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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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who have been rejected. We need to be very careful that confrontation is not seen as angry denunciation, flippant dismissal, or final rejection. Instead, we need to create and foster church communities that embrace people who are struggling with sin or are confused about their identity. Sadly, with a few bright exceptions, many of our churches have been slow to respond in this way.

And let's not have any illusions—such a redemptive commitment will definitely be tested and will need to persevere through a person's failure. So, yes, let us most definitely confront sin, but let us do so with the same level of commitment that we will be part of God's redemptive work in another person's life.

Truth When We're Misunderstood

Second, there is always the risk that if we reach out and love sinners, we will be misunderstood by some as endorsing the sin of sinners. It happened to Jesus, and if we do what Jesus did, it will happen to us too. If accused, respond with truth spoken with grace and clarity. Share your conviction that homosexual conduct is sin, but that you are committed to your friendships with people who need the grace of God.

On the other hand, if friends who are living a homosexual lifestyle think we approve of their behavior, we must also respond with truth spoken with grace and clarity. We do not approve of homosexual conduct; we regard it as sin; but we will never waver from our commitment as a valued friend.

There are always risks to speaking truth. A friend may reject us. We must remain committed. They may be genuinely angry, or they may be testing our commitment. Do not budge. Stay committed to your friend or family member in the name of Jesus. There are many stories of those caught in a homosexual lifestyle turning to Jesus because of the persistent love of a committed Christian. What if God is calling you to demonstrate His outrageous love for sinners?

Understanding and Discernment

Third, take the time to understand another person's life trajectory in order to know how to relate to them with truth and love. You may need to do a lot of listening, seeking to understand past hurts, pains, and rejections. Jude 22-23 says: "And of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." Some people are sinning with a high hand and need strong warning and exhortation. Many others, however, are broken, feeling trapped after trying desperately to free themselves from the grip of sin. They need grace and mercy—and your help! Understanding a person's story can help us discern how the Gospel will transform a life and how we may be part of that.

Compassion for the Broken

Finally, many of those living a homosexual lifestyle are broken people. Many have been marginalized and feel persecuted and trapped. They may hate themselves and their struggle. They may be bitter at God, blaming Him for "making them this way." Many have been mistreated or abused, sent on their life journeys with no clear idea of their own identities.

What is needed most is the powerful love of Christ manifested through compassion and commitment. Isaiah 42:1-3 beautifully describes Jesus' approach to broken sinners:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.

That's the character of our Lord in dealing with broken people trapped in sin. May God give us grace and wisdom to love sinners just as Jesus does. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Torch*, Fall-Winter 2007.

# Person of the Month:

## *W. Ray Wenger* (1910-1945)



W. Ray Wenger was born to a family in the Mellinger District of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, on October 27, 1910. It was in this same church district where he would spend the next 27 years of his life in going to school, being converted to Christ, and meeting and marrying Miriam Landis. It was also in Mellinger where Ray and Miriam felt the call of God on their lives to serve the Lord in foreign missions, namely, Africa.

In 1934 Lancaster Conference had sent its first missionary to the African country of Tanganyika. So it was that on February 23, 1937, Ray and Miriam Wenger left their home shores for Tanganyika. Working in the South Mara district, Ray was ordained as minister. He also became the treasurer of the mission.

Between 1937 and 1945 God blessed the Wenger home with three children.

Since the group of missionaries was growing, the present bishop at the time, Elam Stauffer, ordained Brother Wenger on April 24, 1941, as an additional bishop whose responsibility was to oversee the South Mara District.

In 1942 a revival began in East Africa spreading from Anglican missionaries and their African congregations. People were concerned about a deeper life in the Lord, brokenness before Him, and confession of sin. About the same time there was a conference held at the Mennonite mission station in Nyabasi concerning spiritual life. Much time was spent in preaching as well as prayer. As a result of the meeting, some of the Mennonite missionaries began to confess sin. Slowly the revival spread from one mission congregation to another and people were converted. This had been the result of the Holy Spirit's use of His Word as well as the intercessory prayer of God's missionaries on the field.

Tragedy came to the mission field in 1945. On June fifth of that year, Brother Wenger came down with a kidney infection which was made worse by malarial fever. Four days later, on June 9, W. Ray Wenger went home to be with His Lord. His wife Miriam was left to care for their three young children.

Brother Wenger was buried on the eleventh anniversary of his wedding, on a hillside of Mugango overlooking the site of the compound where he had served the Lord. A memorial service was held on June 24th at the Mellinger church in Pennsylvania.

Brother Wenger is remembered as one who had a passion for lost souls and recognized the importance of interceding for them in prayer. He was an able leader who exhibited qualities of stability and humility. He knew that the days of discouragement and trials would be worth it all for the joy of seeing people come to Christ. He was levelheaded and addressed problems and issues with a Christlike spirit. He was warm and approachable and a good administrator. He knew where he stood on doctrinal issues. His life may be summed up by two verses circled in red in his Bible—John 3:29 and 30. —*Gail L. Emerson*

# A Spiritual Stimulus Plan

by Allen Shirk

What is going wrong with the world today? Everywhere we look there is more bad news—earthquakes, floods, global warming, famine, global financial turmoil. The financial crisis has erased \$14.5 trillion, or 33 percent, of the value of the world's companies in the last half year; everyone has less money; friends are losing their jobs; retirement funds are disappearing; investment scandals are appearing; banks and companies are failing; markets are collapsing; abortion rates are up; crime is on the increase. There is corruption in high places, wars in the Middle East, and world leaders are calling for the destruction of Israel.

I ask myself, "What is going to happen? Will society collapse? What can we do? What is going wrong? Where is God in all of this? Has He forgotten about us?" Then I turn to the Scriptures where I should have been reading in the first place, and I discover that things are exactly as prophesied. Isaiah 24:4b and 5b says, "The world languisheth and fadeth away, because they have transgressed the laws." I also discover there may be some error in my own perception. We **expect** people to do good, and are disappointed when they do wrong. The Bible says we can **expect** godless people (the majority today) to do evil. We should rejoice when someone does good things, because that is a sign that they have been with Jesus! *Philippians 2:18 tells us, "For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me."* When we start to be afraid, we lose sight of God. Fear of the unknown is a tool of Satan, and the enemy of man. God told Isaac in Genesis 26:24, "I am the God of Abraham . . . : fear not, for I am with thee."

There are several things we can learn from the present turmoil. First, the Bible continues to be proven correct while prophecy is being fulfilled every day.

Second, the evolutionists continue to be proven wrong; they would have us believe that the world is becoming a better and bet-

ter place to live, while God tells us that this world is in decay.

Third, we are surely in the end times, and there is no urgency as great as the eleventh hour to win more souls. I am reminded of a story of a tragic house fire. The family was trapped within and the flames were too hot to enter. A courageous fireman dashed in and saved one child out of the inferno. This was the only survivor. While we remain optimistic about saving multitudes, end times evangelism may be more and more like that tragic fire, unless the church puts greater effort into the work. These times are a great opportunity for us to promote God's recovery plan: "Believe on Jesus and thou shalt be saved."

So, what is going to happen next? According to the Scriptures God will remove the church so He can deal with the unrepentant. First Thessalonians 5:6 says, "Let us watch and be sober" (for the return of Christ). Although the current stimulus plan is astronomical, it is not the greatest or most expensive one ever issued. We read in John 3:17 that God sent His Son that the world might be saved. Corrupt men have been very successful at making the bailout money disappear. However, in their best efforts for 2000 years, they have not been able to make Jesus disappear!

This "bailout" plan is free, guarantees freedom from fear, full immunity from loss and theft of assets, with eternal life of bliss thrown in as a bonus. It is still available to each and every man, woman, and child today. Are you on the plan? Remember, God is still in control! Isaiah 46:9b, 10 says, "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." *Amen.* ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Mid-Atlantic Informer*, May 2009.

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

# Prosperity Religion

by John Poff

Prosperity preaching, the teaching that if we will only believe and trust in God, He will make us materially rich is popular today. Why not? Our world has set its sights on success, and success is measured in dollars and cents, euros and pounds, etc.

From the early days of life, children are taught, even by well-meaning parents, that they are entitled to get more, have more, and see more than they did. School curriculums are set to encourage children and young adults to achieve a higher education for a better job, one that pays more and offers more benefits. Because of this, we live in a society that never has enough. Credit cards have only expanded the capacity and allow people to get in debt over their heads.

The Lord offers a better way, and no matter how much I desire to expand my riches in Him, it will not increase my debt load. Jesus told us, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do

not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

This is true prosperity religion. It offers something much more secure than a few pieces of paper with ink on them. It represents more than barns full of grain, garages full of antiques, mines overflowing with silver and diamonds and gold. I know that my investments in Heaven will never pass away; they will pay dividends throughout eternity.

How do I know that? Jesus said so. I know what He has done for me. I know what He says is true. Sure, I want to make all I can make and save all I can save, but what I have is His and all He needs to do is tell me what to do with it. That is where it will be applied. Like Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). ■

*(John Poff pastors the Hallsville, Missouri, Church of God (Holiness)).*

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# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## *A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**NOVEMBER 1, 2009**

### *A Holy People*

1 Peter 1:13-25

The lessons for November are taken from First and Second Peter and are written to a general audience, likely mostly Gentiles, in Asia Minor. These believers are facing persecution for their faith and Peter writes to encourage them and challenge them to faithfulness. There is a better day coming when Christ returns to fully redeem His faithful ones. In the meantime they are admonished to live holy lives befitting their position as children of a holy God.

In the first part of Chapter 1 Peter explains the great gift of salvation given by a merciful and gracious God. He urges his readers going through fiery trials, to trust in the keeping power of God and to look beyond their immediate situation to the glorious day when their total redemption will be secured at the coming of Christ.

In light of that prospect, he says in verse 13, be self-controlled, discipline your mind, and live in anticipation. He urges his readers to be holy in all manner of life. This holiness of life will be in great contrast to their former life which was lived following the desires and will of the flesh. Holiness means to be set apart to God, to be noticeably different from those not professing to be God's children. It is evidenced by purity of life and moral integrity.

Believers are to have a reverential fear of God. We are now His children, and He expects behavior fitting to our position. He will judge unbecoming behavior. It is God's saving grace that provides the impetus for a

holy life, separate from sin and lived in constant pursuit of righteousness and godliness.

Gold and silver are precious metals of high value and worth. Yet Peter tells us that our redemption from sin was secured by something even more precious—the blood of Christ. He was God's perfect sacrifice for man's sin. This provision was not an afterthought with God, but according to a plan He had in place even before man was created and fell into sin. The marvelous story of redemption, culminating in Christ's resurrection and ascension to Heaven, is the foundation for our faith and gives us a confident prospect for the future.

Jewish readers would have readily understood Peter's reference to Christ's sacrificial death "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" as referring to the quality of lambs used in their ritual sacrifices. It took a perfect sacrifice to satisfy a holy God. Peter here affirms the deity and work of Jesus Christ, of whom he was privileged to be an apostle.

In verse 22 Peter shows how one who has embraced God's great gift of salvation will demonstrate the change this has brought into his life by a sincere love of his fellow believers. This parallels Jesus' teaching in John 13:35 where He states: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Brotherly love is the hallmark of a redeemed, holy life.

Peter concludes this chapter by showing that believers have been born again, experienced new life through the ever-living, uncorruptible Logos of God, Jesus Christ, and that it is the eternal spoken word of the gospel which both proclaims Christ and instructs believers in holy living.

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God has provided fully and adequately for sinful man to experience both rebirth and continuing holy living through the sacrifice of His Son. That is the crux of Peter's message.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. Some understanding of the historical setting of Peter's epistle will help you understand its message and purpose.
2. What is holiness? What is its basis? How does one achieve it? Discuss.
3. How is a life of holiness demonstrated? Discuss.
4. Peter helps us understand the scope and depth of God's great salvation plan. Ponder it and give thanks.
5. Peter here describes the essentials of salvation and the means to maintaining that salvation. What are they?

### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* That a loving God has provided salvation for sinful mankind and the means to a holy life.

*Key verse:* verse 15

## **NOVEMBER 8, 2009**

### ***A Chosen People***

1 Peter 2:1-10

As we move into Chapter 2 we note how it builds upon Chapter 1. There Peter explains the means of salvation and the call to holy living. Here he shows how this fleshes out in daily living. Salvation, the new birth, is an act, but the sanctification of life is an ongoing process. This process verifies the change of direction in one's life and the pursuit of holiness required by that change. Today's lesson focuses on the first ten verses but the remaining verses of Chapter 2 also provide insight into the ramifications of the changed life.

The first three verses of this chapter focus on individual responsibilities as a newborn child of God. Verses 4-10 focus more on how Christians come together to form a commu-

nity of believers, a spiritual household, and the function of that household.

The Christian life consists of putting off and putting on. In Chapter 1 we are called to put on holiness. Here in verse 1 we are instructed to put off certain things—things of the old life—the antitheses of the newborn, holy life. Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander—these have no place in the holy life and are to be discarded as unacceptable behavior in the life of the child of God.

The newborn babe in Christ will desire the pure milk of the Word of God in order to grow in his understanding of the new life he has experienced. He has tasted the gracious gift of God and that has whetted his appetite for more knowledge of God and His will. This help is found in “the word of the Lord” also mentioned in 1:25.

New life in Christ starts as an individual, personal experience, but it doesn't stop there. Those who individually develop a vertical relationship to God are also called to develop a horizontal relationship with other believers. Peter here describes that relationship as stones in a building, mutually dependent on one another for cohesion, and bound together by the cornerstone, Christ.

Together these living stones form a living, vital, and useful structure. The imagery is of shaped stones, not just random rocks. These shaped stones fit together nicely in form and function. Together they offer spiritual sacrifices and serve as a priesthood, directing both inner worship and outward service.

The chief cornerstone, Christ, is the rallying point for believers but for the unbeliever it becomes a stumbling block. Those living out their own fleshly desires have no use for a cornerstone to bind them into community. They are content to go their own way, disregarding the consequences of their choice.

But for those who have obtained mercy and become the people of God there is a job to be done. This people, chosen by God, purchased by the blood of His Son, formed into a royal priesthood, living as a holy people, are to now proclaim the benefits of their new life to others. It is through their

sanctified lives and the testimony of their lips that those outside the spiritual structure will be challenged to also change and redirect their lives.

God has chosen us for His purposes, to honor, glorify, and praise Him and to serve as witnesses to those still outside the community of faith. Let's be about our task.

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

1. Verse 1 tells us certain things the believer must lay off. Examine these to see how hurtful they are to others and how detrimental to one's own spiritual life and development.
2. Discuss ways believers can grow in their faith—individually and corporately.
3. Why is the imagery of a building so appropriate for Christian believers? There are many implications. Think through them carefully. Discuss with your class.
4. Is Christ precious to you? How best can you go about sharing this with others?
5. Let this lesson inspire you again with the tremendous blessings you have experienced as a recipient of God's great mercy.

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* That God has chosen you to be His child, provided the means to spiritual growth, and endowed you with a message of hope to a dying world.

*Key verse:* verse 9

## **NOVEMBER 15, 2009**

### ***A Suffering People***

1 Peter 4:12-19

As we move on through the epistle of 1 Peter we note various admonitions and exhortations for Christian living. There are certain things God and society expect of the one claiming to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter explains these. Another recurring theme is that of suffering. We remember that Peter was writing to believers facing persecution for their stand as

Christians. While encouraging the holy life expected of newborn believers, Peter also injects advice and encouragement when facing suffering for righteousness (see 2:19-21; 3:13-17; 4:1; and 5:10).

In today's text Peter tells his readers how they can expect persecution and how to face it with confidence. In fact, he says, they should count it glory to suffer for Christ's sake and in so doing be identifying with His suffering. Christ went through much suffering and the agony of death for them; should they be surprised or discouraged when called upon to suffer for His sake? Indeed not.

Physical suffering is not pleasant and we shrink from it because of the pain and discomfort it brings. However, "for Christians the purpose of suffering is to prove their true character, to clear away the dross of sin, and to allow the pure nature of Christ to show itself" (*Nelson's New Bible Commentary*). This was Peter's message to first-century believers facing the "fiery trial" of their faith. And this encouragement has sustained believers and martyrs in every age of the Christian era. To suffer for Christ will also mean to reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12).

Peter makes it abundantly clear that there is no virtue in suffering for our faults (see 2:20) and that certain actions (verse 15) are simply outside the scope of Christian behavior. The one living a holy, sanctified life will not murder, steal, commit evil acts, or meddle unjustifiably in the affairs of others. The holiness of life one is called to in Chapter 1 will result in a noticeably different and changed lifestyle from that of the unbeliever.

The judgment facing the family of God Peter refers to in verse 17 likely is in reference to the trials and testing of their faith and not moral or judicial judgment. The implication is that if believers in God go through such fiery trials for their faith, what ultimate fate must await those who "obey not the gospel of God"? If indeed the believer must struggle to enter the kingdom of God, verse 18 (see also Acts 14:22), what hope is there for the unbeliever?

Peter is not glorifying persecution. He no doubt realizes the likelihood that persecution may indeed discourage and drive some individuals away from faith in Christ. That would be tragic. Rather, he is warning believers that because we live in an evil society that seeks to destroy the good we can expect some measure of persecution. While suffering persecution validates our faith, our holy lives serve as a conscience to an ungodly society. Therefore, they seek to destroy that which reminds them of their sin (2 Timothy 3:12).

Therefore, Peter says, if you suffer for your faith, suffer joyfully and commit the keeping of your soul to the faithful God. He will keep us in His care. He will not allow overwhelming persecution to defeat us but will provide strength and fortitude to see us through to ultimate victory (see 1 Corinthians 10:13 and James 1:2-4).

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

1. Believers in many countries today face physical persecution for their faith. Perhaps the best and only way we can stand with them is in prayer. Are you remembering to pray for the persecuted church?
2. Have you ever been reproached or faced actual persecution due to your Christian stand? How did it affect you? What results did you experience?
3. What sort of testimony does it leave to a watching world when Christians commit faults (unlawful acts) willfully? Should not that in itself be one challenge for consistent holy living?
4. Persecution may have several effects on the church. Discuss both the positive and negative sides of persecution.
5. This passage also highlights the tragic end of the unsaved. How should that realization challenge us?

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* That the person who lives a holy life fully devoted to God may expect persecution from an ungodly society, and that such persecution should be considered a privilege and a blessing.

*Key verse:* verse 19

**NOVEMBER 22, 2009**

### ***A Faithful People***

2 Peter 1:3-15

Peter opens his second epistle by addressing those who “have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” He goes on to give these fellow believers encouragement for holy living and warning against false teachers who would derail them from their faith. His stress is on faithful, holy living in light of Christ’s imminent return. In today’s text he stresses the full measure of God’s resources for maintaining and growing our faith.

God is not stingy in His provisions. In addition to the basic gift of salvation, He also provides resources for the growth and strengthening of our faith. The “great and precious promises” He has given enable us to partake of the divine nature and thus to escape the world’s corrupting influence. It seems an appropriate response would be “wow”! God wants, and enables, us to enjoy the full measure of His grace. That comes through an increasing knowledge of Him.

However, as Eerdman says, “The divine choice and call do not make human effort unnecessary.” The provisions are there, but they must be appropriated. While faith is the starting point of the salvation experience, other Christian virtues must be added in order to establish, develop, and prove our faith. Goodness must be added. And increasing knowledge of God. Sobriety, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and agape love—all are essential building blocks to vital faith.

Peter says that if these qualities are evident and growing in your life, you will be productive and give increasing affirmation of Christlikeness. On the other hand, those who do not give attention to developing these qualities give evidence of shortsightedness and spiritual apathy. So Peter calls believers to diligence in the development and confirmation of their faith. Surety comes from effort and commitment.

Peter does not imply (verse 10) that we

will never sin, but the chances are diminished when we give steadfast attention to growing our faith. This increasing godliness will give us entrance into the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.” The diligent practice of Christian virtues always increases spiritual insight and growth. When one’s mind and efforts are turned Godward, the temptations of this life take on lesser appeal.

Peter, possibly now 70 years old and facing death, wants to be sure to leave a legacy of spiritual concern for his fellow believers. That they already knew the things he was telling them, Peter was aware. However, the establishment of truth comes through constant reiteration (see Isaiah 28:10). Peter wanted to be certain he had done his part to convey spiritual life-giving truth that would establish his readers in the faith.

Peter here gives us an excellent example of one totally dedicated to the work of building God’s kingdom. He was faithful in living out the commission Jesus gave him there by the seaside as recorded in John 21:15ff. Once Peter had wavered, but now he was fully involved. His life should be a lesson for all of us.

Was Peter referring to his writings there in verse 15? We can’t be certain. However, all generations since, down to our day, have been blessed by Peter’s words of encouragement to diligent spiritual growth and warnings against false philosophies detrimental to faith. Let us be a faithful people.

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

1. What are the dangers of a stagnant faith, one that doesn’t move beyond initial experience? Discuss.
2. Discuss how these additions to faith enhance, ennoble, and equip the believer to be an effective Christian.
3. Where do you struggle most in Christian development? How does this passage both challenge and assist you?
4. What are some ways we can work to keep these faith-strengthening teachings alive among us? Discuss.
5. What will be your legacy? Will you be

remembered as a defender and promoter of the faith? Now is the time to build legacy.

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* The importance of building on our initial step of faith for salvation.

*Key verses:* verses 3 and 4

## **NOVEMBER 29, 2009**

### ***A Hopeful People***

2 Peter 3:1-13

In Chapter 2 Peter warns against the insidious influence and methods of false teachers bent on destroying the faith of his readers. As he begins Chapter 3 he again calls his readers to remembrance of the teaching they had received from the apostles, the messengers of Jesus. In their struggle with false teachers and their message of doubt, these believers needed firm spiritual footing. Past teaching and Peter’s letters would provide that.

Those who belittle Christian faith and scoff at its teachings are not a 21st-century phenomenon. They plagued the church from its beginning. Peter describes them here in verse 3 as hedonists, intent on living after their own self-indulgent desires. They did not want to face the prospect of answering for their actions, so they scoffed at the idea of the *parousia*, the return of Christ in judgment.

Peter gives the lie to their statement that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” by referring to the flood which severely disrupted the status quo and destroyed the world. This was evidence they could know, but chose to ignore. He also reminds them that God doesn’t count time as man does. What man thinks of as a long time is only an eye-blink to an eternal God.

Peter also reminds his readers that

another world judgment is coming, not by water, but by fire. That will be the undoing of the ungodly. But for the righteous, those who are living holy lives in anticipation of that event, it will usher in a new age and result in new surroundings (see Revelation 21:5 and context).

The eternal, righteous God is not careless with His promises. Man may forget or neglect to fulfill his promises, but God never does. And given God's view of time, what may appear to man as failure on God's part is really attributable to His love and patience. It is God's will that all men come to repentance (1 Timothy 2:4). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (see Ezekiel 33:11). But if man persists in sin he effectively seals his own doom.

The day of God's judgment will come unexpectedly, especially to those living carelessly. Christ's coming will usher in a great cataclysmic event, destroying the evil and preparing the earth for the habitation of the righteous. Evil will be forever excluded. The believer looks forward to "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." That will be the culmination of his faithful, holy life, and his longing anticipation.

This prospect, Peter says, should provide both incentive and impetus for holy living, which has been the underlying theme of both of his epistles. There is no greater expectation than to live with Christ our Saviour forever, free from the shackles and temptations of sin. But to achieve that goal means to pay diligent attention to the word of truth, the living of a holy life, and disregarding the damning message of doubt of the scoffers.

In other words, being a people of God is a full-time task, one not to be undertaken lightly. It demands holiness of life as a chosen people. It may entail suffering for our stand. It requires faithfulness and a hope for the future that challenges continuation in the teachings we have heard and been assured of.

May we live up to Peter's challenges and be found faithful on the day of Christ's return.

### For thought and discussion

1. What does this lesson teach us about the importance of maintaining close contact and diligent application of God's Word in our lives?
2. Why is it so dangerous to trifle with God's promises or our obedience to them?
3. Why do men scoff at spiritual things? Has scoffing affected you? How do you respond to scoffers? Good for discussion.
4. While we do not understand all the nuances of the "day of the Lord," there is ample proof in God's Word of the surety of the event and of the necessity of being prepared. Let's not get caught up in the argument and so lose out in preparation for that event.
5. Are you living in anticipation of Christ's coming? Is your life giving evidence of that anticipation?

### Help for teachers

*Lesson emphasis:* Jesus is coming again, regardless of the scoffers or the seeming delay. Be ready.

*Key verses:* verses 11 and 12 ■



### HOW TO PROFIT FROM BIBLE READING ... cont'd from page 30

#### In conclusion

If we want to profit from Bible reading, we should do the things we have considered in this message:

1. Interpret it literally whenever possible.
2. Read it completely.
3. Read it reverently.
4. Read it humbly.
5. Read it expectantly.
6. Read it dependently.
7. Read it Christ-centeredly.
8. Read it obediently.
9. Read it logically.
10. Read it meditatively. ■

# 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

## Catholics and Christians Clash

MEXICO: “Traditionalist Catholic’ leaders last month expelled 57 evangelical Christians from towns in two states for refusing to participate in their religious festivals. Leaders of traditionalist Catholicism, a mixture of Roman Catholicism and native rituals, expelled 32 Christians from their homes in a village in Hidalgo state and another 25 from a town in Oaxaca; in each case, the evangelicals were deprived of their property for refusing to participate in drunken festivals that included worship of Catholic icons.”

—Excerpt from “Traditionalist Catholics’ Attack, Expel Christians in Mexico” (<http://cli.gs/LW2b4d>) in *Compass Direct News*

\* \* \* \* \*

## How a Detainee Became an Asset

“After enduring the CIA’s harshest interrogation methods and spending more than a year in the agency’s secret prisons, Khalid Sheik Mohammed stood before U.S. intelligence officers in a makeshift lecture hall, leading what they called ‘terrorist tutorials.’

“In 2005 and 2006, the bearded, pudgy man . . . the mastermind of the September 11, 2001, attacks discussed . . . al-Qaeda dogma. In one instance, he scolded a listener for poor note-taking and his inability to recall details of an earlier lecture.

“Speaking in English, Mohammed ‘seemed to relish the opportunity, sometimes for hours on end, to discuss the inner workings of al-Qaeda and the group’s plans, ideology and operatives,’ said one of two sources who described the sessions . . .

“These scenes provide previously unpub-

licized details about the transformation of the man known to U. S. officials as KSM from an avowed and truculent enemy of the United States into what the CIA called its ‘preeminent source’ on al-Qaeda. This reversal occurred after Mohammed was subjected to simulated drowning and prolonged sleep deprivation, among other harsh interrogation techniques.”

The article ends with: “Mohammed . . . requested a Bible for study in his cell, according to the source . . .”

Just as God changed Paul, he can change Khalid Sheik Mohammed. Let’s pray that God would speak to him through His Word and transform him.

—Excerpts from “How a Detainee Became An Asset” (<http://cli.gs/EjAtE3>) in the *Washington Post*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Senator Ted Kennedy (1932-2009)

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, brother of President John F. Kennedy and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (both assassinated), died August 25, 2009, of a malignant brain tumor. His death has triggered a recounting of his life.

The most prominent incident he is remembered for is the Chappaquiddick incident. In 1969 he was at a drunken party without his wife and left the party (without his chauffeur) with a young female staffer. They stopped in a private lane, but quickly sped off when a police officer tried to ask if they were lost. They headed onto a dirt road where Kennedy drove off a bridge. Kennedy escaped the underwater car, but his staffer did not. Kennedy did not report the accident

until police discovered the car and body the next morning. A local rescue diver testified that the staffer had probably been alive in an air pocket for two hours after the crash. He reached the body 25 minutes from the moment he was notified, meaning he probably could have saved her had Kennedy phoned police from the house 150 yards away from the scene.

Most people know about Chappaquiddick. Few people know about a memo unearthed in the Soviet archives. Peter Robinson reports in *Forbes*:

“Picking his way through the Soviet archives that Boris Yeltsin had just thrown open, in 1991 Tim Sebastian, a reporter for the *London Times*, came across an arresting memorandum. Composed in 1983 by Victor Chebrikov, the top man at the KGB, the memorandum was addressed to Yuri Andropov, the top man in the entire USSR. The subject: Sen. Edward Kennedy.

“‘On 9-10 May of this year,’ the May 14 memorandum explained, ‘Sen. Edward Kennedy’s close friend and trusted confidant [John] Tunney was in Moscow. The senator charged Tunney to convey the following message, through confidential contacts, to . . . Andropov.’

“Kennedy’s message was simple. He proposed an unabashed quid pro quo. Kennedy would lend Andropov a hand in dealing with President Reagan. In return, the Soviet leader would lend the Democratic Party a hand in challenging Reagan in the 1984 presidential election. ‘The only real potential threats to Reagan are problems of war and peace and Soviet-American relations,’ the memorandum stated. ‘These issues, according to the senator, will without a doubt become the most important of the election campaign.’” —Sources: *Wikipedia*, *Forbes*

—Excerpts from “Ted Kennedy’s Soviet Gambit” (<http://cli.gs/5A7tSr>) in *Forbes*

\* \* \* \* \*

### Planet Puzzles Astrophysicists

“Scientists have discovered a planet that shouldn’t exist. The finding, they say, could alter our understanding of orbital dynamics, a field considered pretty well settled

since the time of astronomer Johannes Kepler 400 years ago.

“The problem is that a planet that close should be consumed by its parent star in less than a million years, say the authors at Keele University in Britain. The star Wasp-18 is believed to be about a billion years old, and because stars and the planets around them are thought to form at the same time, Wasp-18b should have been reduced to cinders ages ago.”

The alternative not mentioned in the above excerpt—an alternative that would be unthinkable to the *LA Times* or the scientists involved—is that perhaps Johannes Kepler and his observable, testable, repeatable orbital dynamics aren’t wrong; it’s assumptions about the age of the universe that are wrong.

Determining the age of the universe is not a scientific inquiry, it’s a historical inquiry (assisted, as all historical inquiries are, by science). Orbital mechanics, on the other hand, is a scientific inquiry—it’s observable, testable, and repeatable. When thinking about science and the age of the universe, it is important to remember that distinction.

—Excerpts from “Astrophysicists puzzle over planet that’s too close to its sun” (<http://cli.gs/87eELP>) in *The Los Angeles Times*

\* \* \* \* \*

### UK Oil for Terrorists Program?

More and more evidence is pointing toward the conclusion that the UK released the Lockerbie bomber in exchange for an oil deal with Libya. But first, Jonathan Gurwitz writing in the *San Antonio Express-News* gives an overview: “Al-Megrahi is a former Libyan intelligence agent, a relative of murderous dictator Mu’ammarr Gadhafi and the only person ever convicted for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103.

“Before [9-11], there was Lockerbie. 180 [of the people aboard Pan Am 103] were American. Prior to 9-11, Lockerbie was the site of the deadliest terrorist attack against American civilians.

“After 36 weeks of testimony, the judges found al-Megrahi guilty of 270 counts of murder—the 259 . . . aboard Flight 103 and

11 people on the ground. They gave him a life sentence of no less than 27 years, or about five weeks for every life taken. American officials and the families of the victims were assured then, in 2001, that al-Megrahi would serve every day.

“Last week, after only eight years, Scottish Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill put al-Megrahi on a plane back to Libya where he was the toast of Tripoli, treated to a hero’s welcome with Gadhafi’s son Saif at his side.

*The Times of London* reports: “The British government decided it was ‘in the overwhelming interests of the United Kingdom’ to make Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed al-Megrahi, the Lockerbie bomber, eligible for return to Libya, leaked ministerial letters reveal.

“Gordon Brown’s government made the decision after discussions between Libya and BP over a multi-million-pound oil exploration deal had hit difficulties. These were resolved soon afterwards.

“The letters were sent two years ago by Jack Straw, the justice secretary, to Kenny MacAskill, his counterpart in Scotland, who has been widely criticized for taking the formal decision to permit Megrahi’s release.

“The correspondence makes it plain that the key decision to include Megrahi in a deal with Libya to allow prisoners to return home was, in fact, taken in London for British national interests.

“Two letters dated five months apart show that Straw initially intended to exclude Megrahi from a prisoner transfer agreement with Colonel Mu‘ammar Gadhafi. . . . Straw then switched his position as Libya used its deal with BP as a bargaining chip to insist the Lockerbie bomber was included.

“The exploration deal for oil and gas, potentially worth up to £15 billion, was announced in May 2007. Six months later the agreement was still waiting to be ratified.

“On December 19, 2007, Straw wrote to MacAskill announcing that the UK government was abandoning its attempt to exclude Megrahi from the prisoner transfer agreement, citing the national interest.

“A Ministry of Justice spokesman denied there had been a U-turn, but said trade considerations had been a factor in negotiating the prisoner exchange deal.

**PAGE 12**

—Excerpts from “Lockerbie bomber ‘set free for oil” (<http://cli.gs/esLQ6W>) in *The Times of London* and “Scot free in Libya” (<http://cli.gs/pugJg3>) in the *San Antonio Express-News*

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### **Health Care Snippets**

Obama, trying to tout his health care plan, said “UPS and FedEx are doing just fine. It’s the Post Office that’s always having problems,” unintentionally highlighting how a government-run system does poorly compared to private enterprise.

As thousands of Americans rally against nationalized health care, Gov. Tim Pawlenty (R-MN) commented, “It appears that President Obama is making great progress on climate change: he is changing the political climate in the country back to Republican.”

Rep. Eric Massa (D-NY), in explaining that he will vote for the government-run health-care plan no matter what, said: “I will vote adamantly against the interests of my district.”

Canadian Press: “The incoming president of the Canadian Medical Association says this country’s [government-run] health-care system is sick and doctors need to develop a plan to cure it.”

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### **Noteworthy News Snippets**

- AP reports that a former director of community organizer group ACORN (with whom Obama is closely associated) will testify against it on felony charges of voter fraud.
- CBS and Pepsi have accomplished a technological and marketing first by delivering video ads in a magazine—including the wafer thin video screen in the magazine which costs several dollars per copy.
- Michael Jackson’s doctor is being charged with manslaughter after the coroner ruled his death was due to a drug overdose administered by the doctor.
- Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-NY) amended his congressional disclosure forms to report up to \$1.3 million of income he forgot to disclose.

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

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

# Burial or Cremation?

by Arno Froese

The practice of cremation is rarely discussed publicly within the Church, although this alternative to burial has become a modern-day phenomenon. More and more people have chosen to have their remains cremated; therefore, the issue must be dealt with regardless of its sensitive nature.

We will consider the differences between burial and cremation in this short examination, and use the Bible as our only reliable source.

First, I must point out that the method in which a person chooses to dispose of his or her body at death has no direct relationship to their salvation. Nor am I questioning God's ability to raise the dead from dust and ashes. I am, however, obligated to challenge believers to examine what Scripture says regarding the biblical ordination for disposing of a person's body.

## *Fire Judgment*

We read on several occasions in Scripture that fire came down from heaven as a form of judgment to destroy the opposition (Genesis 19:24; Exodus 9:23; Leviticus 10:2; Numbers 11:1; 16:35).

God threatened the godless people with fiery judgment (Hosea 8:14; Jeremiah 17:27; Amos 7:4).

The Lord's displeasure with cremation is clearly expressed in Amos 2:1: "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime."

When Israel fell into idolatry, they used fire to sacrifice other sons and daughters to the demon god Molech (Deuteronomy 12:31; Ezekiel 20:31; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10).

These examples provide evidence that

Scripture does not endorse cremation of the body.

## *Practice of Burial*

We can begin with Abraham, the father of all believers, and follow the accounts of each person mentioned in Scripture thereafter, and will not find one who was deliberately burned after they died.

King David, a man according to the heart of God, died and was buried. "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10).

In the New Testament, we read about the way in which John the Baptist's body was handled. "And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus" (Matthew 14:12).

Jesus prophesied about His burial after an unnamed woman poured precious ointment upon His head, "She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying" (Mark 14:8).

Jesus was not cremated when He died. "And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed" (Matthew 27:59, 60).

About the first Christian martyr, we read: "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him" (Acts 8:2).

## *The Body Is the Seed*

The Apostle Paul asked: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). When we

understand that our bodies are not our own, we will immediately understand the significance of burying the body.

In Scripture our bodies are referred to as seed. Seed should not be burned, but buried: “And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain” (1 Corinthians 15:37). We may not be able to scientifically or intellectually identify what is contained in this seed, but it is clear that this body/seed must be put into the ground in order for it to bring forth the spiritual body. “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44). Would anybody think to burn a seed, then plant it in the ground and expect a harvest?

Burial is the method God has instructed His people to use when disposing of a body.

#### ***Pagan Practice***

It should come as no surprise that cremation was practiced only by members of pagan religions. Hinduism and Buddhism are just two of many other Far Eastern religions that are spreading like wildfire throughout the Western world. Yoga is now an accepted form of “exercise” among Bible-believing evangelicals! During a recent visit to a mall, I was surprised to find an entire section of Hindu and Buddhist religious paraphernalia for sale. Pagan religions are alive and well, even in the middle of what has popularly been labeled as the Bible Belt.

This is part of the progress of Bible prophecy fulfillment. Revelation 13:8 says, “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him” [the image of the beast]. Therefore, it stands to reason that all religions must eventually unite in order to fulfill this Scripture. Thus, the difference between Christian and pagan burials will cease to exist.

Naturally, there is nothing we can do about those who have already been cremated, but the point of this writing is to dissuade any believer who has intentions to be

cremated by documenting from Scripture that cremation is not a biblical practice.

Furthermore, the manner in which a body is disposed of must be important, because the Bible records the conversation that took place between Michael the archangel and Satan about the body of Moses (Jude 9).

A number of arguments, including the cost of the procedure, may seem to support cremation, but Bible-believing Christians should reject this practice and consider it as an abomination to God and a rebellion against His designed plan for mankind.

There is no need to consider those who were burned at the stake for their faith, or others who were forcefully robbed of their bodies, because Jesus said: “God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).

Dr. Wim Malgo, founder of Midnight Call Ministries, concluded his tract, “The Fatal Faith of Cremation” with the following words:

“Did God not miraculously save His three faithful servants from Nebuchadnezzar’s burning furnace (Daniel 3:19-27; Isaiah 43:2)? The same applies to people who are killed in fires and explosions, and to those who accidentally were consumed by corrosive acids. It also applies to those who were burned in ovens during the Nazi time or were destroyed by fire during Communist actions. God can restore the resurrection body to all these people. But to be voluntarily cremated is comparable to committing suicide. Anyone who gives his body for cremation is not a martyr. He is committing an outrage and is desecrating the body entrusted to him by God. Take warning regarding cremation, which is of the devil!

“I refuse to accept the argument that there is no longer space enough to bury the dead. The Lord said, ‘Replenish the earth’ (Genesis 1:28). The earth is far from being filled with living people—is there then not enough space for the bodies of the saints who have died?” ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Midnight Call*



## 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.*

### *A Plea for Those in Secret Sin*

by Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Now I come . . . to plead with all my might with some of you whom God has pricked in your consciences. I have come to entreat you, if it be possible, even to tears, that you will give up your secret sins. I have one here for whom I bless God: I love him, though I know him not. He is almost persuaded to be a Christian. He halteth between two opinions: he intendeth to serve God, he striveth to give up sin, but he findeth it a hard struggle. As yet, he knoweth not what shall become of him. I speak to him with all love: My friend, will you have your sin and go to Hell, or leave your sin and go to Heaven? This is the solemn alternative.

To all awakened sinners I put it: The pleasures of this life are so intoxicating, the joys of it so ensnaring, that did I not believe that God worketh in us to will and to do, I should despair of you. Let me lay the alternative before you: On the one hand, there is an hour's merriment, a short life of bliss, and that a poor, poor bliss. On the other hand, there is everlasting life and eternal glory. On the one hand, there is a transient happiness and afterwards overwhelming woe. In this case, there is a solid peace and everlasting joy, and after it overflowing bliss. I say, as Elijah did, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve! If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him" (*cf.* Joshua 24:15; 1

Kings 18:21). But, now, make your choice deliberately; and may God help you to do it! Do not say you will take up with religion without first counting the cost! . . .

Sinner, thou wilt never regret that choice, if God help thee to make it. Thou wilt find thyself a happy man here and thrice happy throughout eternity.

"But," says one, "sir, I intend to be religious, but I do not hold with your strictness." I do not ask you to do so. I hope, however, you will hold with God's strictness. God's strictness is ten thousand times greater than mine. You may say that I am puritanical in my preaching. God will be puritanical in judging in that great day. I may appear severe, but I can never be as severe as God will be. I may draw the harrow with sharp teeth across your conscience, but God shall drag harrows of eternal fire across you one day. I may speak thundering things! God will not speak them, but hurl them from His hands. Remember, men may laugh at Hell and say there is none. But they must reject their Bibles before they can believe the lie. . . .

Sirs, will ye keep your secret sins and have eternal fire for them? Remember: it is of no use, they must all be given up, or else you cannot be God's child. You cannot by any means have both! It cannot be God and

the world; it cannot be Christ and the devil; it must be one or the other. Oh! That God would give you grace to resign all; for what are they worth? They are your deceivers now and will be your tormentors forever. Oh! That your eyes were open to see the rottenness, the emptiness, and trickery of iniquity. Oh! That God would turn you to Himself. Oh! May God give you [the] grace . . . of repentance at this very hour; to say, "Henceforth it is war to the knife with my sins! Not one of them will I willingly keep, but down with them, down with them! Canaanite, Hittite, Jebusite—they shall all be driven out.

*The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from its throne,  
And worship only Thee.*

"But oh, sir, I cannot do it! It would be like pulling my eyes out!" Ay, but hear what Christ says: "It is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (*cf.* Matthew 5:29). "But it would be like cutting my arm off!" Ay and it would be better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, than to be cast into hellfire forever (*cf.* Matthew 5:30). Oh! When the sinner comes before God at last, do you think he will speak as he does now? God will reveal his secret sins: the sinner will not then say, "Lord, I thought my secret sins so sweet, I could not give them up." I think I see how changed it will be then. "Sir," you say now, "you are too strict!" Will you say that when the eyes of the Almighty are glowering on you? You say now, "Sir, you are too precise"; will you say that to God Almighty's face? "Sir, I mean to keep such-and-such a sin." Can you say it at God's bar at last? You will not dare to do it then. Ah! When Christ comes a second time, there will be a marvelous change in the way men talk. Methinks I see Him! *There* He sits upon His throne! Now, Caiaphas, come and condemn Him now! Judas! Come and kiss Him now! What do you stick at, man? Are you afraid of Him? Now, Barabbas! Go! See whether they will prefer you to Christ now. Swearer, now is your time! You have been a bold man. Curse Him to His face

now. Now drunkard, stagger up to Him now! Now infidel, tell Him there is no Christ now—now that the world is lit with lightning and the earth is shaken with thunder until the solid pillars thereof do bow themselves—tell God there is no God now; now laugh at the Bible; now scoff at the minister. Why men, what is the matter with you? Why, can't you do it? Ah! there you are, you have fled to the hills and to the rocks—"Rocks hide us! Mountains fall on us! Hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne" (*cf.* Rev. 6:16). Ah! Where are now your boasts, your vauntings, and your glories? Alas! alas! for you in that dread day of wonders.

Secret sinner, what will then become of thee? Go out of this place unmasked, go out to examine thyself, go out to bend thy knee, go out to weep, go out to pray. God give thee grace to believe! And oh, how sweet and pleasant the thought, that this day sinners have fled to Christ, and men have been born again to Jesus! Brethren, ere I finish, I repeat the words at which so many have caviled—it is now or never, it is turn or burn. Solemnly in God's sight I say it; if it be not God's truth, I must answer for it in the Great Day of account. Your consciences tell you it is true. Take it home and mock me if you will; this morning I am clear of your blood. If any seek not God, but live in sin, I shall be clear of your blood in that Day when the watchman shall have your souls demanded of him. Oh, may God grant that you may be cleared in a blessed manner! When I went down these pulpit stairs a Sabbath or two ago, a friend said to me words that have been in my mind ever since: "Sir, there are nine thousand people this day without excuse in the Day of Judgment." It is true of you this morning. If you are damned, it will be not for [lack] of preaching to you, and it shall not be for [lack] of praying for you. God knoweth that if my heart could break of itself, it would for your souls; for God is my witness, how earnestly I long for you in the bowels of Christ Jesus. Oh, that He might touch your hearts and bring you to Him! For death is a solemn thing, damnation is a horrible thing, to be out of Christ is a dreadful thing, to be dead in sin is a terrific thing. May God lead you to view



because it implies that we might actually have to give something up to be in right relationship with God.

Strictly speaking, even the demons “have a relationship with God.” In the Gospels they know who Jesus is and they speak to Him (and He speaks back, though not in words that any of us would want to hear directed at us). It is not enough to claim to know God. Our lives have to back up our words. No doubt we will sin. While perfect behavior is not a possibility this side of the Resurrection we had better stop kidding ourselves that we can operate like the average twenty-first-century man or woman on the street and then justify it on

the basis of being “free from legalism.”

Both the legalist and the libertine will have to give an account of their lives before God one day. It is imperative that we realize the pendulum too often swings towards the latter error in the twenty-first-century American church and then both corporately and individually seek the Lord’s face on how best to reverse the trend. The alternative is judgment and, whether it ends up being temporal or eternal, such judgment is something to very seriously avoid. ■

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## *Personal Responsibility for Congregational Stability*

by Harold Good

Probably everyone will agree that congregational stability is a good thing. We all want it to happen, but we tend to think it is someone else’s responsibility. This is like the saying that everybody’s business is nobody’s business. That is, responsibility rests on the group as a whole but not on any individuals. We fail to sense our personal responsibility because we can hide in the crowd.

The truth is that congregational stability depends on individual stability. We recognize that there are various levels of maturity in any given congregation. While we do not expect the same from all the members, each one—especially the adult members—needs to assume some responsibility for this matter of congregational stability. You cannot have a stable congregation made up of unstable individuals.

### *Congregational Stability Defined*

Stability can be described as resistance to change, deterioration, or displacement. For example, many things will be blown around and displaced by a strong wind. Even large trees will sway and their branches will move about, but the trees stay put. They are stable.

We find a picture of stability in Ephesians 4:13: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” The opposite is portrayed in the next verse: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness.” Jesus said we must be like children to enter God’s kingdom, but this verse says we must be

different from children in stability.

*Congregational stability means that the people have come to a maturity in faith.* Sometimes a group holds a certain position for some time; but then they hear something new that upsets it all, and suddenly they cast aside much of what they formerly stood for. Something is wrong with our faith if that happens. In contrast, people in a stable congregation are settled in what they believe and will not easily be swayed by the winds of change or false doctrine.

*Congregational stability is a situation where members are satisfied and have rest in church life.* The congregation does not have an undue number of stresses and upheavals. Of course, no congregation can be free of all stress; there will always be some of that because congregations are made of fallible people. But there are some congregations that seem to go from one crisis to another, and that does not contribute to stability. It does not give the people the security that God planned for them to have in the church.

*Congregational stability is evident when peace soon returns after a period of stress.* A strong gust of wind may push an airplane off course, or the rolling sea may take a ship off course and even threaten to capsize it. But if the plane or ship is stable, it will soon come back to its normal position. Yes, there will be stresses in congregational life, but a stable congregation will endure those tests and soon come back to equilibrium.

### ***Our Responsibility Defined***

Individual members are responsible for congregational stability, as is evident in Ephesians 4:16. Speaking of Christ, this verse says, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The word *compacted* means "knit together," and this work is accomplished by "that which every joint supplieth."

Achieving congregational stability involves every member; no one is excluded. The ministering brethren do have a major part in giving leadership, but stability is not just their responsibility. Single people and married folks, younger families and older members—all need to be solidly settled in the faith and thus contribute to a stable congregation.

*We need a strong personal commitment to the Lord.* Though we have an obligation to the church, we must always see that our first obligation is to God. We will finally answer not to each other but to the Lord. This means we are responsible to feed our own selves in the Christian life, to nurture our own faith, and to grow in the Lord.

There are some people in the congregation whom you do not hear much from. They are not outspoken and not out front, but you get the impression that they are faithful and steadfast in their daily responsibilities. Just recently something was said about a certain brother's comments in Sunday school. You can tell that he is interested in the lessons and that he digs in and studies the Scriptures. Yet it is not what we say when we are all together, but what we do in our individual lives that will count in the end.

*We need to give solid support to what the church stands for.* Our personal convictions need to line up with what the church is promoting and upholding. I remember talking to a certain member years ago, and this young man kept saying "your church." So I asked why he did not say "my church." That expression was quite revealing. He saw himself as being at the edge, and he certainly did not see the church as his church.

One of the questions in our counsel services is, Can you work with the standards of the church? We are not insisting that every person have strong conviction for every detail of the church standards. But we are asking each one for a willingness to work with the congregation, to do what is expected, even though it may not be his first preference. Of course, it is quite hard

to work with something if you do not agree with the basics of it. So we assume that when people say that they are willing to work with the standard, they agree with the basics of it and are ready to live by it.

Sometimes we ask people to stop doing a certain thing, and they agree not to do it again. Then after a while they are doing another thing in the same line but in a different area. Soon we hear about something else; and before long we wonder what all we must tell these people they may not do. Some people even have the idea that they will try a certain new thing; and if nobody says anything, it must be all right. That does not contribute to stability in the church.

If we are contributing to stable congregational life, we will have our own convictions instead of needing to be told everything. It is not that we think our church is the only place where a person can be a Christian. Rather, it is somewhat similar to marriage in some respects. There may be a number of eligible partners; but after we are married, we must not think about other options or consider what to do in case this does not work. We commit ourselves to making it work. In church life we can relocate, but when difficult times come, we ought to first be committed to making it work where we are.

*We need to stand for what we believe even if not everyone else does it.* Some people are quite firm on a certain point, but they change when they face the issue in their own families. Though some change can come through maturity, we must not be blind to the possibility of making changes that we should not be making. Let us not be innovative or experimental, but let us rather be cautious about change. That makes a definite contribution to congregational stability.

*We need to support the church administration.* I am not suggesting blind loyalty to the church leaders regardless of what they do. But when we have questions, we must ask them in the right spirit, if we are going to have a stable congregation. The

ministers do need to deal with things and exercise some discipline. If this involves someone close to us, do we get all upset about it? Any questions we ask should be sincere, not condemning, with an honest effort to understand the ministers' concerns. This has a much more stabilizing influence than being quick to accuse the ministry.

*We need a commitment to maintaining peace.* At one extreme are people who ignore issues because they do not want to face conflict. At the other extreme are people who have right interests, but they promote their ideas in such a way that they keep things agitated. They are often pushy, reactionary, and even revolutionary in their approach, constantly keeping things stirred up. Both extremes cause instability in a congregation.

Remember Hebrews 12:14: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Our natural tendency is to expect more of others than of ourselves. For the best contribution to peace in congregational life, we should be a little stricter with ourselves than with others.

*We need a willingness to bear the cross.* This expresses itself in a readiness to work, to sacrifice, and to do whatever needs to be done. When the superintendent asks us to teach a Sunday school class, how quickly can we say no? We should not easily shrug off such a request. If we want good, stable congregational life, there needs to be people who are willing to do these things. Not everyone has to do everything, but someone needs to do something, even if he does not have the best ability in that area.

We all like congregational stability, but what are we doing to contribute to it? As members in the church, we all are either helping or hindering. We are contributing either to stability or to instability in our local congregation. ■

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## *Beginning Issues*



# **The Bible: Is It Accurate? (Part 3)**

by John Mullett

**A**s I promised, this month I would like to look at the reliability of the transmitting of the Bible's manuscripts. How confident can we be that today's copies accurately reflect the original content and intent? How far back do the oldest manuscripts date? How many copies do we have? These are some of the questions we will attempt to answer or at least stir our thinking on.

### ***Reliability of Old Testament Text***

Before the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls the oldest manuscripts of the Old Testament dated back to around 800-900 A.D. There were around 1,000 manuscripts in existence with the Masoretic texts representing at least the majority of these. The Masoretes were extremely careful in how the text was copied, including numbering verses, words, and letters, and which word and letter represented the middle of the book. If any discrepancy was found, the entire book would be condemned as unfit, and the copying for that particular book must be re-copied from the beginning. Any variants were carefully documented in the margins. As a result the manuscripts from that time period show remarkable accuracy. There are several texts translated from manuscripts older than the Masoretic texts, including the Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Syriac Version. Even these when compared with

the Masoretic texts show only minor variations and none that significantly affects any doctrine or event.

But in the 1940s with the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls the reliability of the Old Testament manuscripts received a major confirmation. Suddenly the oldest available manuscripts dated back an additional thousand years to the time of Christ or before, possibly as early as 250 B.C. One of the most exciting discoveries in this find was a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah which when compared with today's Bible was remarkably accurate and of the variances found most of them were obvious copying mistakes or spelling variations.

### ***Reliability of New Testament Text***

The New Testament has an abundance of textual evidence of its accuracy and reliability. There are over 24,000 partial or complete manuscript copies, including 5,300 copies of Greek manuscripts, 10,000 copies of Latin Vulgate manuscripts, and 9,300 copies of various other manuscripts. In fact, not only does it have more than any other ancient book, but by a wide margin. Homer's *Iliad* is a distant second at 640+ copies. With such a vast number of copies it sets the standard for verifying the text for accuracy quite high, but there's more.

Not only does the New Testament have more copies than all other ancient books, but in comparison to those books it also has a

narrower window of time between composition and the oldest complete copies within about 250 years. Some complete books may date to within 100 years of their writing and there are fragments that may come to within about 30 years or so. Further evidence is found in the writings of the early church fathers where the books of the New Testament are quoted to the extent that without any additional writings scholars could compile the entire New Testament, except for about eleven verses from writings within about 150 to 200 years of the time of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

In all reality the reliability of the Biblical text is assured beyond any reasonable doubt or as Hank Hanegraaph puts it, "The overwhelming bibliographic reliability of the Bible is clearly evident."<sup>2</sup>

This article is a compilation of information gathered from a wide range of resources, many of which stated the same or very similar statistics. If you are interested in

a more in-depth look at the subject of Biblical reliability I encourage you to dig in and find additional resources. I came across many names familiar in Christian circles such as Henry Morris, Norm Geisler, William Albright, and Nelson Glueck, just to name a few. Actually I encourage you to always dig in deeper and especially compare these articles with Scriptures as the Bereans in Acts 17:10, 11, "Searching the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." The primary purpose of a short article like this is to stir our interests or create awareness, but obviously can never be exhaustive.

1. Ron Rhodes, *Manuscript Evidence for the Bible*, Reasoning From the Scriptures Ministries <http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Manuscript.html> or PO Box 80087 Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688.
2. Hank Hanegraaph, Bible Reliability: M-A-P-S to Guide You through Bible Reliability <http://www.equip.org/articles/bible-reliability>.

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## Simple Living by Design

by Aaron W. Crider

Simple living has long been a hallmark of God's people. The examples and teachings of Jesus and His apostles, of the early church, and of faithful groups including the Anabaptists—all of these contain principles that point to simplicity of lifestyle. A people separate from the world will be dedicated to eternal entities and realities rather than transitory pleasures and treasures.

The self-justifying affluence of American society surrounds us with ideas that suggest that simple living is for the simple-minded who can't manage their resources well enough to support a higher standard of living. Succumbing to these ideas could steer us away from purposeful simplicity of life that seeks to apply principles of discipleship, kingdom-seeking, and love.

Here are a few points that may encourage us to appreciate and retain this practice.

### ***Simple living is the fruit of obedience.***

A simple lifestyle is a by-product of obedience to Jesus' commands, such as in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." A life dedicated to the pursuit of the kingdom will have little place for cumbersome extras and useless distractions. Kingdom-seeking produces simple living.

### ***The egg basket is empty.***

Our churches continually face new opportunities to financially support kingdom-building efforts. In discussing these opportunities, we sometimes consider the illustration of an egg basket. As the contents of the basket can only be distributed in so many directions, so our funds available for distribution can only stretch so far before some or all of the supported programs suffer.

Since some programs are already suffering, we are forced to conclude that our basket is indeed empty—that our funds are already stretched to the limit. You can't divide a dozen eggs in thirteen directions.

It would be wise for us to go back and carefully check whether we have perchance left an egg or two in the nest. We may discover them in our houses, vehicles, and wardrobe, or even in our recreation or on the dinner table. Then in the prayer closet we can ask, "Would God be pleased if we would alter our lifestyle so the egg basket can be filled?"

Based on God's promises and my study of God's workings throughout history, I suggest that with more sacrificial living and intense kingdom-seeking, we may discover an amazing kinship between our egg basket and the widow's cruse of oil.

***Our abundance can supply others' needs, both material and spiritual.***

Today, there are people groups in our world who have never heard the Gospel. We have neighbors around the world who are certain they won't survive another hard winter. Our own brothers and sisters are suffering every imaginable deprivation for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Closer home, thousands in our own cities and neighborhoods need to hear the true message of the Gospel, see it lived out in transformed lives, and learn the way of the cross. In our own church families, there are always those who are facing bills beyond their means to pay.

If we have more than enough to live on, the Apostle John has a question for us, and some fatherly advice: "*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him*" (1 John 3:17-19).

***The love of Christ constrains us.***

Most of us have had some exposure to the

vast material and spiritual needs of the world. All of us know of needs near at hand. The strange and sad reality is that the knowledge too seldom jolts us out of our comfortable complacency. We enjoy being challenged by the stirring presentations of mission and relief programs, but will we rise to the challenge?

True love is the only motivator that will carry us beyond good words and good intentions (1 John 3:17-19). It is the necessary foundation for successful kingdom-seeking and profitable giving. "*Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing*" (1 Corinthians 13:3).

We may struggle to know what our lifestyle really should be. What does God expect? We search in vain for explicit directives in Scripture. We likely know some people who are considered hopelessly radical, so we shy away from such extremes. At the same time, we do want to please God and follow Jesus in true discipleship, holding nothing back.

The love of Christ can bring us to the end of that struggle. When we gratefully view what the love of Christ cost Him, we begin to feel that there is no limit to what we will do in response to that love. And our motivation, like Paul's, is higher than to be hindered by others' attitudes toward us. "*Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us*" (2 Cor. 5:13, 14). If we will let this love direct our lives, the wise Holy Spirit will superintend the details of our lifestyle.

Let not an intentionally simple lifestyle be considered a sign of slothfulness or poor management. Neither let it ever become a mere relic of our heritage, to be wistfully admired. Above all, let us not pursue it as an end in itself or a proof of godliness. Simple living by design is a deliberate decision of a disciple of Jesus, motivated by his Master's love, to live with less for the benefit of others. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Life Lines*, March-April 2009.



# 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.*

## Praise to God, Immortal Praise

by Barbault/Abbot, Redhead

**Lyrics:** “Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” These words of Job describe the attitude displayed in the simple, familiar hymn: “Praise to God, Immortal Praise.” Due to the steadily decreasing attention span of the human mind over the last couple of centuries, the standard version of this hymn has been reduced to five verses in most hymnals. The original hymn had at least nine verses, and other shortened versions of the hymn have verses that are different from the nine printed here. The first five stanzas stand alone as a nice, simple hymn of thanksgiving for all the good things in life, but the final four add a deeper and more significant dimension that is missing in the pleasant optimism of the first half.

Thanksgiving Day is a day that is set aside specifically to thank God for His blessings. This is easy to do when the “flocks” actually do “whiten the plain,” and when the “stores” actually do “overflow.” However, in many ways and for many people this past year has been one that felt much more like “rising whirlwinds” and “untimely figs.” Many people have lost jobs, seen investments lose value, or even lost their houses. The call of this hymn is to rejoice in God’s blessings, but not to base our love for Him on

what He gives us. The physical blessings are nice, and some even seem necessary from our point of view, but if our love for God is shaken “when every blessing’s flown,” we have misunderstood the meaning of Christianity.

**Music:** The *Mennonite Hymnal* contains a brilliant solution to the problem presented to modern congregations by a hymn with nine verses: split it into *two* hymns. This not only diminishes the monotony of singing nine verses to the same simple tune, but it also provides a clearer contrast between the “thanks for good things” and the “thankfulness in suffering” themes of the two distinct sections.

There are several ways this (these) hymn(s) could be approached. Either of them is capable of standing alone as a hymn to complement some aspect of a worship service. However, they do present a more complete picture of the true meaning of thankfulness when sung together as a set. One effective way to tie the two together is to sing the last verse (v. 9) with the first tune. This musical recapitulation helps to tie the “two” hymns together, and bring a sense of closure to the set. ■

# Praise to God, Immortal Praise

PRAYER 7.7.7.7.

Anna L. Barbault, 1773

PART I

Asahel Abbot, c. 1852

1 Praise to God, im - mor - tal praise, For the love that crowns our days;  
 2 For the bless - ings of the field, For the stores the gar - dens yield,  
 3 Clouds that drop re - fresh - ing dews; Suns that gen - ial heat dif - fuse;  
 4 All that spring with boun - teous hand, Scat - ters o'er the smil - ing land;  
 5 These, great God, to Thee we owe, Source whence all our bless - ings flow;

Boun - teous source of ev - ery joy, Let Thy praise our tongues em - ploy.  
 For the joy which har - vests bring, Grate - ful prais - es now we sing.  
 Flocks that whit - en all the plain, Yel - low sheaves of rip - ened grain.  
 All that lib - 'ral au - tumn pours From her o - ver - flow - ing stores;  
 And for these our souls shall raise Grate - ful vows and sol - emn praise.

# Lord, Should Rising Whirlwinds

ORIENTIS PARTIBUS 7.7.7.7

Anna L. Barbault, 1773

PART II

13th century French Melody  
 Harmony by Richard Redhead, 1853

6 Lord, should ris - ing whirl - winds tear From its stem the rip - ening ear;  
 7 Should the vine put forth no more, Nor the o - live yield her store;  
 8 Should Thine al - tered hand re - strain Th' ear - ly and the lat - ter rain  
 9 Yet to Thee my soul should raise Grate - ful vows and sol - emn praise;

Should the fig - tree's blast - ed shoot Drop her green un - time - ly fruit;  
 Though the sick - 'ning flocks should fall, And the herds de - sert the stall;  
 Blast each o - p'ning bud of joy, And the ris - ing year de - stroy;  
 And, when ev - ery bless - ing's flown, Love Thee for Thy - self a - lone!

# How to Profit From Bible Reading

by Bruce Oyen

There is a great deal of emphasis on Bible reading among Christians, but they need guidance in how to profit from Bible reading. That is what I hope to provide with this article. May the Lord bless it to that end.

## **1) When reading the Bible, interpret it literally whenever possible.**

When we read the Bible with this in mind, we will discover that it should be interpreted this way quite frequently, unless there is good reason to interpret it nonliterally.

Therefore, when we read Genesis 1:1's statement, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," there is no reason to think it means other than just what it says. It does not mean God evolved the heaven and the earth. It does not mean they evolved on their own. It means God created the heaven and the earth.

Moreover, when we read the Bible this way, we will take literally the events recorded in the Book of Jonah. This is not to be understood as a fable, as C. S. Lewis, in his book, *God in the Dock*, would have us believe. Rather, Jonah was a literal man who was swallowed by a literal great fish that literally vomited him out on dry land, and he literally lived to tell about his time of prayer and repentance in that fish's belly.

Often, the context of what is being read will indicate if something is to be understood literally or figuratively. The contexts of the preceding examples indicate they are to be understood literally.

But the context of something in 2 Kings 14:9-12 indicates that figurative speech is used in verse 8, which says, "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife: and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode

down the thistle." It is obvious that King Jehoash spoke of himself as the cedar to whom King Amaziah, represented by the thistle, sent a message. Merrill Unger's commentary on these verses is noteworthy: "In his hearty rebuff Jehoash was both the cedar and the wild beast that trampled down the thistle."

Remember to interpret the Bible literally as you read it, unless the context indicates it should be interpreted figuratively. You will profit more, if you do so.

## **2) To profit more from Bible reading, read it completely.**

Size-wise, the Bible is not a very large book, even in giant print. Many novels and biographies are longer than the Bible. Even so, many Christians have not read the Bible completely. Instead, favorite verses, chapters, and books are read and reread. These might include 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Romans 8, the Book of Psalms, and the Gospel of John.

There is nothing wrong with rereading favorite parts of the Bible, but we should not neglect the rest of it. If you have not read it from cover to cover, you have missed many of its treasures.

Amos R. Wells wrote a poem about this very subject. It is called, "Read the Bible Through." Part of it is given here:

### **Read the Bible Through**

by Amos R. Wells

I supposed I knew the Bible, reading piecemeal, hit or miss;  
Now a bit of John or Matthew, now a snatch of Genesis.

Certain chapters of Isaiah, certain Psalms—the twenty-third!  
Twelfth of Romans, first of Proverbs.

Yes, I thought I knew the Word!

But I found that thorough reading was a different thing to do,  
And the way was unfamiliar when I read the Bible through.  
You who like to play at Bible, dip and dabble, here and there,  
Just before you kneel weary, and yawn through a hurried prayer,  
You who treat the Crown of Writings, as you treat no other book—  
Just a paragraph disjointed, just a crude, impatient look—  
Try a worthier procedure, try a broad and steady view;  
You will kneel in very rapture, when you read the Bible through.

As we think about reading the Bible completely, let me challenge you to try doing so once a year. This can be done by reading four chapters a day. If you read at a consistently moderate speed without taking time to ponder what is read, it won't take long to read four chapters a day. Then, go back and think over something that got your attention while reading the chapters.

### **3) Consider the importance of reading the Bible reverently.**

Reverent Bible reading is the direct result of believing the Bible to be God's Word. The Divine authorship of the Scriptures sets them apart from all other books, making them "the holy Scriptures." In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul said Timothy had known "the holy scriptures" since he was a child. Romans 1:2 refers to the gospel, which God "had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures."

Nehemiah 8:5 and 6 illustrates reverence for the Bible by the fact that, when it was read to others, they stood at attention. Isaiah 66:2 tells us God said, "But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

I am not suggesting that we must stand when the Bible is read in church services just because those persons did so. Nor am I suggesting that we must literally tremble in the presence of the Bible. These statements from Scripture simply underscore the importance of heartfelt reverence for the Word of God. John Burton, Sr., lived from 1773-1822. His

reverence for the Bible as God's Word has become known through his poem, "Holy Bible Book Divine." The first nine words of the poem are, "Holy Bible, Book divine, precious treasure, thou art mine."

May God help us to read His Word with such reverence as Burton had!

### **4) We should also read the Bible humbly.**

Reverence and humility go together, but are not the same. We should read the Bible humbly because it is God's Word, not ours. The Thessalonians were commended for having received the Gospel in the manner they did. This is recorded in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, which says, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

We need to read the Bible humbly because, being God's infallible Word, it contradicts much of our own reasoning. We need to adjust our opinions to it, rather than adjust it to our opinions. As we read Scripture, let us keep in mind Isaiah 55:8, 9, in which God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Humble readers of God's Word do a number of things, including the following: They will accept its condemnation of premarital, extramarital, and homosexual behavior. They will accept its teaching that the only way to God and salvation is through the Lord Jesus Christ. They will accept its moral absolutes, and reject moral relativism. They will acknowledge that God and His Word are their final authority in life, not human reason.

King Josiah had his faults like the rest of us. But he is an example of one who humbled himself to the Word of God when it was read to him. Second Kings 22:11 says, "And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes." Having learned how far

his people had strayed from the will of God, the king reacted in an extreme way by tearing his clothes. We don't need to tear our clothes, but we would do well to humble ourselves to the Word of God as he did.

**5) *The Bible should also be read expectantly.***

The word *expect* means "to look forward to as certain or probable." So, to read Scripture expectantly is to read it with the expectation that it will speak to us in some way.

If an envelope comes in the mail, we open it with the expectation that it will contain a message for us. When we open the Bible, we should do so with the same attitude. But what should we expect it to say to us? Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine [teaching], for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." So, we should look for those things when we read the Word of God. But we can expect other things from the Scriptures too. Romans 15:4 refers to the "comfort of the scriptures." It tells us God's plan for the future in places such as Matthew 24 and 25, 2 Peter 3, and, of course, the Book of Revelation.

Many a Christian man on his deathbed has turned expectantly to Psalm 23 to find consolation from the verse that says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

Many a Christian mother with a wayward child has turned expectantly for strength to Jeremiah 33:3, which says, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."

The Prophet Daniel is a good example of one who read the Bible with expectation, and in this case with the expectation that God's promises would be fulfilled. He and his people had been deported from Israel to Babylon as a punishment for the nation Israel's sins. This deportation was to last 70 years, according to Jeremiah 25:11. Daniel 9:2 tells us the prophet knew the 70 years were almost up, so he went to God in prayer about it all, expecting God to bring the Jews

back to their homeland.

Isaiah 55:11 applies to our subject. It says, "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Therefore, read the Bible expectantly!

**6) *The Bible should also be read dependently.***

By reading the Bible dependently, I mean we look to others for help in understanding it.

First and foremost, we are dependent on God to help us understand His own Book. The writer of Psalm 119 felt his dependence on God, as his prayers in the following verses reveal. Verse 18: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Verse 34: "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart." Verse 73: "Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments."

Though infallible understanding does not come to us in answer to prayer, we surely are helped by it.

Not only can we turn to the Lord for help in understanding His Word. We can seek help from others as well, even though they are not infallible guides. Those who refuse help from others in their study of the Scriptures often end up more confused than anyone else.

All honest persons can relate to what we read in Acts 8 about the conversation between Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian eunuch. While the Ethiopian read a portion from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, the evangelist asked him if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian answered, "How can I except some man should guide me?" So, the evangelist helped the man understand that the prophet had written about the Lord Jesus Christ, and it would seem he helped the man put his faith in Jesus to be saved.

Where might we turn for help in understanding the Bible, other than directly to God in prayer? To Bible dictionaries and commentaries by reputable Bible scholars. *Unger's Bible Dictionary* is well-known. William MacDonald's *Bible Believer's*

*Commentary* is a favorite of many readers. *The Ryrie Study Bible* is valuable.

Of course, pastors, friends, and literature can be helpful.

All these resources combined will help keep us from going too far wrong as we work our way through the Bible.

### **7) *We should read the Bible Christ-centeredly.***

What should we look for as we read the Bible? Let me say, Don't so much look for a "what" as for a "who," and that "who" is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible truly is a Christ-centered Book. Most Christians know the New Testament is centered on Him. But so is the Old Testament. Jesus Christ Himself taught this, as the following quotes of the Lord's own words prove. In each case, He was referring to the Old Testament writings. In John 5:39 He said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." In John 5:46 He said, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me." In Luke 18:31 He said to the twelve disciples, "All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished." Luke 24:27 says, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." In Luke 24:44 we read, "And he [Jesus] said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." This last verse refers to the whole Old Testament in the three main divisions by which it was known to the Jews in the Lord's day: law, prophets, psalms.

So, what we learn from these verses is the Lord considered Himself to be central to the Old Testament. Let us, then, look for Him as we read the Bible.

Others saw Jesus in the Old Testament too. In John 1:45 we are told, "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth,

the son of Joseph."

We previously considered the conversation in Acts 8 between Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian eunuch, in which Philip helped the Ethiopian understand what he was reading in the Old Testament. In Acts 8:35 we read the following significant statement: "Then Philip . . . preached unto him [the Ethiopian] Jesus." He did this from the Old Testament!

When in college, one of the teachers traveled a lot to preach in Bible conferences. He told us students that it seemed no matter where the conference was held, a certain man, whom some of us students knew, would be present.

That is the way it is with the Bible: Jesus Christ will be present, whether we are reading the Old Testament or the New Testament. So, when reading the Bible we should look for Jesus.

### **8) *The Bible should be read obediently.***

The Bible has a message for both non-Christians and Christians. Its message for non-Christians is found in verses such as Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is also found in John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son [Jesus Christ] hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Yes, the Bible has a message for non-Christians. But most of it is directed toward those who are Christians. It is primarily God's Book for God's people. It informs us about the future. It comforts us in sorrow. It tells us what we should believe, and it lays great emphasis on how Christians should behave.

Consequently, the Bible should be read with obedient hearts if we are to profit from it. In fact, it seems that the Bible is a closed Book to Christians with closed hearts. While we might open its covers to read it, its message falls flat if we are not intent on following its truths. A. W. Tozer wisely said, "For truth to be understood, it must be lived." The writer of Psalm 119 understood this principle, for he said in verse 11, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might

not sin against thee.” He knew it was not good enough to simply store the Word in his memory. It had to be hid in the heart.

King Josiah set a good example of reading the Bible obediently. Note what is said about him in 2 Kings 23:2, 3: “He read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all their heart and all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant.”

Let us emulate King Josiah by applying to daily living what we read in the Word of God. If we do so, it will be in great contrast to some the Prophet Ezekiel preached to. Ezekiel 33:31 tells us God said of those persons, “And they come unto thee [Ezekiel] as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.”

**9) As we read the Bible, let us read it logically.**

By reading the Bible logically, I mean reading its 66 individual books and letters as units, chapter by chapter. This is superior to reading a few verses here one day, and a few verses there another day. When we read the Bible’s books and letters as units, we get each one’s overall subject matter fixed in our minds. In other words, we get the big picture. This is especially true after repeated readings.

Each book or letter of the Scriptures has its own logical progression, which can only be seen by reading it in its entirety, preferably in a relatively short period of time so we see the big picture sooner.

While it is better to use the hop, skip, and jump method of Bible reading than to not read it at all, we will profit much more if we read it in the logical way presented here.

This does not mean we must start with Genesis, the Bible’s first book, and read until we finish with Revelation, the Bible’s

last book, like we would read a biography from cover to cover. It means that we read entire Biblical books and letters, even if we alternate back and forth from the Old Testament to the New Testament. So, one might first read Genesis, and then read Matthew, working eventually all the way through the Bible, and then starting the process all over.

**10) We should read the Bible meditatively.**

There are some strikingly significant statements in Psalm 119 about meditating on the Bible. Verse 15 says, “I will meditate in thy precepts.” Verse 23 says, “Thy servant did meditate in thy statutes.” Verse 48 says, “I will meditate in thy statutes.” Verse 78 says, “I will meditate in thy precepts.” Verse 97 says, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.” Verse 99 says, “Thy testimonies are my meditation.” Verse 148 says, “Mine eyes prevent [anticipate] the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.” All these verses emphasize the importance of meditating on the Word of God.

But what does it mean, to meditate on the Bible? Simply put, it is to seriously think over what we read, seeking to understand it and apply it to daily life.

Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ, illustrates what it is to meditate on the Word of God. In Luke 1 we read that after she had given birth to the Lord, the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and said important things to them. One of those statements is found in Luke 2:11: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” After the angel’s appearance and announcements, the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus, who was lying in a manger. Having found them, the shepherds told Mary and Joseph the message of the angel of the Lord concerning the child Jesus.

What was Mary’s response to such a remarkable announcement about her newborn Son? Verse 19 says, “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” That is what meditation on the Word of God is: pondering it in the heart.

*(continued on p. 9)*

# Counseling Those in Sexual Sin

by Steve Gallagher

## ***PART 1:***

### ***THE SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM***

When I entered the ministry in 1986, I could have never guessed that my life's calling would be to minister to men in habitual sexual sin. Sexual addiction was a concept almost unheard of in those days. All these years later, I can honestly say that it has been a great privilege to devote my life to helping these men.

Having encountered thousands of men bound up in sexual sin over the past two decades, I think it's fair to say that I have acquired a good sense of what the typical sexual addict is like.

The typical man who will come to you for help has been involved in illicit sexual activity for years. This immoral lifestyle has been done almost entirely in secret. Although sexual fantasy, pornography, and illicit encounters make up a huge part of his life, he has managed to hide it from most, if not all, of his closest friends and relatives. Most acquaintances would consider him to be morally upright and would never guess what he does when no one is looking.

As a pastor or counselor, you will undoubtedly find yourself helping men who frequent adult bookstores, strip clubs, massage parlors, or prostitutes. You may also minister to men involved with peeking in windows, exposing themselves to women, making obscene telephone calls, sexually assaulting others, or even having sex with animals. You will most certainly deal with promiscuity among teenagers and adults. You will also probably minister to homosexuals—both male and female. However, the primary recipients of your attention will be men who are simply addicted to pornography.

Even so, the average man you will

encounter in your work has been faithfully attending church services for many years. He also reads inspirational books, listens to Christian radio, and possibly attends special men's events.

Unfortunately, the fact that he has been involved in so much religious activity has very possibly hurt him more than it has helped. Sitting in church on Sunday after viewing the filthy images of pornography during the week only hardens a man's heart and deepens his spiritual delusion. Sin always deceives. The more wickedness a person is involved in, the more blind he will become to his true spiritual condition. Because he senses God's presence in meetings, however, it is easy for him to imagine that he truly is walking closely with the Lord. This false impression is compounded by the spiritual reality that the Lord has not been quick to judge his sin.

Living in spiritual defeat over a prolonged period of time causes the man to waffle back and forth between an inflated sense of his own spirituality and a feeling of overwhelming hopelessness. Part of the problem is that for years he has run to books, seminars, and support group meetings in the hope that he can overcome his problems with a minimal amount of effort. His dilemma has been exacerbated because he has gotten his hopes up many times over the years by the exaggerated claims of people offering help: "Read this book, it's powerful!" "This seminar will change your life!" He dutifully reads those books and attends those seminars but finds that nothing has changed. Each promising situation that doesn't bring victory leaves him more cynical. After a while, he even becomes skeptical about the promises held out by Scripture.

**PART 2:**  
**READY, WILLING, ABLE**

As a result of the Sexual Revolution, millions of men (and women) are in terrible bondage to sexual sin. The need has never been greater for godly men and women to reach out to these struggling individuals and their devastated families. Indeed, many are doing so. However, there is a direct correlation between a counselor's methods and the effectiveness of his efforts in helping these hurting people.

If you are increasingly confronted with those in sexual sin, I encourage you to become thoroughly prepared and then confidently enter the battle, fully assured that God will bless your efforts. You will embark on a thrilling journey that will certainly bring forth abundant fruit. Jesus Christ was called "a friend of sinners." This is a badge of honor in the Kingdom of God that you will wear as well. Nothing could possibly be more pleasing to God than for a Christian to lay down his life on behalf of those devastated by sin.

In the Scripture passage shown in the sidebar, Paul establishes the requirements of a person wishing to help those who have fallen into sin. We will examine his three imperatives in this chapter.

***Those Who Are Spiritual***

Paul's opening remarks clearly indicate who is eligible to be involved in this work: "you who are spiritual, who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit." He establishes the context for this conditional statement in the preceding chapter where he summarizes spirituality in three basic characteristics:

- A believer who has a history of crucifying "the flesh with its affections and lusts" (vv. 17, 24);
- A believer who is led, controlled and influenced by the Holy Spirit (vv. 16, 18, 25);
- A believer whose life manifests the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 21, 22).

Galatians 5:16, 17 describes the conflict between the Spirit and flesh that rages within every believer. The "flesh" is a term Paul uses to describe man's lower nature: that part of every human that selfishly

desires pleasure, prominence, comfort, entertainment, and so on. The saints he refers to as "spiritual" have reached their level of maturity by waging a lifelong war with the appetites of the flesh. They are deemed "spiritual" because their daily lives are much more taken up with their life in God than in "the desires of the flesh."

To "walk by" or be "led by" the Spirit means that a person's thinking has come under God's control through this process of crucifixion. To be able to help others in spiritual turmoil, one must first undergo the process of brokenness in one's own life.

Lastly, the "spiritual" manifest the fruit of the Spirit in their daily lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

*The inescapable truth is that mere dissemination of facts on sexual addiction will not touch a heart that is hardened by years of sin.* Frankly, if the counselor is not walking in the Spirit, he will not be much help to the man coming to him in deep need. Indeed, he will discover that a Christian leader can only take someone to the same depths he himself has gone. Only God has the power to transform a person's heart and only the godly have the spiritual expertise to offer any real help.

Men in spiritual trouble need a counselor who is connected to God. Book knowledge about the problem has its place, but that alone is not sufficient to help another. The man actively indulging in the "deeds of the flesh" desperately needs help from someone whose life is exhibiting "the fruit of the Spirit." He needs personal ministry from someone who is feasting daily on the riches of God.

***The Restoration Process***

Having established the qualifications for helping those in habitual sin, Paul next explains the process of restoration. The word *restore* used here (Gk. *katartizo*) is the same word used by physicians to describe the setting of a broken bone. What an apt picture of the man who has been involved in pornography and/or fornication! Inwardly he has been crushed to pieces by the destructive nature of sin. His perspectives on sexuality are warped and distorted. Evil darkness has

penetrated his heart and clouded his thinking. Spiritually speaking, he has fallen off a three-story building: he's still alive, but he's all busted up inside. He needs someone who can help him set things in order.

The counselor's primary role in the restoration process is to lead the counselee into a biblical mindset using correction from God's Word. Bringing correction into a person's life is a delicate operation requiring great care. No one would even consider operating on a person's spinal cord, and yet it is amazing how some will recklessly delve into another's fragile inner world with little expertise! The counsel of the unqualified discipler usually strays off course either by overemphasizing grace at the expense of truth or vice-versa. Either way, the results are potentially disastrous!

A person attempting to break free from habitual sin most certainly needs encouragement. However, if that is all he receives from his counselor there will be minimal change in his life. It is good to feel sympathy and even pity for those who are struggling. However, human mercy, in itself, always tends to see a person's need in temporal rather than eternal terms.

In the existing field of counseling, this secularized mercy usually takes the form of therapies that focus on feelings rather than spirituality. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong in feeling sympathy for a person's emotional pain. Indeed, when a Christian becomes involved in the struggles of others, he will undoubtedly encounter some heartbreaking stories. However, he cannot allow pity to supersede God's Word in establishing a course of action for counseling that person.

The greatest mercy a counselor can do for the man living in rebellion against God's law is to help him discover genuine repentance and restoration. Biblical reproof, then, becomes essential in enabling the man to see authentic repentance as his avenue to freedom.

The man entrenched in a pattern of licentiousness needs someone who will stand against his flesh during those times of spiritual weakness. When he strays off course, the ultimate kindness one can do is to stop him from foolishly plunging into the abyss.

However, I can attest that this requires a great deal of selfless love. It's costly, but anything less is not of God.

In addition to offering encouragement, a counselor must also lovingly speak the truth. Unfortunately, some fall prey to the selfish enjoyment of pointing out others' faults. Pride, rather than love, compels them and gives them a feeling of superiority.

The counselor who is not in a spirit of meekness will become critical, self-righteous and hard-hearted toward people's needs. As a Christian learns to counsel biblically, he will become more adept at spiritual discernment. In the right spirit, he will perceive sin in the lives of others, but through eyes of love. However, if he himself is unbroken and unconquered by God, he will see the same problems, only with a critical spirit.

Bringing godly correction into another's life is difficult, but if done in the right spirit, it could potentially save him from destruction. If a man knows that you love him, he will accept your reproof. In fact, if he knows that you are doing it out of sincere concern for his well-being, he will often be grateful. My personal testimony is this: If you will allow the Holy Spirit to direct your counsel, many men will respond and the results will be astounding!

### ***Bearing the Sinner***

In his instructions about helping the habitual sinner, Paul also admonishes the spiritual leader to, "Bear, endure, carry, one another's burdens and troublesome moral faults and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly the law of Christ." What, you may ask, is the "law of Christ" that Paul refers to here? He identifies it in the previous chapter: "For the whole Law is fulfilled in

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#### **Galatians 6:1, 2**

Brethren, if any person is overtaken in any conduct or sin of any sort, you who are spiritual, who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit, should set him right and restore and reinstate him, without any sense of superiority and with all gentleness keeping an attentive eye on yourself lest you should be tempted also. Bear, endure, carry, one another's burdens and troublesome moral faults and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly the law of Christ (AMP).

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one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

Paul’s meaning is unmistakable: To help people overcome habitual sin, you must consider their needs as important as your own. In meeting people’s needs, you manifest the practical love of a passionate God. The habitual sinner needs a godly person who bears him to God in this way. I can’t state this strongly enough: *Please be prepared to bear people spiritually before becoming deeply involved in their lives.* They desperately need care from someone with the desire and capability to spiritually carry them.

Bearing people in this way requires deep involvement in their lives. The counselor who bears the sexual sinner must walk into the cesspool of his life and help drag him out. I can say from experience—it’s impossible to remain clean while wading into such a mess. It also means making yourself available to them at all times, day or night.

Finally, bearing a person spiritually requires intercession. For the shackles of sin to be broken in a man’s life, someone has to bear him before the throne of grace. Consistent, fervent prayer allows God to come in and do a work in a struggling person’s life. Only God can transform the human heart. Human advice, in itself, is not the answer. The counselor’s prayers are the catalyst by which God goes to work on the man’s behalf. Effectual, fervent prayers change lives.

Ministering to those ravaged by the effects of sexual sin is never glamorous. It is a dirty business, to be sure. Often, as I travel around the country speaking in different ministry settings, I encounter others teaching on the subject of sexual sin. It is remarkable how few of them truly know what it means to bear someone spiritually. At various conferences, they present their own personally-developed ideas, but most have little experience in the day-to-day, hands-on involvement. The true counseling warrior makes necessary spiritual sacrifices to stand against others’ flesh and bear them to God.

The need for qualified counselors has never been greater and only promises to increase. The three imperatives Paul laid out for the Galatians will serve to assess your preparedness. As I said at the outset, I encourage you to become thoroughly pre-

pared and then confidently enter the battle, fully assured that God will bless your efforts. Nothing could possibly be more pleasing to God than for a Christian to lay down his life on behalf of those devastated by sin.

### **PART 3: THE THREE NECESSITIES**

**F**or many years I thought that the greatest problem in today’s Church was a lack of discipleship. If pastors would just take the time to work with individuals—encouraging, exhorting, and training them—most of the carnality, worldliness, and sin amongst Christians would evaporate.

I have since changed my thinking. The best discipleship in the world cannot help an unconverted person overcome habitual sin or become more godly. In the past five years, I have become increasingly more convinced that much of the work that goes on in the Church today is the attempt to make unbelievers *act* like believers. Vast multitudes of professing Christians have never truly bowed their knee to the Christ they claim to follow. If they are unconverted, the best they can hope to accomplish is to try to please God in the flesh—something that the Apostle Paul said was impossible (Romans 8:8).

If this is true of mainstream Christendom, how much more is it true of that multitude within the Church’s ranks who are constantly juggling Christianity and lasciviousness—those people whose minds waver back and forth between thoughts about spiritual matters and evil imaginations?

So it should go without saying that a person must experience a true conversion to Christ if he is to have anything more than a white-knuckle kind of freedom from his addiction. The first necessity is faith; not spurious faith, not temporal faith, not faith in oneself, but real faith: a vibrant, saving faith in Jesus Christ.

I believe the Bible is very clear about the fact that there are, what I would call “unsaved Christians”; i.e., people who profess Christ but whose lives have not exhibited the kind of change indicative of salvation. I’m not referring to baby believers; I’m talking about people who have been

in the Church for years.

(Allow me to offer a word of caution here: Be careful about assuming that a person has truly been saved just because he has a history in the Church. One of the most dangerous mistakes a minister can make is to attempt to convince a person who doubts his salvation experience that he really is a believer. It is our job to point out the evidence of saving faith that the Scriptures describe. If the person has been truly saved, the Holy Spirit will be faithful to affirm it [Romans 8:16]. If the counselee is unsaved, then his salvation must become the primary focus of all future counseling sessions.)

As long as Self remains lodged on the throne of a person's heart, he will not have the power of the Holy Spirit at work within him. If Christ has taken His rightful place of authority in the person's life, then sin cannot hold him.

The second necessity is repentance: a very tricky subject with those who wrongly believe they are saved. If you tell the man he must repent of his sin, you are likely to hear, "I can't tell you how many times I have repented of my sin!" From his perspective, he is expressing what he believes to be true. On countless occasions, he has "repented" after giving over to his sin.

But the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. Real repentance means that the person has quit his sin. So, in the strictest sense of the word, the person has not repented. He has made resolutions to quit—resolutions that usually spring forth from his own determination to stop his behavior. This type of repentance comes forth from "worldly sorrow," as Paul coined it. *A person cannot repent of habitual sin if he has not transferred his allegiance from Self to Christ.* Every bout of "repentance" is doomed to fail. As you can see, we are still talking about whether or not the person has crossed the line into the kingdom of God. There is no doubt that this is the primary issue at stake. Until that matter has been resolved, the person cannot move forward spiritually.

Likewise, once he has truly been converted, he will enter the process of sanctification—where the Holy Spirit begins the internal work of transforming him into the

image of Christ.

Jesus explained this process through the metaphor of a vine and its branches. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:5, 6). If a person is attached to the Vine, he will continually receive spiritual nourishment.

A true believer will feel compelled to spend time with God on a regular basis. He instinctively knows that it is as he communes with God that he receives the inner strength to live the Christian life. On the other hand, a pseudo-Christian will probably not feel such compunction.

As the believer spends time in the Scriptures, he will, over time, find his warped perspectives about life (and sex) being straightened out. This doesn't happen overnight. It takes time. Years of twisted perspectives about sexuality gradually become corrected as he regularly spends time soaking in the Word of God.

Prayer also plays a vital role in this transformation process. It is by sitting in the presence of the Lord that he learns to walk in the Spirit. Paul promises this person that he will not cave in to the temptations to act out sin (Galatians 5:16). I can testify to the truth of this. Over the years, there have been those men who have left our residential program and fell back into their old pattern of sin. Without exception, before they returned to their sin, they had already forsaken their devotion time.

This article is a gross oversimplification of a process that is methodically laid out in my book, *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry*. But my purpose here is to assure you that there is a tried-and-true road map to victory over sin that is available to all children of God. There is no reason that a true believer should ever be held by the cords of sin. ■

—Adapted from *A Biblical Guide to Counseling the Sexual Addict* by Steve Gallagher, Pure Life Ministries.

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# *A Ministry of Deliverance*

by Timothy Gombis

**H**ow we as committed followers of Jesus relate to people living a homosexual lifestyle can be complicated. The Bible plainly teaches that homosexual conduct is sin, and we acknowledge that sin is the universal human condition. Apart from Christ, we are all broken people trapped in sin's crushing grip. But the Bible provides hope—freedom in Jesus Christ—and instruction for how we His redeemed ones should minister that same message of deliverance to sinners around us.

Heightening the tension is the intense national culture war around us. We are frustrated at the favorable way that homosexuality is portrayed in television programs and films. Homosexual lobby groups seem to be gaining political ground daily, having mastered the manipulation of print and digital media.

But amid the culture war, real people are trapped and struggling, in desperate need of the transforming and healing grace of God in Christ. As agents of God's redemption of this world, we have an awesome responsibility and an intense privilege.

## **BUT WHAT ABOUT . . . ?**

Two questions seem to be at the back of many of our minds when it comes to relating to a friend or family member living a homosexual lifestyle:

- If I truly love someone, shouldn't I confront their sin?
- If I befriend a homosexual person, am I implicitly endorsing their sin?

Good questions! We don't want to be like the Corinthian church that accommodated

sinful practices. We also don't want to be like the Pharisees, separating so much that we refuse to have contact with sinners. Such a stance denies that we, too, are sinners and in need of God's grace.

The fact is, it takes wisdom and discernment to honor God not only as Judge of sin, but also as Lover and Redeemer of sinners. Christians are right to feel tension here—wanting to conduct ourselves in ways that make it clear that God hates sin, while also relating to people caught in homosexuality so that redemptive pathways are kept open for the resurrection power of God to transform broken people.

## **MINISTRY WITH INTEGRITY AND LOVE**

Homosexuality has touched almost every one of us in some way. There are no quick answers that apply to how we should respond in every situation. The following considerations are designed to help us think biblically about relating to struggling relatives and friends with integrity and with the life-giving love of Christ.

### ***Confrontation With Commitment***

First, it may indeed be the loving thing to confront a person about sin, but we must also be sure that our confrontation is matched by an intense and persevering commitment to a sustained friendship. Confrontation without an intense commitment is a failure to genuinely follow Christ's model for redemption.

Interestingly, we are told that one of the most powerful draws of homosexual communities is that they are shelters for those