefield’s preaching had in Britain and America in the eighteenth century. It came like rain on the parched land and made the desert spring forth with the flowers of righteousness. Dallimore lifts his eyes from the transformed wasteland of Whitefield’s time and expresses his longing that God would do this again. He cries out for a new generation of preachers like Whitefield. His words help me express what I long for in the coming generations of preachers in America and around the world. Dallimore says:

Yea . . . that we shall see the great Head of the Church once more . . . raise up unto Himself certain young men whom He may use in this glorious employ. And what manner of men will they be? Men mighty in the Scriptures, their lives dominated by a sense of the greatness, the majesty and holiness of God, and their minds and hearts aglow with the great truths of the doctrines of grace. They will be men who have learned what it is to die to self, to human aims and personal ambitions; men who are willing to be “fools for Christ’s sake,” who will bear reproach and falsehood, who will labor and suffer, and whose supreme desire will be, not to gain earth’s accolades, but to win the Master’s approbation when they appear before His awesome judgment seat. They will be men who will preach with broken hearts and tear-filled eyes, and upon whose ministries God will grant an extraordinary effusion of the Holy Spirit, and who will witness “signs and wonders following” in the transformation of multitudes of human lives.

Mighty in the Scriptures, aglow with the great truths of the doctrines of grace, dead to self, willing to labor and suffer, indifferent to the accolades of man, broken for sin, *and dominated by a sense of the greatness, and majesty, and holiness of God*—Dallimore, like Whitefield, believed that preaching is the heralding of God’s Word from that kind of heart. Preaching is not conversation. Preaching is not discussion. Preaching is not casual

talk about religious things. Preaching is not simply teaching. Preaching is the heralding of a message permeated by the sense of God's greatness and majesty and holiness. The topic may be anything under the sun, but it is always brought into the blazing light of God's greatness and majesty in His Word. That was the way Whitefield preached.

In the last century no one embodied that view better than Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who served the Westminster Chapel in London for thirty years. When J. I. Packer was a twenty-two-year-old student, he heard Lloyd-Jones preach every Sunday evening in London during the school year of 1948-1949. He said that he had "never heard such preaching." (That's why so many people say so many minimizing and foolish things about preaching—they have never heard true preaching; they have no basis for judgment about the usefulness of true preaching.) Packer said it came to him "with the force of electric shock, bringing . . . more of a sense of God than any other man" he had known. That's what Dallimore meant. Oh, that God would raise up young preachers who leave their hearers with a spiritual sense of shock at the sense of God—some sense of the infinite weight of the reality of God.

That is my longing for our day—and for you. That God would raise up thousands of brokenhearted, Bible-saturated preachers who are dominated by a sense of the greatness and the majesty and the holiness of God, revealed in the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, and reigning with absolute authority over every nation and every army and every false religion and every terrorist and every tsunami and every cancer cell and every galaxy in the universe.

God did not ordain the cross of Christ or create the lake of fire in order to communicate the insignificance of belittling His glory. The death of the Son of God and the damnation of unrepentant human beings are the loudest shouts under Heaven that God is infinitely holy, and sin is infinitely offensive, and wrath is infinitely just, and grace is infinitely precious, and our brief life—and the life of every person in your church and in your community—leads to everlasting joy or everlasting suffering. If our preaching does not carry the weight of these things to our people, what

will? *Veggie Tales*? Radio? Television? Discussion groups? Emergent conversations?

God planned for His Son to be crucified (Rev. 13:8; 2 Tim. 1:9) and for hell to be terrible (Matt. 25:41) so that we would have the clearest witnesses possible to what is at stake when we preach. What gives preaching its seriousness is that the mantle of the preacher is soaked with the blood of Jesus and singed with the fire of hell. That's the mantle that turns mere talkers into preachers. Yet tragically some of the most prominent evangelical voices today diminish the horror of the cross and the horror of hell—the one stripped of its power to bear our punishment, and the other demythologized into self-dehumanization and the social miseries of this world.

Oh, that the rising generations would see that the world is not overrun with a sense of seriousness about God. There is no surplus in the church of a sense of God's glory; there is no excess of earnestness in the church about Heaven and hell and sin and salvation, and, therefore, the joy of many Christians is paper thin. By the millions, people are amusing themselves to death with DVDs and 107-inch TV screens and games on their cell phones, and slapstick worship while the spokesmen of a massive world religion write letters to the West in major publications: "The first thing we are calling you to is Islam. . . . It is the religion of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil with the hand, tongue, and heart. It is the religion of jihad in the way of Allah so that Allah's Word and religion reign Supreme." And then these spokesmen publicly bless suicide bombers who blow up children in front of falafel shops and call it the way to paradise. This is the world in which we preach.

And yet incomprehensibly, in this Christ-diminishing, soul-destroying age, books and seminars and divinity schools and church growth specialists are bent on saying to young pastors, "lighten up," "get funny," and "do something amusing." To this I ask, Where is the spirit of Jesus? "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:24, 25). "And if thy right eye offend

thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matt. 5:29). “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Matt. 8:22). “And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:44). “Fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). “Some of you shall they cause to be put to death. . . . But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:16-19).

Would the church growth counsel to Jesus be, “Lighten up, Jesus. Do something amusing,” and to the young pastor, “Whatever you do, young pastor, don’t be like the Jesus of the Gospels. Lighten up”? From my perspective, which feels very close to eternity these days, that message to pastors sounds increasingly insane.

A Portrayal of the Glory of God

What you believe about the necessity of preaching and the nature of preaching is governed by your sense of the greatness and the glory of God and how you believe people awaken to that glory and live for that glory. So this next section presents a portrayal of the glory of God, and the third will deal with how people awaken to that glory and are changed by it.

From beginning to end, nothing in the Bible is more ultimate in the mind and heart of God than the glory of God—the beauty of God, the radiance of His manifold perfections. At every point in God’s revealed action, wherever He makes plain the ultimate goal of that action, the goal is always the same: to uphold and display His glory.

- He predestined us for His glory (Eph. 1:5, 6).
- He created us for His glory (Isaiah 43:7).
- He elected Israel for His glory (Jer. 13:11).
- He saved His people from Egypt for His glory (Psalm 106:8).

- He rescued them from exile for His glory (Isaiah 48:9-11).
- He sent Christ into the world so that Gentiles would praise God for His glory (Rom. 15:9).
- He commands His people, whether they eat or drink, to do all things for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31).
- He will send Jesus a second time so that all the redeemed will marvel at His glory (2 Thess. 1:9, 10).
- Therefore, the mission of the church is: “Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people” (Psalm 96:3).

These and a hundred more places drive us back up into the ultimate allegiance of God. Nothing affects preaching more deeply than to be struck almost speechless—almost—by the passion of God for the glory of God. What is clear from the whole range of biblical revelation is that God’s ultimate allegiance is to know Himself perfectly, and to love Himself infinitely, and to share this experience, as much as it can be, with His people. Over every act of God flies the banner: “For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another” (Isaiah 48:11; cf. 42:8).

From all eternity the ever-existing, never-becoming, always-perfect God has known Himself and loved what He knows. He has eternally seen His beauty and savored what He sees. His understanding of His own reality is flawless, and His exuberance in enjoying it is infinite. He has no needs, for He has no imperfections. He has no inclinations to evil because He has no deficiencies that could tempt Him to do wrong. He is therefore the holiest and happiest being that is or that can be conceived. We cannot conceive of a happiness greater than the happiness of infinite power delighting infinitely in infinite beauty in the personal fellowship of the Trinity.

To share this experience—the experience of knowing and enjoying His glory—is the reason God created the world. He would bring us to know Him and to enjoy Him the way He knows Himself and the way He enjoys Himself. Indeed, His purpose is that the very knowledge that He has of Himself

and the very joy that He has in Himself will be our knowledge and our enjoyment, so that we know Him with His own knowledge and we enjoy Him with His own joy. This is the ultimate meaning of Jesus' prayer in John 17:26 where He asks His Father "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." The Father's knowledge of and joy in "the brightness of his glory" (Heb. 1:3)—whose name is Jesus Christ—will be in us because Jesus is in us.

And if you ask: How does God's aim to share this experience (of knowing Himself and enjoying Himself) relate to the love of God? The answer is: His aim to share that experience *is* the love of God. God's love is His commitment to share the knowledge and enjoyment of His glory with us. When John says that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), he means that it is God's nature to share the enjoyment of His glory, even if it costs Him the life of His Son.

This means that God's aim to display His glory and our delight in that glory are in perfect harmony. We do not honor fully what we don't enjoy. God is not glorified fully in merely being known; He is glorified by being known and enjoyed so deeply that our lives become a display of His worth.

Jesus said two things to emphasize His role in giving us the knowledge and the joy of God. He said, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). And he said, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). In other words, we know the Father *with the knowledge of the Son*, and we enjoy the Father *with the joy of the Son*. Jesus has made us partakers of His own knowledge of God and His own enjoyment of God.

The way this becomes visible in the world is not mainly by passionate acts of corporate worship on Sunday morning—as precious as those moments are—but by the changes that it produces in our lives. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). The light that shines through our

deeds and causes people to see God is the all-satisfying worth of His glory.

It works something like this: When the glory of God is the treasure of our lives, we will not lay up treasures on earth, but spend them for the spread of His glory. We will not covet, but overflow with liberality. We will not crave the praise of men, but forget ourselves in praising God. We will not be mastered by sinful, sensual pleasures, but sever their root by the power of a superior promise. We will not nurse a wounded ego or cherish a grudge or nurture a vengeful spirit, but will hand over our cause to God and bless those who hate us. *Every sin flows from the failure to treasure the glory of God above all things*. Therefore one crucial, visible way to display the truth and value of the glory of God is by humble, sacrificial lives of service that flow only from the fountain of God's all-satisfying glory.

How People Waken to This Glory and Are Changed By It

We turn now to the question of how people are wakened to the glory of God and are changed by it. One essential part of the answer is given by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18–4:6. He writes, "But 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, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (v. 18). Beholding the glory of the Lord, we are transformed from one degree of glory to another. This is God's way of changing people into the image of His Son so that they reflect the glory of the Lord. To be changed in the way that glorifies God, we fix our gaze on the glory of the Lord.

How does this happen? (And here we are moving very close to the implications for preaching.) Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4 how we behold the glory of the Lord.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not [here is the fulfillment of 2 Cor. 3:18], lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

We behold the glory of the Lord most clearly and most crucially in the gospel, so

much so that Paul calls it “the gospel of the glory of Christ,” which means—and this has enormous implications for preaching—that in this dispensation, when we cannot see the glory of the Lord directly as we will when He returns in the clouds, we see it most clearly by means of *His Word*. The gospel is a *message* in words. Paradoxically, words are *heard* and glory is *seen*. Therefore, Paul is saying that we see the glory of Christ not mainly with our eyes but through our *ears*. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17) because seeing the glory of Christ comes through hearing, and hearing through the gospel of Christ.

Consider how this was expressed in the life of the prophet Samuel. In the days of Samuel, there was no frequent vision of the Lord (1 Sam. 3:1)—just like today where there is a famine of seeing and savoring the glory of God. But then God raised up a new prophet, and how did God appear to him? The same way He will appear to you and your people. First Samuel 3:21, “And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed *himself* to Samuel in Shiloh *by the word of the LORD*.” He revealed *Himself* by the *word*. This is how our people will behold the glory of the Lord, and be changed into the kind of people who make His glory known. Paul tells us now that the word that reveals the glory of God most clearly and centrally is the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4).

The Implicit Call for Expository Exultation

This brings me finally to a concluding point on preaching as *expository exultation*. If it is the purpose of God that we display His glory in the world, and if we display it because we have been changed by knowing and enjoying it, and if we know and enjoy it by beholding the glory of the Lord, and if we behold that glory most clearly and centrally in the gospel of the glory of Christ, and if the gospel is a message delivered in words to the world, then what follows is that God intends for preachers to unfold these words and exult over them—which is what I call *expository exultation*.

Each word matters. It is *expository*

because there is so much about the gospel that cries out to be expounded (opened, unfolded, elucidated, clarified, explained, displayed). We see this when we focus on five essential dimensions of the gospel message:

1. The gospel is a message about *historical events*—the life and death and resurrection of Christ—summoning us to open them with thorough expositions of texts.

2. The gospel is a message about what those events *achieved* before we experienced anything or even existed—the completion of perfect obedience, the payment for our sins, the removal of the wrath of God, the installation of Jesus as the crucified and risen Messiah and king of the universe, the disarming of the rulers and authorities, the destruction of death—all of these summoning us to open them with thorough expositions of texts.

3. The gospel is a message about the *transfer* of these achievements from Christ to particular persons through our union with Christ by faith alone apart from works, which summons us to open for our people the nature and dynamics of faith by the exposition of dozens of texts.

4. The gospel is a message about the *good things that are now true about us* as the achievement of the cross is applied to us in Christ—that God is only merciful to us now instead of wrathful (propitiation); that we are counted righteous in Christ now (justification); that we are freed now from the guilt and power of sin (redemption); that we are positionally and progressively made holy (sanctification)—all of which summons us to open these glorious realities for our people week after week with thorough expositions of texts.

5. Finally the gospel is a message about the glorious *God Himself* as our final, eternal, all-satisfying Treasure. “We also joy *in God* through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Rom. 5:11). The gospel we preach is the “*glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God*” (2 Cor. 4:4). If our gospel stops short of this goal—enjoying God Himself, not just His gifts of forgiveness and rescue from hell and eternal life—then we are not preaching “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”

(2 Cor. 4:6). Our ultimate goal is knowing and enjoying God. As we saw in the beginning of this chapter, that is why we were created—that God might share with us the knowledge and enjoyment of Himself. This is what it means for Him to love us. This is what the cross ultimately obtained for us. And this too, by every text of Scripture—all of it inspired by God to awaken hope in His glory (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Rom. 15:4)—calls for the richest exposition that our people may be fed the best and highest food of Heaven.

Exposition of texts is essential because the gospel is a message that comes to us in words, and God has ordained that people see the glory of Christ—the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8)—in those gospel words. That is our calling: to open the words and sentences and paragraphs of Scripture and display “the glory of Christ who is the image of God.”

This leads us finally to the second word in the phrase *expository exultation*. Woe to us if we do our exposition of such a gospel without *exultation*—that is, without exulting over the truth we unfold. When Paul writes, “For we *preach* not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:5), the word he uses for *preach* is κηρῦσσομεν—we *herald* Christ as Lord, we *announce* Christ as Lord. The κηρῦξ—the proclaimer, the “preacher” (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11)—may have to explain what he is saying if people don’t understand (so teaching may be

involved). But what sets the herald apart from the philosopher, and scribe, and teacher is that he is the herald of news—and in our case, infinitely good news, infinitely valuable news, the greatest news in all the world.

The Creator of the universe, who is more glorious and more to be desired than any treasure on earth, has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ to be known and enjoyed forever by anyone in the world who will lay down the arms of rebellion, receive His blood-bought amnesty, and embrace His Son as Saviour, Lord, and Treasure of his life.

Oh, brothers, do not lie about the value of the gospel by the dullness of your demeanor. Exposition of the most glorious reality is a glorious reality. If it is not *expository exultation*—authentic, from the heart—something false is being said about the value of the gospel. Don’t say by your face, or by your voice, or by your life that the gospel is not the gospel of the all-satisfying glory of Christ. It is. And may God raise up from among you a generation of preachers whose exposition is worthy of the truth of God and whose exultation is worthy of the glory of God. ■

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That Comfort Zone

by Paul L. Miller

In 1944, when I was ten years old, I spent eight weeks of the summer working on the farm of my uncle and aunt, David M. and Laura (Wagler) Miller. Each forenoon and afternoon for a few hours, Uncle David had me walk among and keep an eye on his small herd of about a dozen milk cows as they grazed in the ditches beside the rural roads two miles east of Partridge, Kansas. I was comfortable doing that.

One day, Uncle David gave me a new assignment. He asked me to do something for

his father-in-law, Peter Wagler. Old Pete kindly asked me to take the horse and buggy to Partridge and bring home a hundred-pound chunk of ice for the family ice box. I nearly panicked. I had finished fourth grade and I could drive a horse all right, but to do something I had never done before—and that I feared doing wrong—pushed me well beyond my comfort zone. But Pete was very reassuring and finally persuaded me to go on that errand. Things worked out well and, to my surprise, nothing bad happened!

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SWORD AND TRUMPET