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THE SWORD AND TRUMPET 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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What Are Those Basics?

**1. Principle of Stewardship.** All we have or ever will have really belongs to God, and we serve as stewards of His things. Because our money and possessions are God's, we treat them with respect, conserve them, and make careful decisions. We will someday give account for our financial decisions.

**2. Tithing and Giving.** Because our money and possessions belong to God, we don't hold them tightly. We give with a free hand, support God's work, and provide for the needs of others. We tithe to acknowledge God's ownership and give generously above the tithe in imitation of His goodness.

**3. Work.** Work is not a negative consequence of sin. Before the fall of man, God had Adam working in the Garden of Eden. God's expectations are clear . . . we are to work to provide for our own needs and to help with the needs of others. Work is not something to be avoided . . . it is a happy, healthy, and honorable opportunity.

**4. Priorities: Needs vs. Wants.** Life is not unlimited abundance. Sometimes I

must look at an item in a store, think about how nice it would be to have it, and then walk away without it. Other times I can eventually have the thing, but I must make myself wait. I am promised that my needs will be supplied, and I must, at times, be totally content with only that.

**5. Saving vs. Hoarding.** The Proverbs paint a very negative picture of the one who spends all he has and does not provide for the winter. God expects us to plan ahead for financial needs. The ascetic teaching that Christians should end every year with a zero balance is unscriptural. While accepting responsibility for providing for needs, we need a firm conviction that God alone holds the future and an honest commitment to hold nothing back when God asks for it.

What will uncertain economic times reveal about your personal financial management? ■

*Richie Lauer is director of Anabaptist Foundation.*

—Reprinted with permission from the *KMF Messenger*, May-June 2009.

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November 20-21, 2009

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- Early Anabaptist Interpretation of Scripture* . . . . . John U. Lapp
- Oil and the Mideast* . . . . . Leonard Wenger
- Report on Jewish Evangelism* . . . . . Floyd Stoltzfus
- Panel Discussion* (speakers of the messages) Moderator: Clarence Bontrager
- Results of Interpretation in Daily Living* . . . . . Paul Emerson

For more information contact Art Hershberger at:  
 artjaneherh@juno.com, or (434) 983-9696

# Person of the Month:

## *Jonas B. Miller*

### (1870-1952)

Jonas B. Miller, son of Joel J. and Savilla (Beachy) Miller, was born in Grantsville, Maryland, on December 10, 1870.

As a young person, Jonas accepted Christ and then joined the Amish Mennonite Church.

Brother Miller met Barbara Swartzentruber and eventually married her on October 5, 1893, when Jonas was 22 years old. In the passage of time God blessed their family with the birth of five boys and seven girls. Tragically, one of the children died early in life.

Jonas Miller was ordained to the ministry at the age of 26 on May 30, 1897, and continued pastoring for over fifty-five years. Many good things characterized Brother Jonas' ministry. He faithfully expounded God's Word and was not ashamed to defend the faith "once delivered" to the saints. Although he was not formally educated, his sermons were scholarly and it was necessary for the hearers to listen carefully and intently in order to have a good understanding of his preaching and teaching. His prayers were filled with adoration for the Lord. He was very conscientious about his manner of life so that it would not bring reproach on the name of Christ.

Brother Miller was also a faithful supporter of conference and made it a point to be there as much as possible. Jonas was concerned that conference would continue to follow God's Word and he was not afraid to speak out in defense of correct doctrine and practice. At the same time Jonas Miller was kind and tenderhearted and touched by the sufferings of others.

Brother Miller loved nature and was always very aware of his surroundings and the beautiful world that God had created. He could hold his own in a conversation and always had something interesting and worthwhile to say.

During the years of 1917-1949 Miller also served faithfully as the editor of the English version of *Herold der Wahrheit*.

Jonas Miller had a great love for church history and as a result he was quite knowledgeable about it.

Brother Jonas was in support of Bible conferences and was quite often called upon to preach at evangelistic meetings.

Miller's firm belief in the need for doctrinal purity and a lifestyle which put "shoe leather" to his beliefs may have been at least part of the reason why all of his children went on to serve the Lord both at "home" and "abroad."

At the age of 81, Jonas B. Miller went home to be with his Lord on September 20, 1952. His funeral service was held at Maple Glen Meetinghouse near Grantsville, Maryland.

—Gail L. Emerson

# *How to Become an Adulterer, a Fornicator, or Worse!*

by Bruce Oyen

Now, that's a strange title for an article, isn't it? I struggled with how to approach this important subject, and decided to use this title, knowing it would get readers' attention. I want your attention simply because we have an epidemic of immorality in our culture. But, as usual, what is in the popular culture is in the lives of evangelicals and fundamentalists, and has wormed its way into their respective churches too.

Therefore, let's consider this unusual subject using the Bible, God's Word, as our guide.

If you want to become sexually immoral, you can . . .

## ***1. Think That It Can't Happen to You!***

Every well-taught Christian knows that 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." But if you want to become sexually immoral, think it can't/won't happen to you because of your strong Christian convictions.

Though the Apostle Peter did not give in to sexual immorality, at least not after becoming one of Christ's hand-picked disciple-apostles, he is a good example of what can happen to someone, even an apostle, who is overly confident in his/her moral strength.

In Matthew 26:31 we read that Jesus told His apostles, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." But, in verses 33-35 we read, "Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never

be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples."

Well, it wasn't long before self-confident Peter did what he had told the Lord he would never do. His three denials are recorded in Matthew 26:70, 72, and 74.

He thought he stood strong, but under pressure he fell flat on his face. We might think we will always stand strong in the presence of sexual temptation, and that very idea is what can make us fall when faced with it. That false confidence in ourselves will get us to let our guard down, and, like Peter, we will end up weeping bitterly when we come to our senses.

If you want to become sexually immoral, you can . . .

## ***2. Allow Your Opposition to Sexual Immorality to Weaken by Exposing Your Mind to It!***

Right now, you might strongly oppose adultery, fornication, and worse. But, that can quickly change if you are not careful to keep your mind from unnecessary exposure to it.

*TV is a morality corrupter!* Not all TV programs are evil. But, unless you watch TV with discrimination, you will be bombarded with sexual immorality, the end result of which will be a weakening of your opposition to it. The voice of conscience is soon silenced when we watch what is evil. So, too, is the voice of Scripture, and the inner voice of the Holy Spirit.

When I first began to play guitar, the fingertips on my left hand, which I pressed on the strings for chords and notes, hurt. They even turned red and blistered. But, I persisted and calluses developed, eliminating the pain. That is what happens to us when we expose the mind to evil. First, it hurts, telling us to quit. Then, if we persist, it no longer bothers us like it should. We become calloused, hardened.

TV is a morality corrupter in subtle ways, not just by its blatant bedroom scenes.

*Exposure to "dirty" jokes, immoral literature, music, and persons will weaken our opposition to sexual immorality too! Therefore, we must take steps to not allow these corrupting influences in our lives, unless we want to become adulterers, fornicators, or worse ourselves!*

If you want to become sexually immoral, you can . . .

### **3. Believe the Lie That There Are Exceptions to God's Rules About Sexual Behavior!**

Human laws can have exceptions to them. For example, ambulances and police cars don't have to stop at stop signs or stoplights in emergencies. And parents can make exceptions to their own rules, such as a child's bedtime. It might normally be at 8 p.m., but parents can let them stay up later when they so choose.

However, an attentive reading of the Bible reveals that when it comes to God's laws about sexual ethics, there are no exceptions, *ever*. The world thinks differently. But, God does not follow the same rules the world does. So, what the Bible condemns, Christians must also condemn. First Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-18 unambiguously condemns adultery (extramarital sex), fornication (premarital sex), homosexuality (perverted sex), and a number of other nonsexual evils accepted by many persons nowadays.

First Corinthians 7:2 says, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman

have her own husband."

This means that sex without marriage is fornication, period! There are no exceptions, no extenuating circumstances, no bending of the rules. And, what is true of that is true of adultery and homosexuality. A candid reading of 1 Corinthians 5 makes it clear that the such behavior was taken so seriously by the apostles of Christ that Christians who were guilty of these evils were to be, in effect, told, "Straighten up, or get put out of the church!"

Yes, the Bible makes it plain that, difficult though it might be to follow at times, there are no exceptions to this law of God. A "frigid" spouse is not an exception. Nor is a sick one, or an absent one (like one in the military or in jail). *Not even an unfaithful spouse grants one an exception to the rule!*

Said differently, the only one God allows a married person to be sexually involved with is the one to whom he or she is married, period.

If you want to become sexually immoral, you can . . .

### **4. Regularly Attend a Church That Does Not Believe What the Bible Says About This Subject!**

The kind of church one regularly attends has a great influence on what one thinks on many subjects, including sexual behavior. So, if you want to go down the path of sexual immorality, you should attend a church that does not believe what the Bible says about it. We have one like that in our town. The "pastor" is a lesbian.

Such a church will have certain characteristics:

1. Its preachers will not tell you the Bible condemns adultery, fornication, and homosexuality.
2. Those practicing these sins will feel "comfortable" at such a church's services, and might even be allowed to hold responsibilities in the church.
3. The church will not discipline its members who violate Biblical teaching on this subject.

4. “Fallen” pastors will be allowed to keep their jobs, so long as they acknowledge their wrongdoing and promise to change—if their evil behavior even makes a difference in such a church.

If you want to become sexually immoral . . .

#### **5. *Don’t Regularly Read the Bible and Pray!***

The Bible has repeated warnings about immoral conduct, so if you want to avoid those warnings, don’t read the Bible very much. Consider some statements from Psalm 119.

Verse 11 says, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” Verse 35 says, “Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight.” Verse 59 says, “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.” Verse 101 says, “I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.” Verse 105 says, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

The Bible is a divinely appointed means of being strengthened against temptations to sin. It is God’s means of helping us live pleasingly to Him. But, if you don’t like to be reminded of these truths, skip Bible reading. You’ll feel better if you do so.

Moreover, if you want to live wrong, skip regular prayer too. It serves the same purpose as Bible reading does. Did not Jesus tell His disciples to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” in Matthew 6:13? Didn’t He tell them, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” in Matthew 26:41?

Not only does God use prayer to strengthen Christians against sin, He also has appointed it as a means for them to obtain forgiveness when they have committed sin. Did not David pray, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou

forgavest the iniquity of my sin,” in Psalm 32:5? Didn’t the Apostle John write, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” in 1 John 1:9? And isn’t this done in prayer?

Therefore, if you quit praying regularly, it will help you become sexually immoral, if that is what you desire.

If you want to become sexually immoral, you can also . . .

#### **6. *Feed Your Lower Instincts by Exposing Your Mind to the Details Given in Sex-Crimes Reports, and in Those Given About the Scandalous Lives of the Rich and Famous***

The news media of all kinds is great at reporting the sordid details of sex-crimes. They do the same with the scandalous lives of the rich and famous.

We must remember that Satan is very clever to use this “news” to draw us into immoral thoughts and behavior. He does it by appealing to our lower instincts with the bait of sexual pleasure derived from “informing” ourselves about what goes on in the lives of others. But the bait conceals a hook that can be hard to extract. In fact, we are in danger of not wanting it removed.

No normal person would swim in a pool of manure. So, why take your mind for a swim in the manure of sexual immorality, as it is found in the above-mentioned things? To do so is contrary to Philippians 4:8, which says, ‘Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think on these things*’ (emphasis added).

But, if you want to go down the wrong path, start to feed your lower instincts, or keep it up. It will also help you to become sexually immoral if you . . .

*(continued on page 6)*

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

## Stormy Peace

by Mark D. Avery

The photographer was in the right place at the right time. Captured on film was the beautiful lake. Several sailboats anchored on the left side of the frame enhanced the beauty of the scene. Swans floated gracefully on the calm water in the center of the picture.

A narrow beach formed the shoreline on the left side of the lake. A row of docks jutted into the lake along the other side of the picture. Stately old houses stood neatly behind the docks.

Looking across the lake, residents could view a row of hills forming a beautiful backdrop to the setting.

Over the hills, a storm was brewing. Dark, heavy clouds were approaching. Soon the setting would change. Tranquility would be removed by wind and rain.

The picture was titled *Peace*.

The title seemed appropriate enough. We live in a world beset by storms. A quick reading of daily headlines reminds us of

this fact. Today's news included stories about mass killings, an earthquake, tornadoes, political upheaval, and international crisis. And that is only a part of the picture. Storms are brewing and bearing down on us.

Still, Christians live in peace. Our peace comes from an inner, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Storms may thunder against us from the outside, but within remains a deep, anchored peace.

This peace does not come from a thriving economy. Nor is it shaken by economic reverses. The winds of political change do not control this peace. This peace comes from knowing Christ.

Christ is the constant that carries us through life. He imparts peace to all who know Him, so that all who know Him find a sense of peace despite the storms that life brings.

Our English word *peace* is used 111 times in the New Testament. Eighty-nine

of those times it translates the Greek word *eirene*. Paul used this word in the greeting of each of his Epistles.

Peace, as the term was used in the New Testament, is much more than the absence of conflict or war. The word was “Christianized” to convey the idea of spiritual prosperity and security despite the absence of safety and security in the world. Christian peace is found not in emotional calmness and material wealth, but in a right relationship with Christ.

As He was giving His “Last Will and Testament,” Jesus offered His peace to His disciples—the twelve, and successive followers of all generations: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

Interestingly, even with this peace the disciples did not live sheltered, protected

lives. They suffered mockery, persecution, even martyrdom. The peace that Jesus gave was not a world of tranquility; it was an inner calm, an assurance of His presence. This peace was the ability to live in conditions very adverse to their comforts, yet to do so without allowing the trouble to settle into their hearts.

The world still is no friend of grace; it is not friendly to Christians. Many are facing extreme difficulty and death because they are believers. Yet each believer is called to suffer his or her lot in life, living peacefully—governed by an inner spiritual peace and prosperity that is anchored in God’s presence—despite the storms. “Let not *your* heart be troubled [agitated], neither let it be afraid.” ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Church Herald & Holiness Banner*, May 2009.

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## HOW TO BECOME AN ADULTERER, A FORNICATOR, OR EVEN WORSE . . . cont’d.

### ***7. Spend More Time on Your Career, Hobbies, and Other Interests Than You Do With Your Spouse***

I realize that our jobs take up many hours each day. But, we should always keep our relationship with our spouses the number one priority in our lives, second only to God Himself. And this *takes* time. Much time. This *deserves* time. Much time.

Sexual sins, “affairs,” take place in a vacuum, often being the direct result of married persons not having strong physical and emotional bonds to their spouses. When those bonds are absent, it is much easier to allow someone else to fill the void. But, when they are present, it helps affair-proof one’s marriage.

So, if you want to set yourself up for an illicit relationship, just live your life as independently from your spouse as possible. Then, don’t be surprised if one of you, or both of you, become involved with someone else to make up the difference.

But if that’s not your desire, reread Genesis 2:18-25, and commit yourself to making your relationship to your spouse the number one priority of your life, second only to God. Genesis 2:24 says, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” If there were more *cleaving* between married persons, there would be less *leaving* for someone else.

### ***In Conclusion***

We have considered what to do if one wants to become an adulterer, a fornicator, or worse, so that we might consider how to avoid these terrible sins.

If necessary, make things right with God, with one’s spouse, one’s family, one’s church, and do so at once.

If you haven’t gone down the wrong path, be sure to do what it takes to maintain the kind of life God wants us to live. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Biblical Evangelist*, January/February 2009.

# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



*A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

## *Introduction to Quarter's Lessons*

The general theme for the quarter's lessons is Covenant Communities. One of the important factors in holding communities together is adequate and qualified leadership. Our four lessons for September deal with four highly capable leaders in Israel's history: Joshua, Gideon, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Note how they led and how their influence affected community life.

October's lessons from the Gospel of Mark focus on Jesus' ministry and the response of various individuals to His call to become part of the New Covenant Community.

November's lessons, from 1 and 2 Peter, focus on the character and behavior of Covenant people. Living in community requires proper relationships, both to God and one's fellow believers.

These lessons show the need for strong leadership, personal commitment, and godly living for the Covenant Community to function as it should. Allow these lessons to challenge you to commitment, cooperation, and holiness. May we each do our part to make our local Covenant Community one that honors God and builds up each believer in faith and practice.

**Teachers**, you will again find brief lesson helps at the end of each lesson.

## SEPTEMBER 6, 2009

### *Joshua: A Leader for the People*

Joshua 1:1-11, 16, 17

Moses was dead and the mantle of leadership for Israel now fell upon Joshua. Moses would be a tough act to follow. He was a great man, and had a close personal relationship with God. The task of leading Israel into the Promised Land, subduing the inhabitants and dividing the land among the tribes would be a difficult one. But Joshua was no neophyte. He had been Moses' right-hand man, accompanied him to Mt. Sinai, served as general over the army, was one of the faithful spies, and was appointed by God to be Moses' successor.

During the years Joshua served as

Moses' aide he was learning principles of leadership and ways of dealing with people. These were essential skills which he would need to lead Israel into Canaan and effect their establishment there as a nation. Joshua was now 85 years old and just starting on the most significant phase of his life's work, which would consume the next 25 years, ending in his death at age 110.

We note right away in this passage that Joshua was not alone in this venture; God was with him. God spoke to him in familiar terms and in recognition of his role of leadership. God repeated to Joshua His promise made to their "fathers" (some 600 years previously) and to Moses regarding occupancy of the land. In fulfillment of His promise God was now telling Joshua to move forward to invade, conquer, and occupy the land of

promise. He also outlined the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land.

Undoubtedly the strongest factor in this venture was God's promise to be with Joshua. He would be as faithful in guiding and protecting Joshua as He had been to Moses. Joshua needed this encouragement and it emboldened him to undertake the difficult tasks that lay ahead.

There was another factor that would provide guidance and stability for Joshua's tasks. He was to make the Book of the Law his constant companion, reading it, and meditating on it day and night. That, coupled with his personal courage and strength, would insure success. Joshua was assured by God that nothing would defeat them, because He would be with them. What comfort!

Joshua's first act of leadership was to command his under-officers to have the people begin preparations for the crossing of Jordan. In addition to packing, they were to prepare food, since, once started, the caravan could not stop till all were across the river. Remember, this was a group of several million people.

We note in verses 16 and 17 how Joshua's leadership was accepted and how the officers pledged their support and allegiance. They also invoked God's continuing presence and guidance upon Joshua.

The transfer of leadership was complete. God had promised His ongoing presence and guidance and the people had pledged their allegiance and cooperation. Israel was now set to move into another significant phase of their ongoing national history.

#### **For thought and discussion**

1. What makes a man a leader? What skills are needed? How are they acquired? Discuss.
2. Are people ever too old to be effective servants of God? What are the crucial factors involved?
3. From this passage we note a number of keys to success in any venture. What are they? Discuss them with your class.
4. What does this lesson teach us about leadership in the church today? What are the roles and relationships between lead-

ers and laity? Discuss.

5. What was the basis for Joshua's authority and leadership? How does that instruct leaders today?

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* The need for a leader to be a man chosen, guided, and supported by God.

*Key verses:* 8 and 9

## **SEPTEMBER 13, 2009**

### ***Gideon: A Deliverer for the People***

Judges 6:1-3, 7-16

We continue to move forward in Israel's history. They had now been in the Promised Land probably several hundred years at the time of today's lesson. The period of the Judges lasted from the death of Joshua to the beginning of the monarchy. It was a dark time in the life of Israel. There was no central leadership. There was a continual cycle of sin, oppression, and deliverance. Heathen nations Israel had not completely driven out of the Promised Land, as well as raiding parties from nations outside their boundaries, continued to harass them. Because Israel strayed from following God's explicit will, He allowed these nations to punish them for their unfaithfulness.

When Israel sinned, God punished. When God punished, Israel cried out for deliverance. Then God raised up a deliverer-judge who gave them temporary respite from their enemies. Altogether during this perhaps 350-year period, God raised up a total of fifteen judges who served varying periods of time as Israel's deliverers. Most of these were regional deliverers. Gideon, our subject for today, was the fifth such judge-deliverer. (Read Deuteronomy 7, and from Joshua 23 through Judges 8 for perspective and background on today's lesson.)

The first part of our text depicts another cycle of sin and resulting punishment upon Israel. This time the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Midianites whom the

Lord allowed to oppress them seven years. The plundering of crops and herds was so severe that many Israelites fled to the hills for security and protection (see verses 4-6).

This time when Israel cried out to God He sent a prophet to remind them why all this was happening. He had miraculously delivered them from Egyptian bondage and had brought them into this land of promise and plenty. But they had forsaken His commandments and followed the gods of the land. Therefore His wrath was upon them. However, His ear was open to their plea and He had a plan and a man to effect deliverance.

God's man was Gideon, a mighty man of valor. But he claimed to be only a poor farmer and an unlikely candidate to fulfill God's plan. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon and stated that "The Lord is with thee," Gideon responded by asking if that were true, why this oppression? Where were the miracles which their fathers told them of? Why had God seemingly forsaken His people after bringing them this far?

Was this angel simply the Lord in disguise? In verses 14-16 it appears that Gideon is actually in conversation with the Lord Himself. The Lord then commissioned him to go and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. He also promised His presence and blessing upon Gideon's mission. He also gave indication of the great victory Gideon and his "host" of 300 men would accomplish.

Willingness is the first prerogative for effective service for the Lord. Gideon met God's challenge and became a storied deliverer for his people.

#### **For thought and discussion**

1. Who were the Midianites? What was ironic about their oppression of Israel?
2. We've looked at this before, but why do people of privilege seem to so easily turn away from doing God's will? Discuss.
3. Moses was reluctant; Gideon was reluctant. Why does God choose reluctant people to do His bidding? Discuss.
4. Did Gideon doubt God's concern for Israel? What did God see in Gideon's life that made him a suitable deliverer?

5. Gideon's task seemed formidable. What was the key to his success, and ours when we face impossible odds?

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* That no task God asks of us is impossible to accomplish with His presence and guidance.

*Key verses:* 14 and 16

## **SEPTEMBER 20, 2009**

### ***Ezra: A Priest for the People***

Ezra 9:5-11, 15

We fast-forward approximately 700 years in Israel's history from last Sunday's lesson on Gideon to today's on Ezra. The period of the Judges was in the distant past. The monarchy was history. The captivity was over and the returning Israelites had been in their homeland about 80 years by the time of Ezra's ministry. Worship of God had been restored at Jerusalem, rebuilding of the temple had begun, was forcibly stopped, and after 16 years begun again and finally completed under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

However, the people were now in need of strong spiritual instruction and leadership. This is where Ezra enters the picture. We read of his mission to Jerusalem beginning in Chapter 7. Verse 10 says that he had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach" it in Israel."

We note in the first part of Chapter 9 that soon after his arrival in Jerusalem he was visited by the leaders of the people, explaining a problem. Some of the people, and even priests and Levites, were intermarrying with the heathen people of the land. That led to worship of other gods, which greatly displeased the God of Israel. Ezra's reaction was one of moral outrage and deep grief. Here was a situation which needed rectification.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra turned to God with the problem. The time of mourning was over. The time for action was at hand. In humility Ezra prostrated himself before God and admitted his shame

over the people's actions. He acknowledged that trespass and iniquity had been rampant among the people "since the days of our fathers" and that because of that they had been subjected to punishment and captivity.

Ezra recognizes that currently a remnant, the returnees, are experiencing freedom from oppression but that that freedom is threatened by their present unfaithfulness. He recognizes God's hand in bringing them back from captivity and giving them the security of His presence. God had been good to them: the temple was rebuilt, worship ritual reestablished. And what had they done? They had forsaken His commandments. They had disregarded His warnings. They had fallen into sin—and were again subject to punishment. They were undone and helpless before Him (see verses 12-14).

Ezra then asks, "O God, what do we do now?" So he does the only reasonable thing—he throws them completely upon God's mercy, while at the same time acknowledging their unworthiness of His consideration. And what was the result? As we read on through Chapter 10 we see the effect of Ezra's prayer and confession. The people responded with repentance and a determination to return to the Lord. They acknowledged Ezra's leadership role in this and pledged themselves to cooperate in bringing about the needed reforms.

The strength of a leader lies both in his commitment to God and his acceptance by the people. Ezra had both.

#### **For thought and discussion**

1. Why did Ezra identify himself with his people's sin even though he himself was not guilty? What effect did this have on the people? on his leadership?
2. Find specific passages wherein God forbade His chosen people to intermarry with the people of Canaan. Why was this?
3. What qualified Ezra for his role of spiritual leadership in Israel?
4. This lesson tells us much about man's fickleness. It also tells us something about God. Psalms 86:5 and 103:8 will help you find an answer.

5. What effect did Ezra's attitude have in determining the response of the people? Does that apply to leaders today as well?

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* A prepared, humble, and godly leader is essential in turning people back to God.

*Key verses:* 6 and 15

## **SEPTEMBER 27, 2009**

### ***Nehemiah: Motivator for the People***

Nehemiah 2:5, 11-20

About 13 years after Ezra had initiated religious reforms in Jerusalem, Nehemiah arrived to rebuild the wall of the city. The wall had lain in ruins for at least 150 years since their destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. Attempts had been made to rebuild, but progress was halted by unsympathetic neighbors (see Ezra 4:7-24). But now Nehemiah bravely entreated King Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild "the city of my fathers' sepulchres." (Read all of Nehemiah 1 and 2 for background.)

Permission was granted by the king. He also gave Nehemiah a blank check for needed supplies and materials and provided a military escort to see him safely through to Jerusalem, a journey of over 1,000 miles. That Nehemiah was favored and respected by the king is evident, even though he was in effect a captive. Above that, he was God's man in God's time. And a capable leader for the task at hand.

Nehemiah's first task after settling in Jerusalem was to assess the situation and formulate a plan of action. He did this quietly, privately. He went out by night and rode around the perimeter of the city, assessing the damage and formulating a plan to rebuild. The walls were in ruins and the gates destroyed. Jerusalem was vulnerable and defenseless. The broken-down walls also lent a negative psychological aspect to the mood of the people. Apathy

had set in. Nehemiah was out to change all that. But first he needed the cooperation of all levels of Israelite society, from the leaders down to the workers.

Once he had done his assessment and made a plan, Nehemiah called together the people of Jerusalem. He first reminded them of their distressed condition, then challenged them to action to remove their reproach. To underscore his appeal he informed them of God's hand behind all this and how even the king had blessed his proposal.

Enthusiasm for the task was immediate: "Let us rise up and build," was their unanimous response. So they began to make arrangements. Thoughtful, prayerful planning, coupled with thorough investigation and a clear presentation, had changed the mood of the people from apathy to eagerness. Strong leadership can move people to accept the seeming impossible task.

However, not everyone was enthused over the proposed project. Neighbors Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem attempted to derail the effort by ridicule (see also verse 10 and Chapters 4 and 6). They made fun of the project and accused the Jews of disloyalty to the king, little knowing that he had blessed and financed the project.

Nehemiah's response was in effect to tell them to mind their own business, that "the God of heaven will prosper us," and we will build the wall. He made it clear that His

project should be no concern of theirs.

Once again Nehemiah demonstrated his leadership abilities by taking full command and full responsibility for the project and by defying attempts by their enemies to thwart the project. He was a strong man with a defined purpose and the ability to motivate and lead others.

### For thought and discussion

1. Have you noticed in these lessons how God always provided a capable leader when the situation demanded it? Does He still do that today?
2. What outstanding qualities in Nehemiah's life made him such a capable leader? Are those qualities innate, or God-given? Good for discussion.
3. Is it wrong today to use the "king's" funds to forward the work of the church? What do you think? What restrictions, if any, should apply?
4. What does Nehemiah teach us about dealing with opposition to God's work?
5. List a number of keys to the successful completion of a project.

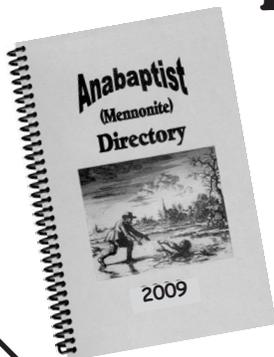
### Help for teachers

*Lesson emphasis:* The key to success in God's work is to have a capable, dedicated leader appointed and equipped by God and accepted by the people he leads.

*Key verses:* 17 and 18 ■

## Anabaptist (Mennonite) Directory 2009

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# 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

## Muslim Coals of Fire in Long Island

Mohammad Sohail, a Muslim shopkeeper from Long Island, NY, was robbed by a man with a baseball bat. Sohail pulled a gun on the thief, who dropped the bat and got to his knees. Sohail had mercy on the man, made him promise to not rob anyone again, and gave him \$40 and a loaf of bread. The robber was amazed and said, "I want to be a Muslim just like you!" So Sohail led him in the Shahaddah, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet." According to Muslim belief, the thief was now a Muslim. When Sohail turned to get the thief a gallon of milk, he fled. When the police arrived, Sohail declined to press charges.

What would you do in that situation? Do people say when they see our lives, "I want to be a Christian like you!"? —Source: *CNN*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Obama Fires Inspector General

Obama fired an inspector general who investigated misuse of federal grants by an organization run by Kevin Johnson, a big Obama supporter. The inspector general's investigation resulted in Johnson's organization needing to repay half of the \$847K in grants it had received from the federal government. The inspector general was subsequently fired by Obama. —Source: *AP*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Shooting at Holocaust Museum

On June 10, an 88-year-old white supremacist and Holocaust denier shot and killed a guard at the United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum. Two other guards returned fire, injuring the gunman. He is being charged with first-degree murder. The same man had been in prison for 6.5 years for trying to kidnap members of the Federal Reserve Board with a pistol and sawed-off shotgun in 1981. —Source: *Wikipedia*

\* \* \* \* \*

## PETA and the President

"Norfolk-based group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals wants the fly-swatter-in-chief to try taking a more humane attitude the next time he's bedeviled by a fly in the White House.

"PETA is sending President Barack Obama a Katcha Bug Humane Bug Catcher, a device that allows users to trap a house fly and then release it outside.

"'We support compassion even for the most curious, smallest and least sympathetic animals,' PETA spokesman Bruce Friedrich said Wednesday. 'We believe that people, where they can be compassionate, should be, for all animals.'

"During an interview for CNBC at the White House on Tuesday, a fly intruded on Obama's conversation with correspondent John Harwood.

"'Get out of here,' the president told the pesky insect. When it didn't, he waited for the fly to settle, put his hand up and then smacked it dead."

—Excerpt from "PETA wishes Obama hadn't swatted fly in interview" (<http://cli.gs/MUjtWL>) in *The Virginian Pilot*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Lancaster, PA—Most Surveilled City

“Some 165 closed-circuit TV cameras soon will provide live, round-the-clock scrutiny of nearly every street. . . . That’s more outdoor cameras than are used by many major cities, including San Francisco and Boston.

“Unlike anywhere else, cash-strapped Lancaster outsourced its surveillance to a private nonprofit group that hires civilians to tilt, pan and zoom the cameras—and to call police if they spot suspicious activity. No government agency is directly involved.

“Perhaps most surprising, the near-saturation surveillance of a community . . . has sparked little public debate about whether the benefits for law enforcement outweigh the loss of privacy.”

“Police blame most of last year’s 3,638 felony crimes, chiefly thefts, on gangs that use Lancaster as a way station to move cocaine, heroin, and other illegal drugs along the Eastern Seaboard.

“In 2001, a local crime commission concluded that cameras might make the city safer. Business owners, civic boosters, and city officials formed the Lancaster Community Safety Coalition, and the nonprofit organization installed its first camera downtown in 2004.

“Raising money from private donors and foundations, the coalition had set up 70 cameras by last year. And the crime rate rose.

“Officials explained the increase by saying cameras caught lesser offenses, such as prostitution and drunkenness, that otherwise often escape prosecution. The cameras also helped police capture and convict a murderer, and solve several other violent crimes.

“On a recent afternoon, camera operator Doug Winglewich sat at a console and watched several dozen incoming video feeds plus a computer linked to the county 911 dispatcher. . . .”

“Each time police logged a new 911 call, he punched up the camera closest to the address, and pushed a joystick to maneuver in for a closer look.

“A license plate could be read a block away, and a face even farther could be iden-

tified. After four years in the job, Winglewich said, he ‘can pretty much tell right away if someone’s up to no good.’

“He called up another feed and focused on a woman sitting on the curb. ‘You get to know people’s faces,’ he said. ‘She’s been arrested for prostitution.’

“Moments later, he called police when he spotted a man drinking beer in trouble-prone Farnum Park. Two police officers soon appeared on the screen, and as the camera watched, issued the man a ticket for violating a local ordinance.

“‘Lots of times, the police find outstanding warrants and the guy winds up in jail,’ said Winglewich, 49, who works from a wheelchair on account of a spinal injury.”

—Excerpts from “Lancaster, Pa., keeps a close eye on itself” (<http://cli.gs/m60SaH>) from *The Los Angeles Times*

\* \* \* \* \*

## French President and Religion

French President Nicolas Sarkozy addressed a joint session of parliament, calling for a law banning wearing Muslim burqas in public. France is already a Western leader in religious discrimination, having banned wearing veillings, crosses, Jewish yarmulkes, or any kind of religious symbol in public schools and universities.

—Source: AP

\* \* \* \* \*

## NYC Teachers Paid to Do Nothing

“NEW YORK – Hundreds of New York City public schoolteachers accused of offenses ranging from insubordination to sexual misconduct are being paid their full salaries to sit around all day playing Scrabble, surfing the Internet, or just staring at the wall, if that’s what they want to do.

“Because their union contract makes it extremely difficult to fire them, the teachers have been banished by the school system to its ‘rubber rooms’—off-campus office space where they wait months, even years, for their disciplinary hearings.”

—Excerpt from “700 NYC teachers are paid to do nothing” (<http://cli.gs/sWG14G>) in AP

\* \* \* \* \*

### What New Nixon Tapes Reveal

Newly released tapes of former President Richard Nixon (R) talking to advisors in the Oval Office reveal his thoughts the day after Roe v. Wade was decided. He was worried that legal abortions would create “permissiveness” and that “it breaks the family,” but he said he saw that “there are times when an abortion is necessary. I know that. When you have a black and white . . . or a rape.” Such disgusting racism is no better than KKK lynchings—both are race-motivated murders. This private sentiment stands in stark contrast to his public record as, in the words of one historian, “the greatest school desegregator in American history.” As I read through the 26-page *Wikipedia* entry on Nixon, the thing that stuck out to me was the consistent hypocrisy of Nixon’s political career on a wide range of issues that crossed his desk. A presidential biographer summed it up with, “How can one evaluate such an idiosyncratic President, so brilliant and so morally lacking?”

—Sources: *Wikipedia, New York Times*

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### Honduras Deposes President

The Honduran President Mel Zelaya was leading an effort to amend the Constitution to remove presidential term limits, emulating Socialist Hugo Chavez’s steps toward becoming dictator in-perpetua of Venezuela. The Constitution stipulates the Constitutional amendment process is that the Congress must call a national referendum, which, when successful, will cause a nationwide election of delegates to a Constitutional convention, which will then amend the Constitution. Zelaya tried to take Congress’ role and call a national referendum without their approval. Zelaya’s own Attorney General refused to cooperate because the action was unconstitutional. The Honduras Supreme Court ruled that the president calling the referendum was unconstitutional and ordered the military, which normally carries out the logistics of voting, to not carry out the vote.

When Gen. Velasquez, head of the Honduras military, announced that he would

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comply with the Supreme Court’s order, Zelaya fired him. When the military still refused to carry out the President’s orders in contravention of the Supreme Court’s orders, the President gathered a mob of supporters, broke into a military base to appropriate the voting supplies, and determined to go on with the referendum.

The Supreme Court ordered the President arrested, which the military did. The Honduran Attorney General was prepared to prosecute him for his crimes, but under a bargain, he resigned in exchange for being deported. Congress, in accordance with Honduran law, appointed the Congressional president (a member of Zelaya’s party) as the interim president until Presidential elections are held in November. Communist Fidel Castro and Socialist Hugo Chavez are loudly protesting this “coup” in Honduras that removed their Socialist ally from power. Barack Obama, speaking volumes to where the U. S. now stands, has joined in the condemnation.

—Sources: *Wall Street Journal, Fausta’s Blog, Consituicion Politica de la Republica de Honduras, Daily Kos, The New Republic*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Election Fraud in Iran?

There seems to be indication that the most recent election in Iran was rigged. Vote totals in some provinces were greater than the number of registered voters, the votes were counted in four hours (previous elections took over twenty-four), and low-level election employees were sent home during the vote, leaving only a skeleton crew. *The New York Times* quoted an Interior Ministry official as saying that all employees disloyal to the current regime had been purged in the weeks leading up to the election.

This apparent fraud has triggered massive street protests against the current Iranian regime and has resulted in a brutal crackdown by police and Basij militia. Neda, one young lady protester, was videoed being shot and killed by forces attacking protesters; she became an instant Internet martyr. —Sources: *Wikipedia, BBC*

Feedback: [hansmast@hansmast.com](mailto:hansmast@hansmast.com)

SWORD AND TRUMPET

# Why History Matters in Mennonite Schools

by Patrick Heatwole

I learned something from several of my history classmates in college—history *doesn't* matter. It's true, no one actually said it, but the news was often suggested by my colleagues' choice of back seats. Although they attended class, historical understanding wasn't the focus. Their true passions, however, surfaced during class introductions or in casual conversations. My classmates cared about coaching; becoming a history teacher was simply the most convenient way to the game.

Please do not misunderstand me. I respect those who aim to build students' character in the gym. Yet getting a history or social studies degree just to coach conveys a rather nonchalant attitude toward studying history—an attitude Christians, and especially Anabaptists, ought to reject robustly.

Unfortunately, it's not merely a few prospective football coaches who share historical apathy. Our culture's indifference regarding history is implied by the headlines we often read—"American Students Lag in Math and Science Achievement." Rarely do we see similar stories about the lack of student achievement in history or geography. This focus on math and science at the exclusion of history shouldn't surprise. It simply reflects the goals of a society and educational system primarily focused on preparing students for the workforce. Of course, schools are concerned with developing good citizens, but this too is largely defined as faithfully con-

tributing to economic uplift. Since jobs and money are the target, and technology and science offer the best path to the goal, studying the past becomes a second-class priority.

But Mennonite schools must exist for reasons more substantial than raising responsible, wealth-building citizens. This goal is far too trivial for followers of the Lord of the universe. In fact, the sacrifices we make to fund our own schools are squandered if our graduates' impact is only felt within the narrow confines of time and geo-political boundaries. Instead, we desire students who live lives of eternal purpose, capturing a vision for what God is doing, and participating in His global strategy. As Anabaptists, who pledge primary allegiance to a heavenly rather than an earthly kingdom, our educational objective should be the development of young men and women prepared for effective service in the kingdom of God in either local or cross-cultural settings. We must equip kingdom citizens.

If this is our purpose, Mennonite schools will offer a distinctive education, but it will not happen automatically. Only as school boards, administrators, and teachers purposefully plan curriculum and activities to prepare students for kingdom responsibilities will our objective be met.

Vital to a distinctive, equipping education is a renewed focus on teaching history. While our students should excel in all academic disciplines, studying history from a Christian point of view has the powerful

potential to shape attitudes, create understandings, and develop skills that prepare our students for successful twenty-first-century kingdom citizenship. Properly taught, history is not just a tedious recitation of past events but an essential part of the curriculum to develop God's servants for service today and tomorrow. But what does this look like? How can history class help students not only develop historical knowledge, but also proper heart-attitudes and skills? And how does one teach history from a Christian/Anabaptist perspective?

I suggest four ways the history classroom (beginning in first grade) can be a significant force in equipping kingdom citizens. Describing these four purposes of historical understanding will also provide us with some direction in thinking Christianly about history and help teachers explore practical ways to make the study of history transformational in their students' lives.

#### ***Equipping Citizens With a Kingdom Perspective***

Stephen Mansfield, a teacher and popular author, thinks he knows why many students hate studying history—their teachers focus on “dates and dead people.”<sup>1</sup> Whatever the reasons some dislike history class, it's true that students are too often stuffed with historical trivia with little chance to engage larger historical questions of cause and effect, change across time, and the effects of the past on their lives. In short, they are cheated out of asking the big question—what is our world about and where do I fit in? Helping our students get out of the trees to see the forest is our first job as history teachers.

Our task is to introduce students to history as the study of God's unfolding plan for time. We understand that God created time, and history is guided by His hand to a designated end. God even raises up and puts down powerful rulers (Dan. 2:21). When students gain an appreciation for the ways God has acted throughout history to achieve His goals, they begin to

develop a God-centered perspective (His priorities and desires) on their world. This perspective has practical significance in equipping kingdom citizens.

First, knowing God has a plan for history develops confidence in troubled times. As students learn that our sovereign God has the ultimate control and is moving history toward a victorious completion, they gain confidence knowing they are on the winning side. We can have peace even when our earthly country faces Muslim extremists and a crumbling economy.

Secondly, learning to view earthly events from God's point of view helps our students resist entanglement in earthly contests. Whether it is Obama vs. McCain, Democrats vs. Republicans, or China vs. the United States, teachers should train students to watch and wonder how God might be directing history for the advancement of His kingdom. As Joshua learned while preparing to battle Jericho, we dare not try to put God on the side of an earthly, partisan contest (Joshua 5:13, 14). Our job is to make sure we are on God's side. Instead of becoming the cheerleaders in national or international controversies, an understanding of God's perspective on the world will cause our students to begin to ask how they may best accomplish God's will in their time.

Thirdly, with an understanding of God's eternal plan for history, students begin to develop vision for what God wants to do in the future. As God's plan for the world becomes clearer, our students should grow more passionate about God's desire that the entire world should know Him. Kingdom citizens who understand that God is at work in history will be more excited to get involved in the Great Commission.

#### ***Equipping Citizens With a Kingdom Identity***

Preparing students to be good citizens is almost universally considered a central purpose of a history education. The stories students learn in history are a society's collective memory. This memory develops

a sense of citizenship—the responsibilities and privileges of living in that particular society. The largest association in the United States devoted to social studies education explicitly states that “social studies educators teach students [what is] necessary for fulfilling the duties of citizenship in a participatory democracy.”<sup>2</sup> As Christian teachers, however, we understand our primary citizenship to be heavenly. Therefore, contrary to the goals of the National Council for the Social Studies, we want our students to identify themselves first as citizens of God’s kingdom before assuming citizenship in a “participatory democracy.” Historical understanding in our Mennonite schools should develop within students a global, Christian identity with God’s people across time and geography.

One important way to develop this identity is to include in our collective memory some of the stories left out of many history texts. Too often students read history books that glorify warriors and political leaders while excluding those who lived for God’s kingdom. Mennonite schools’ history programs will be distinctive and effective as they choose to highlight not just the exploits of national heroes but also the heroes of the kingdom of heaven. Our students should hear of those who overcame evil with good, who chose to follow God against the odds, and who advanced the kingdom of heaven. A history not only of Hannibal, George Washington, and Dwight Eisenhower, but of Felix Manz, Elizabeth Elliot, and John Troyer.

Another way to help students develop their primary identity as citizens of the kingdom is to integrate the historical record in the Bible and church history into the history curriculum. As students see God’s people working on His plan throughout history, they begin to see themselves as one link in God’s overarching plan of history. Our classrooms will want to join in solidarity with the distinguished kingdom citizens past and present who are advancing God’s work. Like

Queen Esther, they can view themselves as first a child of God and understand that they have been placed in history “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).

### ***Equipping Citizens With Kingdom Understandings and Attitudes***

A challenge I face teaching in a school with little ethnic diversity is helping students develop understanding attitudes toward those who are different or less privileged. And I’m not the only one teaching in an overwhelmingly white, rural Mennonite school in a community becoming more diverse in our globalizing world. In such relatively sheltered environments, how do we help students understand the struggles many around us face? How do our students respond to new Latino or Asian immigrants in their neighborhoods or the struggles of many urban, African-American communities? Do our students look compassionately on those hurting in the world and desire to share Christ’s love?

History class offers an ideal environment to help our students learn about themselves and those around them. Whether or not we admit it, the past strongly influences the realities of our lives; therefore, studying history enlightens present conditions. As we explore how people’s pasts affect their current situations, decisions, and weaknesses and strengths, we can guide our students in developing caring attitudes. In our history classes we ought to teach the injustices inflicted on Native American populations, the terrible history of slavery in the United States, and the historical and economic reasons giving rise to immigration. An awareness of history equips kingdom citizens to minister more effectively by developing understanding and compassion for those they will touch.

Historical understanding not only leads to empathy, history also develops humility. As students study history they learn we are not the only ones through whom God has worked. In different cultures and reli-

gious traditions, men and women have done mighty works for the Lord. Studying history teaches us to appreciate those different from us; we will be less ready to criticize and more ready to listen to counsel from brothers and sisters, both living and dead.

### ***Equipping Citizens With Skills for Kingdom Advancement***

We live in the information age. As a teacher, I notice the change in the classroom; my students enter class each morning with more information than ever before about events and ideas around the world. Through blogs, radio talk-show hosts, YouTube, and Facebook, our students receive a stream of data each day needing to be filtered and sorted. Especially troubling with the spread of non-traditional news media is students' ability to get all their news from increasingly subjective and opinionated sources. In a world filled with information, it is vital that kingdom citizens learn to analyze and weigh all they hear and read. We need followers of Jesus who are discerning when they study for topical presentations, prepare for Sunday school, or listen to news that shapes their worldview. As educators we face a challenge—how to teach students to be wise consumers in an age of cheap information. History class is a place we can engage our students in careful research about the past to develop thinking skills essential to navigate the vast trove of information at their fingertips.

A central task of historians is to uncover the past based on source material. Historians carefully look at evidence from the past and analyze each source for bias, both intentional and unintentional. In history class, we should teach our students these same skills. History teachers should require their students to research, analyze historical documents, and discuss the validity of the sources. Students should learn to ask questions of what they read. What was the motive behind writing this? Who wrote this document? What biases

might this writer have? As students learn to wrestle with these questions, we can then teach them to transfer these skills to their current information usage. Effective kingdom citizens dare not be naive about the power of false information to take their eyes off truth. Studying history equips students to use the blessings and advantages of the information age to build God's kingdom.

Implementing these historical principles and practices in our schools is not easy. Few history curriculums on the market share our distinctive vision for educating kingdom citizens. In addition, many textbooks—even from Christian companies—too strongly emphasize earthly citizenship and fail to engage students in historical analysis. To communicate these four purposes of history effectively, we teachers must put effort into learning to think and teach Christianly about history. Quality classroom materials designed to teach history from a Christian/Anabaptist point of view will help. Yet to be equipped, students ultimately need teachers who personally embrace a vision for why history matters and act to implement this vision in the classroom.

It will take work, but the opportunity to see students prepared for effective service is an exciting calling. In addition, students will be happy for a purposeful history class. Considering its potential for our communities, let us renew our commitment to the history classroom as a vital tool in equipping a generation of world Christians, students interested in God's global work. May we equip kingdom citizens who, like the sons of Issachar, "understood the times" and wisely directed their lives (1 Chron. 12:32). ■

#### ENDNOTES

1. Mansfield, Stephen. *More Than Dates & Dead People*. Nashville: Cumberland House Pub., 2000.
2. From: "About NCSS": accessed at [www.socialstudies.org/about](http://www.socialstudies.org/about).

—Reprinted with permission from *Faith Builders*, Spring 2009 newsletter.

# *My Work or His Work?*

by David L. Burkholder

Too often we tend to dichotomize our daily activities into what we call our necessary secular work, and our work for the kingdom of God. We fail to realize that as followers of Jesus everything we do has some bearing on the kingdom and its advance. We need to realize that laying down one set of tools and picking up another, or changing one set of clothes for another changes only the immediate focus of life and not its basic intent.

Our attitude should be that of a Christian shoemaker who, when asked about his occupation, responded, “My occupation is being a Christian. I cobble shoes to pay expenses.” We need to understand that we are first of all Christians who are then, secondarily, farmers, teachers, plumbers, carpenters, businessmen, secretaries, housewives, etc., and not the other way around. The difference may be subtle, but it is not without significance.

A businessman, merchant, farmer, teacher, etc., should certainly be careful to apply Christian principles to his occupation so as to not discolor his profession of faith. However, that approach still places secular occupation as first emphasis and then applies Christian principles to Christianize the occupation. Bad? Not at all. But does the shift of emphasis somehow give one a loophole to make it our work for God’s kingdom instead of myself for God’s kingdom work? Subtle? Perhaps. Important? You judge.

Was the Apostle Paul, for instance, a tentmaking apostle, or a preacher, teacher, writer, missionary who made tents to meet expenses? Do you get the point? It’s not so much a matter of occupation, although such choice should figure large in the life of a follower of Jesus, but more an attitude, a direction-of-life emphasis.

When Christ calls to repentance, and we answer, He expects absolute and complete surrender of life—its ambitions, motivations, desires, and energies to the Lordship and control of Christ. God does not take part-time Christians into His family. He wants the whole life, with its abilities and capabilities. And, yes, its earning powers too.

Jesus made it clear in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:24-34 (see also Luke 12:24-31) that His followers dare not have loyalties divided between secular pursuits and kingdom work. In fact He tells us we must make the seeking of the things of God’s kingdom our first and primary responsibility and then trust Him for the things of life which we consider necessary. That kind of attitude takes concern away from secular pursuits and places emphasis on what is more important, what really matters, and that is the building of Christ’s kingdom.

We humans don’t like to give up control of our lives. We cherish our independence. But to thoroughly please God and be completely in His will we must submit ourselves totally to His control and direction. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes 12:13 tells us that the conclusion of the whole matter of life is to “fear God, and keep his commandments.” That emphasizes respect and reverence for God, which implies a giving up of one’s personal desires to His control. And that the keeping of His commandments should become our first priority.

What are His commandments? We read in Deuteronomy 6:5 that we are to “love the LORD [our] God with all” our heart, soul, and might. In Matthew 22:38 Jesus described this as “the first and great commandment.” That sets one’s first priority in life of honoring God. By extension,

*(continued on page 26)*



# 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.*

## A Mighty Fortress



by Martin Luther

**Lyrics:** Many of the Psalms describe God as a place of refuge or a “fortress.” Some of these instances may refer to God’s sheltering from the assaults of physical enemies, but it is clear that the psalmist also sees God as a place of refuge from the onslaughts of the spiritual powers of darkness. Martin Luther’s hymn, “A Mighty Fortress,” describes the “fortress-like” attributes of God, and contrasts them to the lesser (but still significant) powers of darkness.

This hymn is set up as a drama between two opposing forces. The stage is set with the first stanza of the hymn. The first half describes God as a “mighty fortress,” and someone who is helping us to overcome the “flood of mortal ills.” Luther then paints the picture of the other side: a formidable foe indeed, with whom no one on earth can be compared. Given this comparison, the second verse concludes that our own strength is no match for this enemy, and that the only way the battle can be won is with the help of the “right Man,” Jesus Christ. Each half of the third stanza begins by describing some aspect of Satan’s kingdom, but then relates how God’s truth will triumph and seal Satan’s doom. In the final stanza, Luther mentions the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts that will help us in the battle. He concludes with the important realization that the war is not about us; God’s truth is what will ultimately conquer.

The enigmatic phrase in the third verse “one little word shall fell him” has no doubt

been debated ever since the origin of the hymn. Many feel that it is a reference to Christ, either by the word’s being “Jesus” or the fact that Jesus was often called “the Word.” Others have argued that it is simply a reference to the Bible, the “Word of God.”<sup>1</sup> In any case, Luther gets across his point that God’s power is infinitely greater than that of Satan.

**Music:** The rousing tune that accompanies this hymn text is particularly suited to its message of strength and fortitude. The second musical phrase is an exact repetition of the first, adding strength to the opening half of the hymn. The third line brings a slight shift in the character and stability of the music. This is particularly appropriate for expressing the shift of mood in the text, especially for the first and third stanzas. The shorter phrases and broader harmonic language of the second half have the potential to leave the ending feeling a little unsettled. However, to finish the tune, the composer uses the same descending scale that concluded the first two lines. This quickly and effectively brings the piece to a firm conclusion.

As with many older hymns, the origin of this tune has been disputed. However, most scholars now agree that it was indeed Martin Luther who composed this tune. The original form had a very different rhythmic structure than the common meter tune that we sing today, but the sequence of pitches is

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

# A Mighty Fortress

*The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress. – PSALM 18:2*

MARTIN LUTHER, 1529

EIN FESTE BURG P. M.

MARTIN LUTHER, 1529

1. A might-y for-tress is our God, A bul-wark nev-er fail - ing;  
2. Did we in our own strength confide, Our striv-ing would be los - ing;  
3. And tho' this world, with dev-ils filled, Should threaten to un - do us;  
4. That word a - bove all earthly pow'rs—No thanks to them—a - bid - eth;

Our help-er He, a - mid the flood Of mor - tal ills pre - vail - ing.  
Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choos - ing.  
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to tri - umph through us.  
The Spir - it and the gifts are ours Thro' Him who with us sid - eth.

For still our an - cient foe Doth seek to work us woe; His craft and  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Je - sus, it is He; Lord Sabaoth  
The prince of darkness grim—We trem-ble not for him; His rage we  
Let goods and kin - dred go, This mor - tal life al - so: The bod - y

pow'r are great, And, armed with cru-el hate, On earth is not his e - qual.  
is His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the bat - tle.  
can en - dure, For lo! his doom is sure,—One lit - tle word shall fell him.  
they may kill: God's truth a - bid-eth still, His king-dom is for - ev - er.

essentially the same.<sup>2</sup>

1. <http://www.puritanboard.com/f18/luthers-one-little-word-17718/>

2. [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

**CORRECTION:** (July 2009) Joseph Barnby, not John B. Dykes, was the composer for "O Perfect Love."



## 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.*

### *Revelation 5 — The Sealed Book*

by Delmas I. Gehman

**R**evelation 5 opens with a new scene in the throne room of Heaven. We should note that the Book of Revelation is the throne book of the Bible. Revelation 4 is the throne chapter of the Bible. And here is a new scene in the throne room of glory.

**And I saw.** This opens a new vision by John, the apostle. It is tied to his previous vision in Chapter 4 by the word *and*. This vision consists of one verse and it merits special attention.

The focal point is the book in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. The book is written within and on the backside. In those days they did not have hardcover books like we do today. All they had was leather or parchment scrolls. It will help if you think of the book as a scroll, written on the inside and on the backside, the outside, and sealed with seven seals. The book is sealed securely to secure its contents.

There are seven seals. Each seal seems to seal up a specific part of the judgments that will be poured out upon the earth. It helps our understanding when we compare Scripture with Scripture. So we need to ask the question, "Do we have any other mention of such a book in Scripture?" Immediately many Bible students will think of the Book of Daniel. In Daniel 12:4, Daniel, the prophet,

heard the words the angel gave to him and he was told to shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. Daniel said he heard the words (of the book), but he understood not. Here in Revelation 5 the same sealed book is in focus again.

**And I saw a strong angel.** John saw another new vision of a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, loud enough so that all the eligible ones could hear. The angel presents a challenge. "Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof?" Who is qualified? Who is *deserving* or *suitable* to open the book? The search is on. The search went to Heaven (the abode of the angels), to earth (the abode of man), and to the netherworld (the places of the demonic world). And no man in Heaven nor earth nor under the earth was found. None was found who was worthy or suitable; no one met the qualifications. It is significant that the search is on for a man. They were not searching for an angel. This tells us the contents of the book have to do with man and his relationship to the earth. No man was found worthy to open the book, to read the book, or to look thereon.

We know that God knows all things, and He does not have to search. Yet, it seems to me, He does it in an orderly way for man

and for all the angelic world. When God is done with His plan, it cannot be said that anything was done which would not hold up to scrutiny. All of God's workings are righteous and holy. When God's plan is complete all will have been just and equitable and orderly and no one will be able to question Him when He is finished.

There was not one man found, even among the redeemed, who was *worthy* to open this sealed book. "*And I wept much.*" The sense is I wept and wept. John was devastated because none was found who was "able" (verse 3) or worthy to open the book or to look inside. Why was John affected in such a way that he wept and wept? What was the significance of the book not being opened? Apparently the contents of the book were secret and had not yet been revealed. If no one was found to open it, the contents would remain forever sealed. What are the contents of this book?

As we accept the divine outline for the Book of Revelation in Revelation 1:19 we understand that this sealed scroll contains the "*things which shall be hereafter.*" It is quite clear as we move on through the Book of Revelation that the book contains things that are future for the earth. In the following chapters as each seal on the book is opened, it reveals and brings into rapid action judgment on the earth. It seems to me that this document could be similar in some ways to the one Jeremiah made at God's command.

It is recorded in Jeremiah 32 how Jeremiah bought land at God's command and sealed up the evidence for a later time. When the children of Israel would come back to the land, Jeremiah's descendants would take possession of this land by presenting the title deed. It seems to me this document could be very similar. We know that in the Garden of Eden, Adam was given dominion over the earth (see Genesis 1:28). We also know from the Scriptures that Adam and Eve yielded to sin and thus ceded control to Satan, who is shown in 2 Corinthians 4:4 as the god of this world, the one who has control of it, as far as God

will allow him. And it seemed that Daniel the prophet was very concerned about the things that were revealed to him. He wondered about it, but God told him to seal up the book until the time of the end.

The contents of this book relate to pouring out judgment on the earth dwellers, the devil's people, and taking action to take back control of the earth from the devil. I say it contains God's redemptive program for the earth. Can we say that the judgments poured out are part of God's redemptive program? I think we can. These judgments which are poured out are the redemptive program of God to offer once more to earth dwellers the privilege of coming to God through Jesus Christ and not identifying with the Antichrist and his system. This redemptive program includes purging the earth of sin and sinners who reject the clarion call in order to cleanse it and prepare it for the righteous reign of Christ on earth.

This is what we have revealed here in the Book of Revelation. We have it laid out chapter by chapter, event after event, judgment after judgment, in rapid succession. It shows Jesus Christ making moves one after another against the devil and his program and, at the end of the Book of Revelation, Jesus Christ comes out of Heaven with the armies of Heaven following Him. He will conquer and will reign supreme for one thousand years on this earth and then will turn the kingdom back to God that God may be all in all!

So, I think, it is a fair depiction to think of this sealed scroll as relating to the future of the earth. If no one was found worthy to open the scroll, the book would remain sealed and the devil and his forces would remain in control over the earth. No wonder John wept and wept! It is the desire of God's children the world over to see God have His way and to have the devil be overthrown. It is our desire to be with the Lord forever and to see His purposes fulfilled completely. And thus we say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

One of the elders said unto John, "*Weep*

not.” This is one of the twenty-four elders mentioned before in Chapter 4—one of the redeemed church. “Stop weeping! Someone has been found to open the Book! The Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed.” This reminds me of Genesis 49:9, 10: “*Judah is a lion’s whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,*” etc. The “Lion” speaks of His power and His ability to open the book and His power to rule.

**The Root of David.** The word *Root* is capitalized. It is speaking about a person! In Isaiah 11 He is referred to as the root of Jesse, and also in Romans 15:12. “*And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.*”

**Hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof.** He is able! He has overcome! He has triumphed and is able to open the book and to loose the seals thereof!

**And I beheld, and I saw in the midst of the throne and the four beasts and the elders, stood a Lamb.** In the middle of the throne, with the living creatures and the elders circled around, there was a Lamb. Wait, didn’t the elder tell John the Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed? Now John looks and he sees a Lamb, as though it had been slain! How can that be? What does this mean? The elder said a Lion and now John looks and he sees a Lamb! Is there a mistake here? No, not at all! Isn’t it marvelous how the Word of God is so detailed and so descriptive. Where are those people who are sure God is a God of love and won’t hurt anyone and would never judge anyone? He came as a Lamb the first time and He will come the second time as a Lion. It is right here that Jesus Christ receives His commission as Judge of all the earth.

And yet, He is seen here as a Lamb that has been slain. Right here we see that Jesus triumphed through His death as the Lamb of God and through His resurrection. As a Lion He is **able** to take the book. As a Lamb

He is **worthy** to take the book and open its seals. It was through His death and resurrection that He triumphed over sin and death. Because of this He is worthy to take the Book and open its seals and to set in motion His righteous judgment by which He judges the wicked!

It is significant that the Lamb is *standing* in the midst of the throne. At Stephen’s trial in Acts 7:56, Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And what is He doing there? According to Romans 8:34, Christ is at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. According to Hebrews 1:3, “*when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.*” “*But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool*” (Hebrews 10:12, 13). In Stephen’s time He was standing. Could it be that Christ was standing when there was something momentous going on such as Stephen’s persecution and martyrdom? Here in Revelation 5 He is standing again, ready for action, in preparation for stepping forward to receive the book and to bring into action His righteous judgment. He is standing, ready to move forward as King!

Here we also have again the seven Spirits of God, and here they are sent forth into all the earth. This reinforces the belief that they are angels, ministering Spirits sent forth. From here throughout the rest of the Book of Revelation we see these seven Spirits of God as seven angels which have a special work to do in pouring out God’s judgments on the earth. In Chapter 8:2 John saw the seven angels which stood before God.

He (the Lamb) came and took the Book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne. It seems all Heaven was interested in this book and concerned about it. And the entire universe stands in solemn awe when the Lamb steps forward to take the Book and open it. It seems quite clear to me that this Book holds within it the future of the earth. In the Garden of Eden man was given dominion over all creation. Then man

fell into sin and thus forfeited his dominion to Satan, the usurper, and Satan became the god of this world. From then on the whole human race was under the bondage of Satan, hopelessly lost!

But God, in His foreknowledge, knew that man would choose the wrong way and fall into sin. And God had a plan in place to redeem the world from the clutches of the enemy. There was only one way that man could be redeemed, and that was by the shedding of blood. It had to be the shedding of blood of a perfect sacrifice, not the sacrifice of animals but of a perfect man. And there was no man who qualified! All men were corrupted by the devil. Can you imagine the devil rubbing his hands with glee as he thought about how he had thwarted God's plan?

But God sent His only Son into this world. He stooped down to the lowest of the low and became man. He was born of a virgin, and became a man. He took upon Him human flesh. He lived a sinless life and the holy, sinless Son of God gave His life on the cross as a perfect Lamb for our sins and for the sins of the whole world! And again, the devil thought he had won a victory. The devil thought he thwarted God's plan again! But three days later, the stone was rolled away, and the grave could not hold Him! He rose again, and His body did not see corruption! Praise God! And now, the perfect Lamb steps forward. He has sacrificed His perfect life as a ransom for the sins of the whole world. And He died and rose again! And **thus He is worthy** to open the Book and to break the seals! There was no one else. And because He is worthy, He can move forward in the final acts of judgment on the wicked earth dwellers and in the final phases of redemption that we as Christians are groaning for and awaiting. Even all creation is groaning and travailing, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body!

It is not a dead hope—it is a living hope because the Lamb has been slain and rose again and because of this the Lamb has prevailed to open the Book! This is the only way He could be worthy! No wonder the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders

fall down before Him and lead out in the chorus of worship, praise, and adoration to the Lamb which has been slain.

They had harps and golden bowls full of odors or incense which are the prayers of the saints. The elders were offering up the prayers of the saints as incense to God. And they sung a new song. Who sang? The elders sang the song.

**Thou art worthy**—this is true worship. Worship can be defined as worth-ship. To truly worship is to assign worth to someone. And the elders here say, *“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”* A price was paid for our redemption! He by His death and resurrection has purchased men from the clutches of the enemy! Thus He is worthy! Praise God for the blood of the Lamb!

This can be no other group but the redeemed church! There is no other group that fits: purchased, redeemed, ransomed, from every tribe and nation! It cannot be angels, for the good angels need no redemption and there is no salvation for the evil angels who are *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day”* (Jude 6). The elders take the initiative and all the vast throng joins in. The elders address the Lamb directly in song: “Thou art worthy!” It is noteworthy that *only the elders address the Lamb directly* in this heavenly praise to the Lamb. Only the redeemed address the Lamb directly. **And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.** The reign is still future at this point in the revelation. This poses a problem for those who say the kingdom and the reign is now. We shall reign! This is truly marvelous! All I can say is “Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!” How can it be? This marvelous salvation! In the next several verses there is universal praise to the Lamb.

**And I beheld, and I heard.** John observed with his eyes and his ears. And





## Counseling From the Word

### Overstimulation

by James Rudy Gray

There seems to be a new addiction that is sweeping our land. It leaves people numb, bored, and often depressed. What is it? Overstimulation.

People today run with a much faster pace of life than generations before us. We are not just busy—we are busy craving pleasure. Like the ancient Epicureans, the motto of many is “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” While God has given us life to enjoy and pleasure itself is not a sin, the addiction to it is.

Dr. Archibald Hart believes the church is contributing to this problem. He writes, “There has been a subtle shift in the last decade or so toward more of a stimulant-driven spirituality. With the proliferation of high-tech communication, education, and entertainment, we have become more dependent on excitement. This leads to needing more excitement. Soon, a person is burned out.

The overuse and abuse of the Internet has been a major culprit in this downward spiral. The things we have come to rely on so heavily in this culture are the very things that become the tools of our undoing. As Hart writes, “There is no downtime. That’s the problem. The system is even designed to make you feel guilty or lazy if you attempt to rest.” He says the key is to find a way to maximize your God-given ability to enjoy pleasure without overloading it.

What is the cure to this addictive and destructive cycle? Hart suggests such things

as talking to a family member, walking the dog, doing chores, learning a musical instrument or foreign language, writing a story, exercising, playing simple outdoor sports, . . . or just thinking.

The phenomenon that we are seeing today is the shutting down of our pleasure system because of too much pleasure. There is a new generation in America that professes to be relationship-driven. However, it is a new kind of relationship they have created. Connections are built and maintained, not on the basis of God’s truth and moral absolutes, but on a strong appetite for fulfillment, stimulation, and pleasure. This appetite is fed through the tools of technology which are not in themselves bad but produce a bad result when they become the instruments of overstimulation.

What can be done? A person needs time to pray, meditate, and relax. People should work, but they should also relax. I recently counseled a couple whose marriage is failing—they are burned out. He has become an Internet game addict, and she is searching for something more. Both have given up hope of renewing their marriage. Both claim to be Christians, but neither one is following the counsel of Jesus in Matthew 6:33 to “*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*”

People can change. We must have God as our source in order to do it most effectively, but people can change. I think most

*(continued on page 33)*

# ***Stick to Your Standards!***

## **Flip Side of Legalism**

by Hugh Pyle

*“Lift up a standard for the people.” – Isaiah 62:10*

In this day of permissiveness, preachers and Christian workers are being bombarded with temptations to “avoid legalism” and “be not righteous overmuch.” Christian school principals are being chided for having rules and regulations. Guidelines are being dropped. Rules are being loosened. Folks are saying the Bible warnings about worldliness and sin must not be taken too literally.

Parents might remove their pupils from our schools. The well-heeled professional people in our churches might decide to move their membership down to the First Progressive Church. We won’t appeal to the mod, enlightened sophisticates if we have biblical standards for our people. What’s a pastor to do?

### ***Bible Standards Are Not Legalism***

Are Bible standards legalism? The dictionary says that legalism is strict adherence to the law. In the theological sense, legalism is the doctrine of salvation by good works. Now I do not know any fundamental, Bible-believing preacher who thus is a legalist. There *are* some people in religious circles who (as they did in Jesus’ day) teach “for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). This is wrong.

But it is not wrong to have biblical standards. “The Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard” (Isa. 59:19). Bible standards are not legalism. Preaching against sin and warning our people about the consequences of sin and compromise are a command from God.

One writer wrote an article called “An Alternative to Legalism.” I am sure he is a

good preacher and a sincere brother in the Lord, but he has declared that we have been confusing a whole generation of young people because we fail to deal with legalism courageously. Rather, we have confused a whole generation by failing to deal with *sin* courageously.

He states that “legalism is disastrous to personal Christianity,” that we “need to examine our system of values which is harmful and does not work.” Now I agree that legalism would be harmful. But my contention is that having standards, regulations, and guidelines for our members is not legalism.

He wants to teach real spirituality, not a superficial religion. So do I, and so does every sincere pastor I know. If legalism is just a “system of rules,” as is stated, then I would be against it. But we need to have rules. Let a school try to operate without them! (Many public schools have tried it with disastrous results!)

Homes with no rules and guidelines have produced a generation of hippies, perverts, and sassy rebels. They also have contributed to the host of teenage pregnancies and suicides!

Jesus said, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). Now what “commandments” is He talking about? We all know that the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses are not the only commandments in the Bible. Here are a few others:

*“Let your light so shine before men”* (Matt. 5:16).

*“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation”* (Matt. 26:41).

*“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel”* (Mark 16:15).

*“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him”* (1 Cor. 16:2).

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”* (Heb. 10:25).

*“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2).

*“Be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph. 5:18).

*“Walk in the Spirit”* (Gal. 5:16).

So far, so good. Every honest preacher would want his members to read, know, and obey these commands. He would not want to rule out any of them. But there are other commands in the New Testament. For instance:

*“Be not conformed to this world”* (Rom. 12:2).

*“Flee fornication”* (1 Cor. 6:18).

*“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth”* (Eph. 4:29).

*“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ”* (Phil. 1:27).

*“Be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample”* (Phil. 3:17).

*“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Col. 3:2).

Now in order to instruct young people (and young converts among adults) about such commands, we’re going to have to do some explaining. What does it mean to be not “conformed” to this world in actions, language, and dress, among other things? How can you warn young people to flee fornication in the present society without warning them about pornography, vulgar TV programs, and dirty rock music? These are some of the things that lead to fornication.

Since God commands that no corrupt communication should come out of the mouth, does not a Christian school have to have some rules about the language that can be used on campus?

When Paul mentions following him as an example in Philippians 3, he proceeds “even weeping” to tell them that some of them are “the enemies of the cross of Christ . . . who mind earthly things” (Phil. 3:17-19). Must not the church and school, then, lay down some guidelines or standards about these “earthly things”?

Since God commands, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15), and since we know that He is talking about this world *system* (not the trees, mountains, flowers, and other such beautiful things), does it not behoove us to explain what these worldly things are?

Since God tells us, “Abstain from all appearance of evil,” are we not to have standards about dress, hair, and indulgences that would identify one with the evil world around us?

When the Beatles first came over here from England with their feminine, mop-headed haircuts, preachers were aghast; and we all thundered out against this violation of manhood and propriety. We did not hesitate to preach, “Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?” (1 Cor. 11:14). Now if God said it was a shame then, is it any less a shame now? Or was God’s Word valid only during the ’50s and ’60s? Is He not the God of today also? Why is it suddenly “legalism” to preach this part of the New Testament?

I was in Denver in a revival. The pastor has hundreds of young people in his church and school who dress like ladies and gentlemen. The boys have men’s haircuts. You never saw a happier, livelier lot of Christians anywhere. I have been with no other group who were more responsive to the Bible, soul winning, and spiritual living. The school rules had not made legalistic zombies out of them. The youth pastor told me one day that he could almost always look at a boy’s hair and tell what kind of music he listened to. You almost always find the long-haired, feminine-looking ones still attached to the “beat” music of this world. Watch it!

Those who charge us with legalism say, "The child may look great on the outside, but be ungodly on the inside." That is, of course, true. But they do not turn around and say, "The child may look terrible, grubby, and raunchy on the outside, but be a wonderful, soul-winning Christian on the inside!"

There are those who think we should act like the world and look like the world in order to win the world. But it is not necessary to dress like a soldier to win a soldier or to look like a clown to win a clown. For me to put on greasy overalls in order to win a mechanic is not even sensible. A Christian lady does not have to dress indecently to witness to a go-go girl.

Public schools once had standards and a code of morality. And there were *rules*. In those days students were sent to the office for chewing gum, getting out of line in the halls, talking in class, and such matters.

Then the rules were dropped, and permissiveness took over. Today, students in these same schools have to be dealt with about fondling in the halls, rape, pushing drugs, coming to school drunk, or committing murder! We'd better get some of the right kind of legalism back into the schools!

It has been suggested that fundamental preachers who preach against long hair on boys, immodest girls, dancing, and rock music are neglecting such matters as covetousness, lying, hatred, and strife. This was certainly not true in my preaching when I was a pastor. I preached on the sins of the spirit as much as I preached on the sins of the flesh. I think most Spirit-filled preachers do.

#### ***Positive or Negative?***

I also preached on the fruits of the Spirit, the happy potential of a Christian, the joys of the Christian life, and the victory we could readily have in Christ.

There must be as much positive preaching as negative preaching. I believe it was Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., who said, "The way to *don't* is to *do* so fast you don't have time to don't." There must be a positive post on the

battery. But try getting a car started without the negative post. You have to have both!

#### ***Preachers Too Lax***

We have a generation of church members on our hands today who do not know what is right and wrong anymore. Preachers have been so lax and so soft for so long that sin is no longer black. In fact, it is hardly bilious gray anymore.

Vance Havner has said that when all of God's sheep become dirty gray, the black sheep feel more comfortable. But we are not here to make sinners feel comfortable in their sins! What are preachers for if we are not to lift up our voices like a trumpet and show God's people their sins? (See Isaiah 58:1.)

Our critics say that "rules without reason build rebellion." I'm sure that would be true. But good, scriptural rules and standards are not without reason. We never had any rules for our children that we did not have good reason for. We never had any regulations in our Christian schools that were not founded upon reason.

Some charge that preachers' children often become rebellious. Sometimes some of them have. But most preachers I have been with in meetings have dandy children who love the Lord and are loyal to God, to church, and to parents.

And the preachers' children who have become rebels probably got that way because of one of three things: (1) a dad who was so busy with everybody else's children that he neglected his own; (2) inconsistency on the part of one or both parents; (3) a fuss or split in the church that left the child bewildered and heartbroken about the way Christians act. So "legalism" strikes out again.

I don't know of very many people, if any, who most admire their parents because they were permissive and let them get away with murder. Do you?

#### ***Do We Need Laws?***

The wise king wrote, "The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the

snare of death.” It is true that some young people who sat under my ministry did go the way of the world and are not living for God today. But cannot every preacher say that? I do not believe they went astray because of sound Bible preaching and good biblical standards in the church and/or school. Many other things enter into it. Some came from broken homes. Others had one parent who was spiritual and another who was a soft compromiser. Others backslid because their parents did. Others were offended by weak Christians.

A pastor can do only so much. Worldly and sarcastic people in the church often cause a young person to stumble (another good reason why a pastor had better have good standards for his church leaders!). The pastor cannot do it all. But he had better preach honestly against sin and be able one day to stand before God without the blood of these wayward people on his hands. Paul cried, “We preach, *warning* every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom” (Col. 1:28).

Jeremiah said that if a preacher stands in God’s counsel and causes the people to hear God’s words, he will turn “them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings” (Jer. 23:22). “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11).

Are we to have no rules? Then what does Hebrews 13:7 mean when God says, “Remember them which have the rule over you”? The bishop or preacher is enjoined to be “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Tim. 3:4). God could use Abraham because He knew that old Abe would “command his children . . . after him” (Gen. 18:19). Is this legalism? I think it is just obedience to God.

### **“Preach Positive”**

Now we’re told to “preach positive sermons” and leave off the standards. It was the liberals who first started that business; then the new evangelicals. Then the conservative-minded, denominational preach-

ers decided that was the popular route. Now, sadly, a lot of the independent men who built their churches on hard preaching and Bible standards are letting down and going along the same route.

We have moved uptown now. We don’t have the little storefront, wooden buildings on the back streets anymore. We now have the big, imposing auditoriums on the boulevards. We must attract the better clientele.

Well, I tell you what, Preacher, you stick to the Bible and preach against sin and stay on your face before God, and God will honor your ministry with souls, and the crowds will follow. God will take care of *your* business if you obediently take care of *His* business. You may or may not have a great following among people. Different men have different gifts, different potential, and different leadership abilities. Some of our best and most dedicated men are pastors in remote country or small-town churches. But these men who honor and obey God will one day hear His “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

The same book of Galatians that tells us that we are not under law but under grace, also tells us that Christ came to deliver us from this evil world (Gal. 1:4) and warns us that the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: “Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry,” etc. (Gal. 5:19-21).

Now how are you going to explain what fornication is, what lasciviousness is, if you do not specify? One bright-looking high schooler recently asked me what a benediction was. If he couldn’t define *benediction*, I hate to think what he would have done with words like *lascivious* or *licentious*!

Are we going to permit our young converts to go on killing themselves with tobacco just because there is no command in the Bible, “Thou shalt not smoke”? Yes, indeed, the Holy Spirit can direct Christians into right living, but good preachers and teachers are here to guide their thinking and to show them both from the Scriptures and from daily life all around us what is right and what is wrong for a believer. Then

we introduce them to the Spirit's power so they can be victorious. Even Paul had a real battle with the flesh and cried, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19).

### ***How to Go About It***

First, make up your mind that you are going to obey God. Get Dr. John Rice's little booklet *Why Preach Against Sin?* and read it several times. See how much God has to say in the Bible on this subject.

Second, remember that you are obligated under God to put up the warning sign where the bridge is out. The media, the public schools, and the entertainment world all are doing all they can to ruin our young people. Many parents do not give their children the warnings and the instructions they need. *You* may be their only hope.

Third, love them and be genuinely interested in your people. The shepherd should genuinely care for his sheep. If they know that you love them, your people will take almost any kind of strong preaching. Preach the truth in love.

Fourth, don't expect unsaved people to understand and appreciate what you are trying to get across to the saints. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see. . . ." Unsaved people will not want to subscribe to Christian standards (though sometimes some sinners have better standards for us than we have for ourselves!). Christians should be taught how to live for God.

Fifth, use your head and don't make big issues over silly little things that will straighten out under your preaching if you just give the people time.

Now, a man should look like a man. The Bible says it is a shame if a man have long hair. A pastor can teach his people this truth on Sunday nights or Wednesday nights without making a federal case of it.

So where do you start, and where do you stop? Many a boy *does* look like a girl if he has his hair over his ears. So the logical place for a Christian school to start its hair standards is just off the ear. What's wrong with that? Boys who go to military school or

into the Marines have to keep a good haircut.

A girl is supposed to look like a lady. So what's wrong with just teaching our children what the Bible says about it? An ad in a huge, fashionable department store recently read, "Look Like a *Lady*—Wear a *Dress!*" and then proceeded to show the pictures of the dresses they hoped you'd buy. Even the world associates a modest dress with being a lady.

On the other hand, if unsaved or carnal Christians show up at my church in slacks or jeans, I'm not going to refuse them a seat. If they get converted and come for awhile, they will readily see what the Christian ladies are wearing, and most of them will soon be wearing dresses.

As the heart line improves, the hairline and hemline usually take care of themselves. So, while you can have some very definite rules in a school, you have to give the people in your church more time to learn. But if your leaders in the church set the right example, it will be no big deal.

If you do not have standards, your church will soon be a farce as far as its testimony goes.

Sixth, the unsaved world looks on, so it does matter how a Christian lives. As Christian young people are taught this, and as new converts learn the Bible, it is not asking too much to expect them to understand that Christians have a standard to maintain as we live before the world we seek to win. Compromising our standards is not the way to win the lost.

Seventh, it is suggested that we do not have to have a list of unacceptable music and a sledgehammer in the music department. We never did. (And no one we knew did.) But we had good, spiritual music men who knew what proper and acceptable music was. The pastor can go a long way toward teaching his people to appreciate the right kind of music. Bring in the right kind of music men and singers. When young people have been taught and then weaned away from the wrong kind of music, I have seen amazing changes in their lives.

Eighth, we are in a battle. The fight is on! We must war a good warfare. But we should not ride a hobby horse. Don't spend *all* of your time preaching *against* things. I have only preached entire sermons on dress and hair twice in my life, and that was on consecutive Sunday nights when I was a pastor and the miniskirt and hippie-hair craze was raging. Now I hit it glancing blows and weave in illustrations that let people know what they ought to do without lambasting them all the time.

When I was a pastor I kept good books and tracts available so that all people could readily read up on what a good Christian ought to look like and be like.

Use illustrations about the modern dance and include dancing in your explanations of worldliness, uncleanness, drunkenness, revellings, and such like (see Gal. 5:19, 20); and it won't take them long to know that dancing is one of the "works of the flesh."

With horrible movie ads and the general information that abounds today about how rotten Hollywood has become, it should take no genius as a preacher to put the theater in its appropriate place. If your deacons, teachers, and other leaders are what they ought to be, then a host of your people will follow suit.

Teach them that while "all things are lawful unto me, . . . all things are not expedient" (1 Cor. 6:12) by any means. Teach them what GOD says, and you get the monkey off *your* back!

But don't ride a hobby. Variety is the spice of preaching. Teach them the Bible. Throw the Book at them. Be cheerful. Be loving and kind along with your firmness. But *you* are the preacher. With God's Word in hand, *you* are the authority!

Ninth, this is not the time to cave in and let down. Get on the battlefield for our Lord! Challenge your people with the truth. If you are the spiritual giant you ought to be, and if you truly love the Lord, they will know you are right.

My people did not all love me, I'm sure, and they did not all appreciate me as I sometimes supposed they should have, but

they knew I was right because I gave them the Book!

Preach firmly, but preach in love. Be kind to people. Take an interest in them. Remember many of them have not had the training you have had. Keep your sense of humor, be gracious, be a gentleman—but be a leader. They expect you to be!

Don't be a pip-squeak. Don't drift with the tide of popular opinion. "Be not afraid of their faces," God told Jeremiah.

Put on the whole armor of God. Stick to your standards. ■

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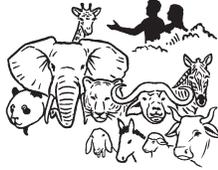
#### OVERSTIMULATION . . . cont'd from p. 27

overstimulated believers (whether workaholics or pleasure addicts) can make some needed changes if they learn the lesson of the harvester ant mentioned in Proverbs 6:6. These ants are extremely busy creatures. They are active and productive. However, God has designed them to take an annual hibernation, and when they hibernate, they rest. This cycle of work and hibernation brings balance into their existence.

Every person needs balance in order to give life zest and energy. In theology, any doctrine carried too far becomes heresy. In living, any pleasure or excitement carried too far becomes self-defeating. Balance is the key. Most overstimulated, pleasure-driven people could be helped by finding the balance God has designed for His people.

The process can start when we can convince overstimulated people to stop: to reorder their schedules and reassign the way they spend their time. A great place to start is a daily time of spiritual reflection, Bible study, and prayer. After about 30 to 45 days this new routine can bring more freedom and genuine balance to living. ■

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## Beginning Issues



# The Bible: Is It Accurate?

by John Mullett

In John 18:38 Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" Let's briefly ponder the question, Is truth knowable? If it's not knowable our ability to "get it right" in anything vanishes because we are left without any means by which to measure what is "right." The accuracy of the biblical record is vital, because as the history book of the universe and God's Word to man, it is that standard by which all things can be measured. For the next few articles I'd like to look at a compilation of facts and statistics supporting the reliability and accuracy of the Bible.

The Bible explicitly claims to be the Word of God in a number of passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 and 2 Peter 1:21.

*The phrase "Thus saith the Lord," or similar, occurs nearly 700 times in the Pentateuch alone. You find it 400 times in the historical books, around 400 times in the Prophets: ca. 150 times in Isaiah alone! In Ezekiel you find expressions such as "the word of the Lord came unto me, saying," and similar, around 350 times. Finally, in the New Testament, the expression "it is written" occurs around 80 times. No other books have a remotely similar claim to the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>*

The Bible was written over a period spanning more than 1500 years, by more than 40 different writers. They were from a

wide range of backgrounds including slaves, shepherds, fishermen, a tax collector, teachers, and kings. Their work resulted in a compilation of 66 books that complement each other, building around a single theme without conflict.

### Archaeology

The first area I want to look at is archaeological evidence. Archaeology has only served to confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible.

One of the greatest archaeologists of all time was Sir William Ramsay. He studied under the famous German historical schools in the mid-nineteenth century, which taught that the New Testament was a religious treatise written in the mid-200s AD, and not an historical document recorded in the first century. Ramsay was so convinced of this teaching that he entered the field of archaeology and went to Asia Minor to specifically find the physical evidence to refute Luke's biblical record. After years of field study, Ramsay completely reversed his entire view of the Bible and first-century history. He wrote: *Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense . . . in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians.<sup>2</sup>*

Dr. Nelson Glueck, probably the greatest modern authority on Israeli archeology, has said: No archeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries.<sup>3</sup>

William F. Albright said,

The excessive skepticism shown toward the Bible by important historical schools of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, certain phases of which still appear periodically, has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history.<sup>4</sup>

When reviewing the research and writings of Saint Luke, famous historian A. N. Sherwin-White declares:

*“In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands*

*without error. <sup>b</sup>For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd.<sup>5</sup>*

Some additional areas we will be looking at include fulfilled prophecy, manuscripts, and secular historical documents. ■

*(To be continued)*

1. Michael Hardt, [http://www.biblecentre.org/topics/mh\\_faq\\_inspiration.htm](http://www.biblecentre.org/topics/mh_faq_inspiration.htm)
2. Randall Niles at <http://www.AllAboutTheJourney.org/saint-luke.htm> quotes Sir William M. Ramsey, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1915.
3. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959, 136. <http://www.AllAboutTheJourney.org/israel-history.htm>
4. [http://www.conservapedia.com/Biblical\\_accuracy#cite\\_note-0](http://www.conservapedia.com/Biblical_accuracy#cite_note-0) Albright, 1960, p. 127-128, quoted in Miller.
5. <http://www.AllAboutTheJourney.org/saint-luke.htm> quoting:  
<sup>a</sup>Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, Baker Books, 1999, 47.  
<sup>b</sup>A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*, Clarendon Press, 1963, 189.

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## Personal Financial Management

by Richie Lauer

What kind of “money manager” are you? With the overall economy spiraling downward, you may soon have the opportunity to find out. Good times, like the ones our people have experienced over the last twenty-five years, provide pretty effective cover for poor financial management. When you have a good and increasing hourly wage, a backlog of work, or strong demand for your services, it seems as if a little indulgence or poor stewardship here and there doesn’t matter too much. Unfortunately, the strong downturn in the economy has already revealed that not all families are on solid footing. More of our people are likely to have a difficult awakening to reality before 2009 is past.

It is important to understand that our people do not all think alike in how personal finances are managed. There are currently three distinct economic “generations” in conservative Anabaptist circles. While we have to be careful about oversimplifying, I think that most of us find ourselves in one of these groups, and these comparisons help explain the changes that we see in views towards work and money. The generations do not strictly apply to chronological age; there are some 30-year-olds who fit in the “first generation” and some older folks who fit in the “third generation.”

The “first generation” are those who started with little and have worked hard, out of necessity. These are the only people in

our circles who have actually known the taste of poverty. For them, hard work is a well-established habit, thriftiness is a virtue, and stewardship is a way of life. They lived on little and learned to save. Although many of these folks end up having significant assets, they never see themselves as rich; their memories of hard times are too intact. Lest we praise this generation overmuch, we should acknowledge that, in general, studies reveal that these people give a smaller percentage of their assets to charity than any other group. Influenced by the hard times of their youth, many in this “first generation” give little of their accumulated wealth to charity. They tend to hold onto their assets until death, and many of them have never written a \$1,000.00 check to a charity.

The “second generation” often follows the first, 20 or 30 or 40 years down the road. Some grew up on and inherited farms and businesses from their parents. Many others are entrepreneurs and have started businesses of their own. From their parents they inherited values, a work ethic, and a modest financial start in life. Although they can repeat all of their parents’ stories about hard times, the second generation has no personal experience in being poor. Their homes and lives show that they expect a little more comfort out of life than their parents did. These folks do work hard and know how to turn a profit, and they consistently plow that profit back into their farms and businesses. This generation is the backbone of charitable giving . . . they fund the church, Christian school, and support some special ministry on the side. On the negative side, the workaholics you know are likely part of this generation.

The “third generation” is rather far removed from the lessons of poverty. When they graduated from or dropped out of school, a good-paying job was waiting for them. They can often work in a family business instead of starting something new on their

own. They are willing to work some overtime, if asked, but aren’t really interested in working six days a week. This is the generation that grows up with four-wheelers, vacations, and pocket money. They can spend on wants and still have some left to save. On the positive side, these are not stingy people, although a fair number of them do have their income tied up in payments. Also on the positive side, these people feel they have disposable time and gladly do most of the voluntary service work in our mission organizations.

As was stated in the beginning, good economic times provide pretty effective cover for poor financial management. What will tougher economic times reveal?

I’m not worried about the “first generation.” Hard times probably won’t change their lives too significantly. Most of them never learned to “spend” so it comes natural to “cut back,” and many of them have fair assets to fall back on. I’m not so worried about the “second generation” either. If what they are currently doing starts to falter, these folks were taught sound principles of stewardship and know how to innovate and will come up with something else. I do have some concern for those in the “third generation.” Many of them depend on someone else to provide their paycheck and have never had the experience of creating their own job. In some cases, they were not taught to budget or to have a healthy respect for debt. They are accustomed to a higher standard of living and may struggle to identify priorities when cutting back becomes necessary.

Have we, as families and a church, done right by the “third generation”? If they don’t have a firm footing in personal financial management, should we blame them or blame the ones who were their parents, teachers, and ministers? Were they taught the basics of personal financial management?

***Have we, as families and a church, done right by the “third generation”? If they don’t have a firm footing in personal financial management, should we blame them or blame the ones who were their parents, teachers, and ministers? Were they taught the basics of personal financial management?***