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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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lonely, hurting, hungry soul.

*Witness to your neighbor.* That does not mean going through the plan of salvation every time you talk. Instead, simply mention how God has helped you in some situation similar to his. Your goal is to introduce him to Jesus.

*Invite your neighbor to your house.* Your house is your refuge, your safe haven. Inside is a sense of security and belonging. Allowing a neighbor inside reflects that you have also opened your heart to him. You will not like nor approve of all he is or does, but remember, you are trying to point him to Christ.

*Take your neighbor to church.* While there, introduce him to other church friends and your pastor. Remember, his transformed life in the neighborhood may shine even brighter than yours.

Will you win all your neighbors? Probably not. Still, if you can win a few of them, you have made a hole in the darkness, your light has shined, and you have given hope to someone who had been destined for Hell. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Church Herald and Holiness Banner*, October 2007.

"Till Death Do Us Part" Video Project

April 16, 17, 2010

**The Project**

The Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites (FCM), in cooperation with *Christian Principles Restored Ministries International, Inc.* (CPR), is planning to produce a video series on Marriage and Divorce featuring the teaching ministry of Dr. Joseph A. Webb. The title of this project is: *Till Death Do Us Part—Restoring Biblical Truth Concerning Marriage and Divorce.* Dr. Webb is the author of the book "Till Death Do Us Part" (What the Bible REALLY says about Marriage and Divorce) and his latest work, "Divorce and Remarriage: The Trojan Horse Within the Church."

**The Place**

Wellspring Mennonite Church in Athens, TN.

The facility is relatively small, therefore reservations will be made on a first come, first served basis. Intended for ages 13 years and older.

**The Opportunity**

Prayer and financial support are requested as the Lord directs. The cost for this project is anticipated to be \$5,000 to \$7,000. All contributions will be granted a tax deductible receipt. Funds received over and above the initial production costs will be split 50/50 between FCM and CPR Ministries.

Send your gift to: *The Fellowship of Concerned Mennonites, P.O. Box 106, Harrisonburg, VA 22803* and earmarked "Till Death Do Us Part" Video Project.

Copies of this video seminar will be available in DVD (video) and CD (audio) through FCM several months after the actual seminar.

**Contact Information**

If you would like to attend the video production in Athens, TN, please call Tony Forry at 423-507-0054 or E-mail him at [tony.forry@netscape.com](mailto:tony.forry@netscape.com).

# Person of the Month:

## *Jacob J. Hershberger* (1908-1965)



Jacob J. Hershberger was born near Parkman, Ohio, on January 21, 1908.

His formal education extended to the eighth grade but he was well read and could competently discuss a wide range of subjects from history to current events as well as a passage of Scripture or theological issues.

At the age of 14 he moved with his family to Kempsville, Virginia, in 1922. This area of the country would be his home for the rest of his life.

Seven years later, at the age of 21, he married Matilda Yoder, his one true love.

Jake's five sons helped him operate a dairy farm in the Virginia Beach area. For six years he was also the manager of the Yoder Dairies in Kempsville. However, dairying is not the work for which he would be most remembered.

In 1941, at the age of 33, Brother Hershberger was ordained a minister for the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church. Later on he would also teach several terms in a Christian school.

Jake Hershberger had good writing skills, which he put to use in 1953 with his "Lynnhaven Gleanings." His column, which was printed in the *Budget*, was one of weekly news as well as a devotional.

Two years later, in 1955, at the age of 47, his most noted accomplishments began when Amish Mennonite Aid (AMA) was established and he was appointed its secretary-treasurer. He served in that capacity for the next ten years. His responsibilities in this post consisted of mission trips to West Berlin and parts of Central America. His biggest task, however, was with all the bookwork that needed doing. Jake was very efficient in his duties and took care of the volumes of correspondence and other bookwork right away. Brother Jake knew how to express himself but was also very good with figures. He was accomplished at seeing the need for various mission policies in the beginning of the organization and had the zeal to get the job done.

In 1960, at the age of 52, Jacob Hershberger was ordained as bishop for his home congregation which added more responsibility to "his plate." Brother Jake was deeply devoted to the Lord and His work. He also had a deep understanding of the Scriptures.

Jacob J. Hershberger died a sudden and tragic death as a result of an automobile accident. The car in which he was riding was hit head-on by another car on the morning of September 14, 1965. That morning, at the age of 57, Brother Jacob went home to be with the Lord he loved. Before his untimely death Brother Hershberger had already set in motion plans for his work as secretary-treasurer to be carried on after he was gone.

—Gail L. Emerson

# Joy Is Not an Option

by Allen Nell

Happy New Year is an expression that many of us will hear near the beginning of a new year. The word *happy* evokes visions of driving the right car, meeting the right person, living in that dream house, or vacationing in an exotic location. Mankind makes a lifelong pursuit out of chasing this elusive ideal of happiness—spending money, collecting things, and searching for new and exciting experiences. If happiness depends on circumstances and “everything going our way,” what happens when the toys rust, when loved ones die, when health fails, when the money is gone, and the party is over? Often happiness flees and despair sets in.

Joy stands in contrast to happiness. Joy does not depend on circumstances or outward happenings, but rather has its springs deep down inside. Joy is the quiet, confident assurance of God’s love and work in our lives, the certainty that He will be there no matter what. As someone has said, “Happiness depends on happenings, but joy depends on Jesus.” In John 15:11, Jesus said, “*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*” Jesus had just spoken about the importance of abiding in Him and bearing much fruit, using the analogy of the vine and the branches. The only true source of lasting joy is a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Joy is a major theme of the New Testament. The word *joy* occurs 63 times and the word *rejoice* occurs 77 times. The word translated *greetings* in the New Testament literally means “joy be with you.” Joy is one expression of the

fruit of the Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16, we are commanded to “*rejoice evermore.*” The prophet Habakkuk, in spite of the losses he experienced, was able to declare with confidence, “*Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation*” (Habakkuk 3:18). Each day we are confronted with the choice, and with the obligation to rejoice in the God of our salvation. Joy is not an option.

The Book of Philippians is Paul’s letter of joy. The letter was written while he was a prisoner in Rome, and it was sent to his fellow Christians at the church in Philippi. One of their members, Epaphroditus, had been sent to Rome to bring a special offering to Paul and to help him in his time of need. Paul’s letter to the Philippian church is an expression of his gratitude and love for them, but it is so much more than that. It also emphasizes the joy of the Christian life. At least 17 times in the four chapters, Paul mentions joy or rejoicing. The letter radiates joy, culminating in the command of Philippians 4:4, “*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.*”

There appeared to be no reason for Paul to be rejoicing. He was a Roman prisoner and his case was coming up shortly. According to verses 15-17 of the first chapter of Philippians, the believers at Rome were divided; some supported him and some opposed him. In fact, some of the Christians even wanted to make things more difficult for the apostle.

Yet, in spite of the danger and opposition, Paul overflowed with joy. What was the source of this joy? The answer is found in another word that is often

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repeated in his letter. It is the word *mind*. The word is used ten times; the word *think* is used four times, and the word *remember* (or remembrance) is used one time—a total of 15 references to the *mind*. There is a close connection between Christian joy and the attitudes of our minds. Warren Wiersbe describes four attitudes of the mind that are essential for experiencing joy in the Christian life.

### 1. *The Single Mind*

The single mind signifies the attitude of single-hearted devotion to Christ. This is expressed by Paul in verses 20 and 21 (of Philippians 1), “*Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ.*”

Paul’s highest priority in life was serving Jesus Christ, and as a result, the difficulties he encountered did not rob him of joy in the Lord. Throughout Chapter 1, Paul discusses the difficult circumstances he faced. He was a prisoner in Rome (he was in chains) and some of the Christians there opposed him and even tried to stir up trouble for him. Yet, in the midst of all of those circumstances, he could write at the end of verse 18, “*I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*” Paul viewed his circumstances in relationship to the priority of serving Christ. In verse 14, Paul wrote that because of his bonds, many of the brethren were encouraged to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly. In verse 17, Paul views his upcoming trial as being set for the defense of the Gospel. Paul rejoiced in his difficult circumstances because they encouraged other believers to be bolder in their witness for Christ, and enabled him to defend the Gospel before the courts of Rome. Because Paul possessed the single mind of wholeheartedly serving the Lord, he viewed the circumstances of life as working for him and not against him, and therefore, he could rejoice in the Lord no matter how great the difficulties he faced.

The reason why we are so often dis-

tracted by the difficult circumstances of life and fail to experience the joy of the Lord is that we do not cultivate “the single mind” as we should. James 1:8 says, “*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*” We will not experience the joy of the Lord when we are trying to live for Christ and pursuing our own self-fulfillment at the same time. Oswald Chambers wrote, “*Joy comes from seeing the complete fulfillment of the specific purpose for which I was created and born again, not from successfully doing something of my own choosing.*”

Surrendering our own personal goals and ambitions to the authority of the Lord may seem to be too restrictive and confining to some people, but Jesus said, “*He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*” (Matthew 10:39). Jesus teaches us to measure our lives by losses rather than gains, by self-sacrifices rather than self-preservation. A secular psychiatrist once remarked, “The greatest secret of mental health comes down to us in the words, ‘Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will save it.’” He added, “I forget who said that, but it is a great truth.”

Actually, he missed an important phrase. Jesus said, “*Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life **for my sake** shall find it*” (Matthew 16:25). Not only is that the greatest secret of mental health, but it is also the secret to experiencing the joy of the Lord.

We may tend to think that devotion to Christ involves a big heroic decision of life, like going on the mission field or doing something really big for Christ. Sometimes devotion does involve that. But for most of us most of the time, our devotion to Christ involves decisions in the everyday events of life. It may involve a commitment to sacrifice more of our personal time to Christ in order to serve in some form of ministry in the church, such as teaching a Sunday

school class or in the responsibility of being a trustee. It may involve a commitment in the family life such as having family devotions or looking for opportunities to serve others as a family. It may involve a commitment to refrain from spending money on a luxury item or a hobby so that we can help support missionaries or Christians who are persecuted for their faith. Most of the time, our devotion to Christ is expressed in the activities of everyday living. Cultivating a “single mind” of devotion to Christ is essential for experiencing joy in the Christian life.

### **2. The Submissive Mind**

The second chapter of Philippians focuses on people, and the key verses are verses 3, 4: “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*” In verse 5, Paul goes on to write, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*”

There can be no joy in the life of the Christian who is selfish and puts himself above others. From an unknown source comes an article titled “How to Be Miserable.” It says, “Think about yourself; talk about yourself; use ‘I’ as often as possible; mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen greedily to what people say about you. Expect to be appreciated. Be suspicious. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive a criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors shown them. Never forget a service you have rendered. Shirk your duties if you can. Do as little as possible for others.” We expect unsaved people to be selfish and grasping, but this should not be true of Christians, who have experienced the love of Christ and the fellowship of the

Spirit. The eyes of Christians are to be turned away from themselves and focused on the needs of others.

In Philippians 2, we find several examples of the submissive mind. Each example illustrates three characteristics of a submissive mind: thinking of others, serving others, and sacrificing for others. Persons with the submissive mind do not avoid sacrifice. They live for the glory of God and the good of others.

In verse 8, we read that *Christ “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* In verse 17, *Paul* alludes to a willingness to be offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith. In verse 20, we read this about *Timothy*, “*I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state.*” And then in verse 30, Paul describes *Epaphroditus* in these words, “[*F*]or the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.”

“Others” is the key word in the vocabulary of the Christian who exercises the submissive mind. That does not mean that the believer is at the beck and call of everybody else, or that he is a “religious doormat” for all to use. In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul gives the right perspective when he writes, “*ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.*”

A writer for a major newspaper visited India. One day he met a missionary nurse who lived among the lepers and served them. The reporter looked upon her with amazement and remarked, “I wouldn’t wash the wounds of these lepers for a million dollars!”

“Neither would I,” answered the missionary nurse, “but I gladly do it for Christ. I have no thought of any reward other than His smile of approval upon me!”

### **3. The Spiritual Mind**

The third attitude of mind that is essential for experiencing joy in the Christian life is found in verses 18 and

19 of Chapter 3. Paul describes those who “mind earthly things.” Many people today are living under the delusion that joy is to be found in the temporary things of this world. They mind earthly things.

Percy Ainsworth tells of a picture hanging in London, which is one of the most tragic pictures ever painted. It portrays *the last rough slope of a mountain leading to the edge of a precipice, at the foot of which one catches a misty glimpse of a graveyard*. A crowd of men and women pack the slope, all struggling for a foothold on the highest point and tearing and treading upon one another. They are gazing upward where the filmy, beckoning, mocking figure of pleasure floats out of reach. The picture is called “The Pursuit of Pleasure.” On that grim, sunless canvas the artist had not painted one happy face; not a smile, not even a flicker of gladness; nothing but fear, hatred, selfishness, and pain is seen. That painting is a commentary on the world’s pursuit of joy and happiness. Joy is not found in pleasure. Lord Byron had his fill of pleasure. Toward the end of his life, he wrote, “*The worm, the canker, and the grief are mine alone.*” Joy is not found in wealth or possessions. Jay Gould was an American millionaire who when dying remarked, “*I suppose I am the most miserable man of earth.*” Neither is joy found in position nor fame. Lord Beaconsfield experienced more than his share of both. But in disgust he wrote, “*Youth is a mistake; manhood is a struggle; old age is a regret.*”

In contrast to those who “mind earthly things,” Paul in verses 20, 21 describes the believer with the spiritual mind. “*For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.*” It is this anticipation of

Christ’s coming that motivates the believer with the spiritual mind. He does not live for the things of this world; he anticipates the blessings of the world to come. This does not mean that he ignores or neglects his daily obligations, but it does mean that what he does today is governed by what Christ will do in the future. First John 3:3 says, “*Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*”

The Scriptures repeatedly teach that the focal point of our joy should be our hope of a blessed future. The Apostle Peter mentions “*an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations [trials]*” (1 Peter 1:4-6).

In Hebrews 10:34, we read of a group of Christians who joyfully accepted the spoiling of their goods, because their focus was on the inheritance that awaited them.

#### **4. The Secure Mind**

The fourth attitude of mind that is essential for experiencing the joy of the Lord is found in verse 6 of Philippians 4: “*Be careful [anxious] for nothing.*” The Greek word translated “careful” (or anxious) means “to be pulled in different directions.” Our hopes pull us in one direction and our fears pull us in another direction. That describes worry. The Old English root from which we get our word *worry* means “to strangle.” If you have ever really worried, you know how it does strangle a person. Proverbs 12:25 in one translation (NIV) says, “*An anxious heart weighs a man down.*” Worry is a thief of joy. In Philippians 4:6, Paul says we are not to be *anxious* and then says, “*In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*” A related

Scripture is 1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your care upon him for he careth for you." The word translated *casting* describes the action of casting a blanket on a colt or a sack of potatoes on a truck. We are admonished to cast our cares upon the Lord. Paul continues in Philipians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [guard] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." That describes a secure mind. Because Paul possessed a secure mind, he could write in 2 Corinthians 6:10, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

There was a surgeon who on one occasion was asked, "Doctor, what was the greatest operation you ever performed?"

He thought for a while and then responded, "Many operations have required all of my skills, but perhaps the one that meant the most to me was the time I operated on a little girl who was given only a 10 percent chance of survival. She was such a sweet little thing, and so pale when they brought her into the operating room."

He continued, "At that time I was having a great deal of trouble, myself. I had a son who was a real problem and there were other things as well. I had allowed myself to become an unhappy man. As the nurses were preparing to administer the anesthetic to this little girl, she asked, 'Doctor, may I say something?'"

He replied, "Yes, what is it?"

She said, "Every night when I go to bed I say my prayers, and I'd like to say a prayer right now."

The surgeon said, "That's all right—please say your prayer, and think of me too, won't you?"

In a sweet voice she prayed, "Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me; Bless thy little lamb tonight; through the darkness be Thou near me; keep me safe till morning light. And dear God, please bless the doctor." Then she added, "I'm ready now. And I'm not afraid, because Jesus loves me and is right here with me."

The surgeon confessed, "I was blinded by tears. I had to turn away and occupy myself with another wash-up before I could start the operation." He prayed silently, "Dear God, if You never help me save another human being, help me save this little girl." He performed the operation and the miracle happened. She lived.

The surgeon remarked, "Leaving the hospital that day, I realized *that I was* the one who was operated on, not the girl. She taught me that if I take all my problems and put them in the hands of Jesus, He will see me through."

In summary, there are two results of joy: One, the joy of the Lord gives strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Two, the joy of the Lord on the inside will develop radiance on the outside (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Many years ago, when the missionary Adoniram Judson was home on furlough, he passed through the city of Stonington, Connecticut. A young boy playing about the dock at the time of Judson's arrival was struck by the man's appearance. Never before had he seen such a light on any human face. He ran up the street to a minister to ask who the stranger was. The minister hurried back with him, but became so absorbed in conversation with Judson that he forgot all about the impatient youngster standing near him.

Many years afterward, the boy who saw that joyful countenance became a noted preacher. His name was Henry Clay Trumbull. In a book of memoirs, Trumbull penned a chapter entitled, "What a boy saw in the face of Adoniram Judson." The joyful countenance on Judson's face had changed his life. Likewise, the joy on your face can change the lives of others. ■

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# *To Text or Not to Text?*

by Ryan Shetler

**M**any young people across the world now participate in the activity of text messaging (texting) each other with their cell phones. At first consideration, you would say there is nothing detrimental about it. What could possibly be wrong with sending messages by typed words as opposed to calling someone? Many people have embraced it wholeheartedly, as they will most new trends, while others have frowned on it with suspicion and questioned its wholesomeness as a way to communicate.

Can it really convey the same meaning and carry the feeling and emotion that normal conversation does? Does it cheapen relationships, causing them to be superficial? Is it actually any different from normal conversation? Furthermore, does the time spent texting while with other people lessen the quality of the time spent with them?

Statistics show that youth, aged 13-20, are sending and receiving an average 10,000 text messages each year. It is easy to see that most youth our age are seriously abusing this technology. But what does that mean for us who are actually concerned about the stewardship of our time?

Text messaging is a convenient method of communication, but for many it has become a pastime. These people base their relationships on it, use it to create a virtual reality, and waste their time in empty conversations, causing interactions in their relationships to be little more than skin deep.

This poses a question: Should we as Christians tenaciously grasp it with both hands because of its convenience, or should we avoid it altogether because of what it can be, negatively, to relationships?

Texting is a terrific way to carry on short conversations, but since it is so easy to overuse, everyone should exercise care in how frequently they text.

Technology is tricky. One day, it can be a very useful servant and the next it can become a cruel master. This brings us to the first caution—the time spent on it in group settings. One of the great things about this technology is that you can easily communicate with so many people in so little time, right?

Many people spend so much time in their multiple artificial realities they have set up for themselves that they barely have time to be whole people in actual reality. It is not right to cheat your friends and family of the time that you spend with them by constantly texting other people. Essentially, it says to them, “I wish I were somewhere else.” I am not referring to the incidental sending of several messages to friends over the course of longer time spent with others. What I am talking about is the rampant text message conversations that some of my friends have with multiple people while trying to spend quality time with a larger group.

I struggle with texting sometimes when I am not really participating in the conversation. Since this can be a personal problem, effort should be made to engage in conversation or whatever is happening in the group at the time. Mere boredom is not sufficient excuse to detach from reality by texting.

Time is also a factor when on the job. By all means, do not become worried about the thirty seconds you paused to answer that text and whether or not it should count off on your time card. When you consistently allow your phone to come before your work, then please at least take

it into account on your time card. Your boss is not obligated to pay you for a full day's work if you spend lots of time texting. This is simply dishonest. Not only does it take the time you actually spend texting, it also hinders efficiency because you must try to remember exactly what you were doing before you answered the message. It is an issue of time. If you are answering several text messages a day, there is not a huge need to alter the time on your card. However, if you are answering text messages throughout the day, you should make some compensation for that time spent or maybe you should simply consider making text messaging a smaller part of your life.

Another reason to avoid excessive texting is the propensity it has to cause superficial relationships. For myself it is nice to text a friend occasionally to find out what is going on in his life. It can be unhealthy, however, if the majority of communication in a relationship is via text message. When the basis of a relationship is through texting, it can quickly turn into something impersonal, and therefore not worth nearly as much.

Sometimes, for example, when you have numerous friends in various places, it is simply the most convenient way to stay in touch with each other. Make sure, however, that it is not texting that is the basis of your relationship. Think of texting rather as a way to sustain an existing relationship that is already good but is difficult to maintain in another manner.

In relation to this subject, it is especially important to avoid excessive texting people of the opposite gender. I have seen and heard of numerous instances where fellows and ladies have gone too far with their communications and it caused hurt feelings on both sides. I have found the following statement to be true for me and have heard similar things said by others: "People often write things via text message that they would not say if they were with that person face to face." This is so right. Rather than actually fac-

ing the person and honestly interacting, a person is robotically punching in replies to every text that comes in.

I am not at all saying that it is a wicked and ungodly activity to text anyone of the opposite gender. While texting could be perfectly acceptable in making plans for an activity, definite care must be taken to prevent unhealthy close relationships or the types of relationships that end up with both parties getting hurt. If you honestly think it is acceptable to text someone of the opposite gender, would you also consider it acceptable to sit down and talk with that same person as often as you text each other throughout the day? My point is evident. If talking often with a person of the opposite gender would be unhealthy, communication via text messaging is no better.

In conclusion, text messaging can be a very useful tool for communication, but it can also be a cruel tyrant. Texting can take up quality time from your family and friends, affect your efficiency at your job, and cause shallowness in your relationships. This said, with the technology we currently have, we are just as able to bless others as well. When a person is down in the dumps, a text message letting him know you are praying for him can be very encouraging.

Moderation is an appropriate theme in the life of the Christian. Texting in moderation and in the proper context is a great way of communication. But, however handy technology is, it completely loses its value when it controls us. Will we allow text messaging and other electronic communication to invade every facet of our lives like it has done to American society? Or will we, as Christians, exercise self-control and harness technology in a way that honors God and blesses others? ■

—Used by permission from the May 2009 issue of *Calvary Messenger*. This article was written at Calvary Bible School in March 2009 as a submission for the class, Christian Writing and Expression.

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

## True Patriotism!

From *John Newton's Letters*

Dear Friend,

Allow me to say, that it excites both my wonder and concern, that a Christian minister such as yourself, should think it worth his while to attempt political reforms. When I look around upon the present state of the nation, such an attempt appears to me, to be no less vain and foolish, than it would be to paint the cabin—while the ship is sinking! Or to decorate the parlor—while the house is on fire!

When our Lord Jesus was upon earth, He refused to get involved in disputes or politics: "Friend, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (Luke 12:14). "My kingdom is not of this world! If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight!" (John 18:36). God's children belong to a kingdom which is not of this world; they are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and a part of their Scriptural character is, that they are the "quiet in the land" (Psalms 35:19).

Satan has many contrivances to amuse people, and to divert their thoughts from their real danger!

My dear sir, my prayer to God for you is—that He may induce you to employ the talents He has given you, in pointing out sin as the great cause and source of every existing evil; and to engage those who love and fear Him, (instead of wasting time in political speculations, for which very few of them are competent,) to sigh and cry for our abounding abominations, and to stand in the breach, by prayer, that God's wrath may yet be averted, and our national

mercies prolonged! This, I think, is true patriotism—the best way in which people in private life may serve their country.

I consider the ungodly as saws and hammers in the hand of the Lord. So far as they are His instruments, they will succeed—but not an inch further! Their wrath shall praise Him, and be subservient to His designs!

If our lot is so cast that we can exercise our ministry free from stripes, fines, imprisonments, and death—it is more than the gospel has promised to us! If Christians were quiet when under the cruel governments of Nero and other wicked persecutors, when they were hunted down like wild beasts—then we ought to be not only quiet but very thankful now! It was then accounted an honor to suffer for Christ and the “offence of the cross”!

Those are to be greatly pitied, who boast of their “liberty”—and yet they do not consider that they are in the most deplorable bondage as the slaves of sin and Satan, under the curse of God’s law and His eternal wrath! Oh! for a voice to reach their hearts, that they may know their true and dreadful state—and seek deliverance from their horrific thralldom! May you and I labor to direct them to the one thing, which is absolutely needful, and abundantly sufficient.

If I had the wisdom or influence to soothe the angry passions of mankind—I would gladly employ them! But I am a stranger and a pilgrim here in this world. My charter, my rights and my treasures, are all in heaven—and there my heart ought to be. In a very short time, I may be removed (and perhaps suddenly) into the unseen and eternal world—where all that now causes so much bustle upon earth—will be of no more importance to me—than the events which took place among the antediluvians!

In the hour, when death shall open the door into eternity—many things which now assume an “air of importance,” will be found as light and unsubstantial as a child’s dream!

How crucial then, is it for me—to be found watching, with my lamp burning, diligently engaged in my proper calling! For the Lord has not called me to set governments right—but to preach the gospel, to proclaim the glory of His name, and to endeavor to win souls! “Let the dead bury their own dead—but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!” ([Luke 9:60](#)). Happy is that servant, whom his Master finds so doing, when He returns!

As you have forced me to respond—both duty and love have obliged me to be faithful and free in giving you my thoughts.

I recommend you to the care and blessing of the great Shepherd and Savior; and remain for His sake, your affectionate friend and brother,

John Newton

*(Puritan Minister of the Revolutionary Era, 1725-1807)*

# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



*A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**JANUARY 3, 2010**

## ***Confirmed in Baptism***

Matthew 3:1-6, 11-17

January's lessons, all again from the Gospel of Matthew, focus on Evidences of Jesus as Messiah. Today's focuses on Jesus' baptism by John at the beginning of His ministry. Little is known of Jesus' life from the close of Chapter 2 when He returned from Egypt as a small child with His parents and settled in Nazareth. With the exception of the account in Luke where Jesus at 12 years old accompanied His parents to the feast in Jerusalem, there is an 18-year period of silence in Jesus' life until the events portrayed in today's lesson.

However, we can safely assume that Jesus grew and developed as any normal Jewish child (see Luke 2:51, 52). As He developed physically He also developed mentally, socially, and spiritually. He no doubt worked alongside Joseph in the carpentry shop, learning a life-skill as all Jewish boys did. We can also assume that He learned other life-skills as He interacted with brothers and sisters in the family setting. He was also known and accepted in the community (see Matthew 13:55, 56; Mark 6:1-13).

John the Baptist broke 400 years of prophetic silence. God had been at work formulating His plan and now we note how events came together to announce and present His plan to man. Just as earthly kings used a herald to announce their coming, so God used John as a forerunner to announce the coming of the One who would be ruler of the heavenly kingdom (see v. 12). Matthew makes it clear that John was the

fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (40:3). John's lifestyle and preaching also epitomized that of the Old Testament prophets—simple and direct.

John's message was simple and direct: repent, change your ways and your attitudes. He made it clear (v. 9) that entrance into the kingdom of heaven was not by birthright, but through confession of sin and a resulting changed life. John's message called men to a high moral standard (see Luke 3:10-14).

People from all walks of life came and responded to John's preaching. They confessed their sin. They accepted the challenge of a new lifestyle modeled on integrity, concern for their fellowmen and, most of all, on a deep, personal relationship to the King of the heavenly kingdom. However, John informed his listeners that he was not the long-expected Messiah, but One mightier than he was coming whose ministry would bring purification and separation.

John was astonished when Jesus presented Himself for baptism. Certainly He needed no repentance. And who was John, the servant, to baptize Jesus the Son of God? But Jesus patiently explained to John that this was necessary for Him in order to identify with the people He came to minister to. John complied and baptized Jesus, the righteous Son of God humbly submitting Himself to the role of "elder brother" to mankind.

Immediately upon His baptism, Jesus was affirmed by God the Father in a spoken word from Heaven, and by the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove upon Him. What a beautiful blending of the three Persons of the Godhead at the initiation of their plan to redeem man from the bondage

of sin. God's plan now had "feet on the ground," ready to move forward.

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

1. A review of both John's and Jesus' early life will help put today's lesson in perspective. Be sure to understand John's role.
2. What are the two clear evidences given in this passage that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the chosen One?
3. Why did the people so eagerly hear and accept John's message? Did their enthusiasm carry over into Jesus' ministry?
4. What was the purpose of John's ministry? Why didn't Jesus just appear on the scene and begin preaching? Good for discussion.
5. Did Jesus need the affirmation by the Father and the Spirit? Why? Discuss the implications.

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* Affirmation that Jesus was truly the Son of God sent into the world to redeem fallen man from his sin.

*Key verses:* 16 and 17

## **JANUARY 10, 2010**

### ***Strengthened in Temptation***

Matthew 4:1-11

The conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of good began in eons past when Satan in a futile attempt to elevate himself above God was cast out of Heaven. The conflict began on the human level in the Garden of Eden when Satan, in an attempt to derail God's plan, enticed Eve to sin and thus became alienated from God. The struggle continued throughout the history of mankind as evidenced by many deviations from God's will and evil actions on the part of man. These were all attempts by Satan to gain influence and control over man and thus keep him from fulfilling God's will and plan. This is exactly what we see in today's lesson, however on a much higher level since it involved the very Son of God and His pro-

jected ultimate benefit for man.

We certainly may wonder at the rationale for this testing experience of Jesus. He had just been affirmed by John and by God the Father and the Holy Spirit as God's Son and man's Redeemer. Why was it necessary for Him to be so confronted by Satan here at the outset of His ministry? The answer is likely several-fold. It was to show man that victory over temptation is possible regardless of the onslaughts of Satan. And it proved that Jesus, remaining sinless under severe temptation, was worthy and qualified for the role of man's Saviour.

We note that Satan approached Jesus at a vulnerable moment, as he so often does to us today. After a 40-day fast, Jesus was hungry. He certainly had the power to make bread out of stones; however, He refused to use His power simply for the gratification of the flesh, to fulfill His own need. Furthermore, by yielding to Satan's appeal He would have given him legitimacy, acknowledged his wisdom, his worth.

Note how Satan attempted to cast doubt in Jesus' mind by stating "If thou be the Son of God." He also portrayed a sanctimonious air by quoting Scripture, albeit out of context. Shouldn't that be a strong lesson to us that he cannot be trusted to tell the truth? (See John 8:44.)

Not only did Satan tempt Jesus in terms of His physical need, he also appealed to the use of spectacular means to prove His relationship to God. It is suggested that the "pinnacle of the temple" was some 400 feet above the Kidron Valley. Certainly an angelic rescue would have established His credentials in the sight of the people. But Jesus didn't bite.

In his final attempt Satan offered to give up to Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" if He would simply worship him. Again Jesus saw the folly of this appeal. It would have bypassed the cross, costing Him the privilege of becoming man's Saviour. Ultimately the kingdoms of the world will be His by rightful inheritance (Rev. 11:15).

At Jesus' final rebuke, Satan left Him (for a season, Luke 4:13), and angels came

and ministered to His needs. What a comfort it must have been to Jesus for these pure, heavenly messengers to minister to His needs in this hour of turmoil.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. There were certainly valid reasons for Jesus to experience this testing. Use Hebrews 2:16-18 and 4:15 to strengthen your understanding.
2. Note how Jesus' temptations parallel the Apostle John's comments in 1 John 2:15-17. Do these areas cover all basic temptations? Discuss.
3. Jesus quoted Scripture to rebuff Satan's appeals. Look at Psalm 119:11. Should that not challenge us to greater understanding of God's Word?
4. We all have our particular areas of vulnerability. Discuss how we can individually and collectively strengthen ourselves against temptation toward our "besetting sin." Hebrews 12:1-3 will be of help in finding answers.
5. At what points in life are we most vulnerable to Satan's appeals? Why? What are our safeguards?

### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* Alertness to Satan's attempts to lead us away from God's care and control to areas of vulnerability to Satan's control.

*Key verse:* 10 (see also Hebrews 4:15).

## **JANUARY 17, 2010**

### ***Demonstrated in Acts of Healing***

Matthew 9:27-34; 11:2-6

Following His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus set forth on His ministry, preaching repentance (4:17), calling disciples (4:18-22), and healing those who were diseased (4:23, 24). He had set forth the principles of His kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount; healed a leper, the Centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law; and cast out many devils (8:2-17). We also see in the first verses of Chapter 9 the beginning of conflict

with the religious leaders.

The healing events in our lesson text from Chapter 9 are not isolated events in the ministry of Jesus, but are simply used to verify His divine power and claim to Messiahship. Though out of sequence with our text, verses 35 and 36 as well as verses 8 and 26 provide excellent setting and background for our text. Part of what set Jesus apart from other self-proclaimed messiahs was His unquestionable display of supernatural power.

As Jesus was leaving the house of the ruler of the synagogue where He had just raised his daughter to life (9:18-25), two blind men accosted Him and begged for mercy. They addressed Him in recognition of His role and in respect of His power and authority over human infirmities. They responded in faith when Jesus asked their understanding of His power and ability to grant their request for sight. Then He touched their eyes and sent them away seeing.

Why did Jesus charge them to "tell no man" of their healing? Surely He knew that their exuberance would know no bounds. They had just experienced supernatural healing. They could not keep it to themselves. However, their joy may simply have prematurely heightened the tension between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees. He was not yet ready for open confrontation.

Immediately upon their departure, a devil-possessed dumb man was brought to Jesus. Again, someone recognized in Jesus a power beyond mere human ability, and they sought Him for healing. Again Jesus responded, cast out the devil, and the man's speech returned. The crowd marveled: "It was never so seen in Israel." They had just observed a miracle, wrought by divine power upon an otherwise helpless individual (see also verse 8).

But not all were pleased with this display of divine power. The Pharisees, feeling threatened by Jesus' rising popularity, quickly attributed His miracle-working power to the devil himself. That was sheer blasphemy. The absurdity of their statement is evident. Why would Satan give man the power to destroy his work? No doubt

the irony was not lost on the multitude who observed and marveled at this supernatural deed.

As we turn to our text from Matthew 11, we see John the Baptist in prison (see Matthew 14:3), discouraged over what he saw as a lack of fulfillment of his expectations regarding the coming of Messiah's kingdom. He was no doubt expecting in the coming of Jesus a rapid judgment on unfaithful Israel and an immediate establishment of Messiah's reign (see Matthew 3:1-12). This had not happened and John, now facing an uncertain future in Herod's clutches, had questions. Was Jesus indeed the long-expected One, or was there another Messiah in the offing?

Jesus' answer to John was not direct, but structured to cause him to consider what he had heard and observed and to evaluate that in light of the prophetic Scriptures. The evidence was there. Jesus said: "Blessed are those who receive it without doubting."

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

1. What was the significant factor in light of our lesson emphasis, other than Jesus' compassion, about Jesus healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead?
2. The blind men showed a certain level of persistence in addition to their faith. Do we too often give up too soon in our requests to God? (Look at Matthew 20:30-34; Luke 18:39.)
3. Why could not the Pharisees admit an obvious divine intervention in the healing of the devil-possessed, dumb man?
4. Why was it so difficult for John, now in prison, to recognize Jesus as the Messiah he had proclaimed at His baptism? Discuss.
5. At what point in our experience do doubts often assail us? Why?

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* To establish the fact that Jesus' miracles of healing were incontrovertible evidence of His divinity, thus establishing His credentials as God's chosen Messiah.

*Key verses:* 11:4 and 6

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**JANUARY 24, 2010**

### ***Declared in Prayer and Compassion***

Matthew 11:25-30

It seems as though we have two distinct situations presented in our lesson text for today. It is clear in verses 25-27 that Jesus is speaking to His heavenly Father, while verses 28-30 are undoubtedly spoken to the crowds that followed Him (see verse 7). Jesus was a man of prayer and He was also a man of compassion. Both of these elements are portrayed in today's text.

Jesus' prayer life is amply attested to in the gospels (Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 6:12; and Matthew 14:23). Even though He was God's Son, in His human frame He felt the need for continual communication with His heavenly Father. Just prior to today's text we see (verses 20-24) Jesus expressing disappointment at the rejection of His message by those who had observed "his mighty works."

Then in verse 25 He thanks the Father that although He has hidden the knowledge of saving truth from the proud, arrogant, and self-wise individuals, He has revealed it to the poor, simple folk who recognized their need (see also Chapter 7:6-8 and John 12:37-40). Mark said in his gospel (12:37) that "the common people heard him gladly." Jesus said (Matthew 9:12, 13) that He did not come to call the self-righteous to repentance, but sinners, those who admitted their need (see James 4:6).

Jesus recognized that the Father had committed to Him the administration of the kingdom of grace and that it was His privilege and right to reveal the Father to whomsoever He will. But even then it was clear that not all who heard and saw evidence of the Father's power accepted it as such. Many turned away. Many scoffed. But the open-minded received the blessing of spiritual insight.

In verses 28-30 we have Jesus' great invitation. We note several outstanding elements of that invitation. It is extended to all. It is for those who are overburdened.

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

Jesus promises rest for all who come to Him. He also promises an easy yoke to those who accept His lordship.

Jesus' appeal was to those who were burdened with the minutiae of the law—difficult to keep, demanding in time and performance (see Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46). And, in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who seemed to take pleasure in the enforcement of many rules and considered themselves above the common run of mankind, Jesus identified with the meek and lowly. He would not impose on those who came to Him burdens He Himself was not willing to bear.

His yoke, the symbol of servitude, was as one commentator described it, a well-fitting one. It did not chafe nor cause discomfort. It was suited to the wearer. It was a yoke designed by the Master Carpenter, fashioned to provide comfort even while performing its function.

Several things stand out in this passage which give credence to Jesus as Messiah. First of all is His familiarity and contact with the heavenly Father with whom He identified as Son to Father. Secondly, the humble attitude of concern for the spiritual well-being of His followers. He would not "lord it over them," but stooped to share their burden, making it easy for them to bear.

His contact with the Father and His heartfelt concern for His followers identified Him truly as God's anointed One.

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

1. If Jesus as the divine Son of God felt the need of prayer, how much more do we mortals need continual communication with our heavenly Father?
2. Certainly God does not without cause withhold knowledge of salvation from anyone. What factors contribute to what we read in verse 25? Discuss.
3. What is the purpose of a yoke?
4. What does it mean to accept Jesus' yoke? What does it signify in terms of relationship?
5. Is there something we need to do in order for Jesus to reveal the Father to us? Discuss.

#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* Jesus' need of contact with the Father as example to us, and His loving concern for those who accept His yoke of service.

*Key verses:* 28-30

## **JANUARY 31, 2010**

### ***Revealed in Rejection***

Matthew 11:20-24; 13:54-58

Jesus' mission to the world was to reveal the heavenly Father (John 1:18) and the Father's Son, through supernatural works which would attest to His divinity. The works were not an end in themselves, but attestation that the Divine was among men, and for man's benefit. And many who saw the miracles believed and accepted Jesus as Messiah, the One sent from Heaven to deliver man from the bondage of sin.

However, as we note from today's texts and others in the gospels, many rejected Jesus and the evidence He presented for His Messiahship. That caused Him grief. His mission and ministry was for all men and it grieved Him deeply when His message of hope and deliverance was not accepted by those He came to save.

Matthew 9:35 states that "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching . . . and preaching . . . and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." We note from the way crowds followed Him that there was a hunger for spiritual nourishment and much need of healing and deliverance. Many responded, recognizing Jesus as the "Son of David," the One long promised by the prophets of old. His ministry was fruitful.

But we also note throughout the gospels that some rejected Him and some scoffed at His claims. The religious leaders were especially disturbed by His popularity and claims, feeling personal threat from His authority and His acceptance by the people. We note in Mark 12:37 that "the common people heard him gladly," and in John 5:18 how the religious leaders "sought . . . to kill

him.” So there were two distinct responses to Jesus’ message.

In the passage from Matthew 11 we note Jesus lamenting with sorrow that many of those who had observed His mighty works rejected His claims and refused to repent. Because of their missed opportunity Jesus declared that in the judgment they would fare far worse than those wicked cities which did not have their opportunity. Sodom was grossly wicked, but Jesus states that had they the opportunity of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Harsh judgment was pronounced upon those who had opportunity, but rejected it.

When Jesus returned to His hometown He was met with unbelief. The townsmen knew Him as “the carpenter’s son,” son of Mary, brother to James, Joses, Simon, and Judas, and their sisters. They couldn’t get away from His human connections, nor understand how this hometown man got the wisdom He displayed and the power to do the mighty works of which they had heard. It was a case of knowing Him too well, yet not knowing Him well enough. They took offense at His superior knowledge and power. They could not, or would not, accept Him as a prophet. He was just

Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary, to them.

Jesus understood, though He was disappointed by their unbelief and therefore “did not many mighty works” among them. He did, however, heal a few (see Mark 6:5).

How sad, that in spite of obvious evidence, those who knew Him best refused to accept His credentials and turned against Him in unbelief.

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

1. What is the basis of unbelief, and what is necessary to overcome it?
2. Is there a parallel between Jesus’ statements here in Chapter 11 and what He says in Luke 12:47, 48?
3. What does this passage teach us about privilege? Discuss.
4. On what basis should we evaluate anyone’s teaching and claims? Discuss.
5. What is the proper response to rejection?
6. Have you ever suffered rejection because of your Christian witness? What did it do for you? Are you stronger, or weaker because of it?

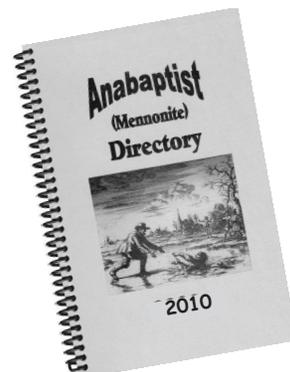
#### **Help for teachers**

*Lesson emphasis:* The folly of rejecting Jesus.

*Key verse:* 13:58

**Coming Soon . . .**

## **Anabaptist (Mennonite) Directory 2010**



Approximately 115 pages, listing churches and ministers not found in other major directories. Based on adherence to an accepted doctrinal standard—Schleitheim, Dortrecht, 1921, 1963 or comparative.

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# Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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## Americans Faking Religiosity?

*reasonWeekly*, an online atheist magazine, published an article that examines the evidence that huge numbers of Americans lie about their level of religious belief and activity. They start by (generously) estimating the seating capacity of all American churches at around 59 million (including multiple services), while 100-132 million Americans claim to go to church weekly. They also offer these statistics and thoughts: “According to a study conducted for the Catholic Biblical Federation in 2008, 93 percent of Americans have at least one copy of the Bible at home. . . . 78 percent view [the Bible’s] contents as true. Almost half of American respondents agree . . . with the statement ‘The Bible should be studied at school,’ and 56 percent have given a Bible as a gift at least once. In addition, a Harris poll conducted the same year showed that Americans overwhelmingly name the Bible as their favorite book.

“One might deduct from these numbers that the Americans’ knowledge of the Bible is at least somewhat satisfactory.

“Not so. According to polls, a mere half of Americans are able to name a single Gospel, and a majority are unfamiliar with the fact that Genesis is the first book of the Bible. Thomas, according to 22 percent of Americans, wrote one of the books, and Sodom and Gomorrah were married, if we are to listen to half of American high school seniors.

“While a majority of Americans maintain that they use the ten biblical commandments as a life guide, 60 percent are unable to name more than four. Among adult and teen believers, ‘God helps those who help themselves’ is the most widely-known verse in the Bible; only 38 percent of respondents correctly said that this was not a Bible quotation . . .

“Sixteen percent of American Christians believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was born in Jerusalem . . .

“America seems to not be the solid bastion of Christianity that many claim it is or wish it were. In large numbers, Americans from all walks of life shun church and reduce their Bibles to the status of objects of decoration, while they maintain, perhaps in a bout of wishful thinking, that God, churches, and religion rule their lives. People who believe Joan of Arc to have been Noah’s wife, as one in 10 Americans do, can not be said to have even a fleeting interest in their scripture. Americans are indeed religious; just how religious is a question that still needs investigating. In private, religious apathy piles thick behind the screen of public piety, and the famously robust American religiosity—taken for granted by many—seems to become a delusion of biblical proportions.

—Source and excerpts from “Are Americans Faking Religiosity?” (<http://j.mp/4AHR4e>) in *reasonWeekly*

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### Verses Christians Don't Like

Online "Christian" magazine *Ship of Fools* published an article that lists the ten worst verses in the Bible. Here are 4 of the 10 listed:

"I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, . . ." (1 Timothy 2:12).

"And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet" (Romans 1:27).

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22).

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Peter 2:18).

Another verse which they didn't include, but which I think they should add to their list: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3, 4, NASB).

—Excerpts from "Chapter and Worse" (<http://j.mp/2F3THg>) on *ShipOfFools.com*)

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### Church News Snippets

Islamists burned 60 houses of Christians to the ground and stole their cattle in Korian village in Toba Tek Singh district in Gojra, Pakistan. Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minorities personally inspected the scene and had the perpetrators arrested. Charges are pending.

Baptist Press writes, "In North Africa, an ex-imam was jailed years ago after becoming a follower of Christ. He led many fellow Muslim inmates to faith, however. The 'Christian imam' has been

transferred from one prison to another. The same thing happens each time: He starts churches in the prisons."

In 2006, a former minister of police under the South African apartheid regime who was a leader in the violent crackdowns against blacks in the 1980s, washed the feet of nine elderly women who had been victims of the SA police violence. Recently at a church service, he washed the feet of more people he had wronged—his former police subordinates whom he led in these atrocities.

—Sources, respectively: ASSIST News Service, Baptist Press (<http://j.mp/t1Q5s>), Ecumenical News International (<http://j.mp/1XzDb2>)

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### "Christian" Elephants

"In the last 40-50 years, no one has seen or even imagined the unique appearance of a herd of wild elephants such as has been recently witnessed by the people of Orissa State, India. These elephants are not ordinary elephants; these elephants are on a mission. With smaller brutes preceding the herd to apparently survey each village, larger elephants soon follow and get the job done. 'Just what is their job?' you might ask. We think that it might have something to do with avenging the blood of martyrs. In fact, the local people have christened these elephants, 'Christian elephants.'

"Were these elephants summoned by God? One would wonder, as it was in the month of August a year ago around 7-8 PM that Christians in this same area began to run for their lives while their homes were being destroyed by anti-Christian rioters. Exactly one year later, at the same time of the day, the persecutors are now running for their lives, from nothing less than a herd of wild elephants! These elephants first attacked a rock crusher machine owned by a key leader of the persecution movement. They then went on to destroy his house and farms. Gaining momentum, they

rampaged through other non-Christian homes demolishing gardens and singling out the homes of persecutors, leaving Christian homes untouched. People ran to the police station to report the disastrous news. In one case, a police jeep that attempted to drive away [from] the herd was attacked and the occupants barely escaped. Truly, God is the avenger of the helpless.

“According to the news report by Kusanath Pradhan, the elephants have already destroyed more than 700 houses in more than 30 villages and killed 5 people.

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord’ Romans 12:19.”

—Reprinted with permission from *Kuepfer Kronicle* by Luke and Amy Kuepfer

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### **Church Discipline for Repetitive Sin**

“How do you respond to people who are sinning, who know they’re sinning, and who (given the addictive nature of their sin) most likely will sin again? Is there appropriate church discipline for repetitive sin?”

“Our church has taken these questions seriously, and we have been learning along the way. Maybe our experience can be helpful to others who want to guide their people to greater holiness and amendment of life.”

—Excerpt from “Church Discipline for Repetitive Sin” (<http://j.mp/36kQd>) by Kevin Miller in *Christianity Today’s Leadership Journal*

(This snippet is just a teaser; I suggest you follow the link online and read the entire thought-provoking article. Thanks to Dwight Gingrich for pointing me toward this article.)

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### **Thief-Chasing Security Guard Fired**

Josh Rutner said he was just doing his

job as a Wal-Mart “asset protection officer” earlier this month when he chased a knife-wielding theft suspect across the store parking lot.

“The man, later identified as Marc Ash, was arrested by Ocala police and the merchandise was recovered.

“The next day, Wal-Mart fired Rutner.

“Rutner said it boiled down to doing what was right or following policy. For him, it was an easy choice.

“‘I couldn’t let him get away,’ Rutner said. ‘That’s wrong.’

“But Michelle Bradford, a Wal-Mart Stores Inc. spokeswoman, said the store’s no-chase policy is clear.

“‘We take the safety and security of our customers and associates very seriously,’ she said. ‘There are specific instructions as to what an associate can and can’t do during a shoplifting episode.’

“Ash picked up a pack of golf balls, valued at \$42.98, and put them in his pants.

“After radioing for assistance, Rutner and two other employees tackled the man outside the food center doors. He wasn’t expecting Ash to pull a knife, slash at his face, and take off running, Rutner said. ‘I felt now that he was a danger to the public and the city,’ he said. ‘If he’d pull a knife on two security guards, he’d pull a knife on anyone.’

“[After capturing the assailant with a customer’s assistance, and turning him over to the police,] Rutner returned to work the next day. Around lunch time, he was called into a manager’s office. A corporate representative from Arkansas was waiting. ‘They said this is a non-rehirable offense,’ he said. ‘At the age of 65, I can’t even come back and become a greeter. I didn’t get hurt. They got their merchandise,’ he said. ‘And yet I got fired.’

—Excerpts from “Wal-Mart fires employee for chasing after thief” (<http://j.mp/1fuVKo>) in *Ocala Star-Banner*

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

# Hearing the Voice of God Over and over and over and

by Leah Farr

Mara Cook felt like she was supposed to be a missionary. But when the then 8-year-old mentioned it to her pastor, he brushed her off. “You are much too young to know what God has for you,” he said.

From that point on, Mara dismissed the pull on her heart as nothing more than an emotional response.

Mara’s husband, Andy, first felt burdened for missions at a conference in college. While the president of a mission agency spoke about God using people with any type of college degree, Andy felt a tugging at his heart. Although he was painfully shy, he made an appointment to discuss going to the mission field. When the president asked him his major, Andy told him he was studying chemistry. “We don’t have anything for you,” the president said as he turned and walked away.

Both Andy and Mara call those moments their “get out of missions free” cards, admitting that they shaped the path they would take for the next two decades.

The Cooks dated throughout college and married their senior year. After graduation, they began working in youth ministry. They spent the next 18 years rooted at the same church, working with the youth group and serving in ministry. Then, in 2007, Andy read an article about a ministry position in Portugal. Something inside of him cried out, *This could be you!*

The thought scared Andy pretty badly.

He was happy serving where he was and he knew that his family didn’t like change. But he gave the article to Mara to read. Several days later, Mara came back to Andy. “When I was looking through that article and it talked about the youth specialist position, it was like someone took our resume and wrote it into this article,” she told him.

Throughout the fall, God got the Cooks’ attention through numerous verses citing the call to share the gospel. Still, they doubted what they were supposed to do.

*We don’t fit the profile of a missionary,* they thought to themselves.

For more than two years, the couple tried to be sure they had heard God’s voice. Using the Scriptures, prayer, circumstances, and godly counsel,

they were repeatedly encouraged to begin pursuing missions. But they struggled with the thought. “We didn’t think we were missionaries. And we certainly weren’t evangelists,” says Andy, who jokes that once while being tasked with giving a homeless person a free lunch, he couldn’t find anyone willing to take it. “Finally at one point, we prayed, *God, do we really have to go or are you just burdening our hearts to pray for a certain region of the world?*”

Later that morning the family’s devotional book made it extremely clear. The opening line read, *God commands you to go. You need permission to stay.* “We

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**“God commands  
you to go.  
You need  
permission  
to stay.”**

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immediately changed our prayers,” Andy says.

In addition, the Cooks’ children had come to them on two separate occasions about going on a family mission trip. “Dad, we believe that God is telling us that we should be going on a mission trip,” they said. “When I realized that they hadn’t been talking about it amongst themselves, we began saving right away,” Andy says.

When the family decided they would take a mission trip to survey Portugal for future ministry, they asked that their church family would pray for three things. “We asked that our entire family would know that God was changing where our family was ministering. Two, that we would have a definite idea to whether or not God was having us to serve in Portugal before we arrived back home. And three, that we would be able to minister to the team on our trip,” Mara says.

During their first four days in Portugal, God systematically removed every false motive they may have had for moving to the country. “First, the weather was colder than we had packed for. We also heard a national pastor state emphatically that he didn’t think missionaries would be needed by 2016,” Andy says. They also saw how some of the newer missionaries were struggling with homesickness and feeling ineffective in their ministry. “On top of this, the team leader and ‘keeper of the vision’ informed us that he was leaving the field.”

Everything within us was screaming, “*This is stupid. Go home before you throw your life away,*” Andy says. “I took that to God and He took me to the verse in John which says that if a grain of wheat dies, it multiplies. The next day we reviewed everything God had said to us over the past year, through prayer, godly counsel, and circumstances. We decided that there was no question. God was calling us to go.”

On their way back to the United States, the Cooks realized that God had also answered all three of the requests that they had made of Him for their trip. “All that was left was for us to be obedient and follow His call,” Mara says.

During their discerning period, the Cooks were amazed at how often God confirmed His will in specific ways. “Sometimes, we thought we were just making it all up, or reading into things. But God brought people into our lives at key moments,” Mara says.

Once while attending a youth camp in New York, the couple began discussing the details of becoming missionaries in their downtime. Questions about their children’s schooling and ability to adjust to a new culture poured out of Mara’s worried heart. Later that day, a camp counselor approached Andy and Mara and began sharing about things that had impacted her life. “She mentioned that her principal had left and gone to the mission field in Portugal,” Andy says. “Our ears certainly perked right away. Then, she talked about how she had gone there and studied and served a year at his school—the exact same school our children would attend if we went onto the mission field,” Andy says with a laugh. “Without even knowing it, she answered every question Mara had been asking earlier that morning.

“Sometimes when we get to tell our whole story, people are amazed by all of the details,” Andy says. “What God has impressed upon me is not how amazing our story has been, but how patient God has been with us both in clarifying and confirming His call upon our lives.

“God has been gracious in speaking repeatedly to us in a way we would hear it and understand it.” ■

—Reprinted with permission from *ABWE Message*, Fall 2009.





## Counseling From the Word

### From Whom All Truthful Counsel Flows

by John Henderson

***“O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!  
FOR WHO HATH KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD?  
OR WHO HATH BEEN HIS COUNSELLOR? OR WHO HATH FIRST  
GIVEN TO HIM, AND IT SHALL BE RECOMPENSED UNTO HIM AGAIN?  
For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things:  
to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” – Romans 11:33-36***

Once he reflects on the remarkable and against-human-logic economy of God’s grace toward Israel, the nations, and His Church, the Apostle Paul is stirred to spontaneous, natural, and exultant awe toward God. As a pebble surveys an immense canyon and a candle stands before the sun, so the apostle stands before and surveys his Maker and Redeemer. The inspired apostle kneels, convinced there is much more to God than meets his mortal eyes. If we know anything about God, Paul believes, it is because He has graciously given us such knowledge. If we conceive of His ways, then the Spirit has surely birthed such wisdom in our limited minds, for we cannot fathom Him nor comprehend the manner in which He works upon human hearts and destiny.

It is probably best as biblical counselors that we carefully examine and habitually acclaim the beauties of God’s wisdom and knowledge. Let us never

believe we have discovered their limits or spent their supplies. They are deep riches. And thus, let us firmly believe the purposes and methods of God are beyond us (Isaiah 55:9). Whatever divine purposes we come to appreciate, our appraisal is mere approximation of still grander intentions. Whatever divine methods we come to value, our observations are mere estimates of still grander ways. Embrace them and love them yes, but let us not suppose we hold and adore the whole. If we face a person in counseling and then observe some deficiency of relevance or power in God and His Word, then let us not believe the deficiency is His at all, but the result of some limitation in our own understanding and faith, or perhaps the work of Providence to hold us in our place. Let us certainly not imagine the real relevance and power is somehow to be found in the wisdom and knowledge of mankind, who depends on God for breath.

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

All true counsel flows from God and is revealed by God, not discovered by man. The human race is able to invent and discover many things, but nothing leading to soul redemption and heart renewal. Nothing arises from or abides within the treasury of human ingenuity able to give a human life any true light and joy. Since you might encounter volumes upon volumes of various wisdoms and judgments in your counseling tenure, I pray that the Lord helps you learn their source—for there is a difference between the wisdom from above and the wisdom from below (James 3:15-18). Even more, I pray that you learn to love the wisdom from above,

and by it live fruitfully. He is the power by which truthful counsel is sustained and applied, for all things exist through Him. And truthful counsel is to Him. That is, to His pleasure, honor, and glory. Strive to remember, as counselors, the One to whom your counsel rises and falls. Your counsel to others will reach, ultimately, the ears and eyes of Jesus Christ, and He will most assuredly know the difference between counsel given from below and counsel given from above. ■

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## *Why So Many Men Are “Pornified”: Sexual Idolatry, Sexual Wasteland*

by Dan Wilson

***Editor’s note: In this series Dan calls our attention to a subject many of us would prefer to deal with indirectly or not at all: sexual sin in the Church. Part 1 raised some very uncomfortable red flags to remind us just how much is at stake here. Part 2 addresses the spiritual and cultural roots of the problem, and Part 3 will suggest how to scripturally and practically deal with the problem.***

I noted in the last issue that a majority of Christian men are “pornified” at some level. In surveys, 60% of married Christian men admit to regular sexual fantasy and masturbation, 50% view porn once a week on average, 25% admit they have had an affair, and 3% are homosexually tempted.

This gritty war to fight “pornification” is not hopeless. In fact, in a litany of grievous sins including promiscuity, adultery, and

homosexuality in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul exulted in the fact that “*such were some of you*”! If he could minister to the church in Corinth, we must learn to deal with porn users, adulterers, and the homosexually tempted, with compassion, humility, and brotherly love.

Sexual brokenness ministry is not just an unwanted mess; it’s a Gospel opportunity—a mess worth jumping into. Participating with the Redeemer King in restoring a man who has squandered so much of his manhood is an opportunity to share in the victory of Christ in the spiritual battle we commonly call sanctification. Men hiding their “pornification”—whatever the type—are the guilt and shame-ridden social lepers akin to the tax collectors and prostitutes that Jesus personally touched and called to repentance. The goal in finding them in their sin and walking with them in repentance is restoration (Gal. 6:1, 2).

Why are so many more men “pornified” now than in previous generations? And what do we need to know about how sexual sin “works” in the lives of the men and young men in our churches?

### ***The “Porn-is-the-Norm” Worldview***

Generational decline in morality is nothing new. In the days of the Judges, the cycle of apostasy and repentance in God’s covenant people was extreme.

I have asked many men **why** they are into the favorite form of *porneia* (the Greek “catch-all” term for sexual sin). Many say, “It feels good.” Others complain that their “life is so stressful.” Then I point out how stressful and unmanageable it is to live a double life. In a few minutes, most men answer the question, “I do not know why I do what I do.”

You probably remember the infamous political slogan from the 1990s, “It’s the economy, stupid.” When it comes to sexuality, many with an anti-supernatural, materialistic worldview would say, “It’s the biology, stupid,” and, “It’s normal. That’s just the way men are.”

As a Christian, I cannot accept the evolutionary notion that our male sex drive is just an animal urge. I also cannot accept the psychological notion that “sexual addiction” is a “disease.” If true, our counsel might be, “Oh well, I guess you lost life’s lottery and got the sex-addict gene.”

This evolutionary worldview undercuts sanctification. A modern-day version of Freud might say, “Accept the way you are. You were born that way.” But Paul basically said, “Even though you were born a sinner, because of Christ, that’s the way some of you **were**.”

Christians must understand sex first theologically before considering it biologically. I do not see “sexual addiction” fundamentally as addiction—it’s worse than addiction; “sexual addiction” is sin. The Bible teaches us that our sexuality, with each gender, is divinely designed to express the image of God to the glory of God. Maybe we should change the slogan from “It’s the

biology, stupid” to “It’s the theology, people!” Sexuality is incredibly spiritual; God designed it, and now in Christ it can be redemptively led and controlled by the Spirit.

We ought not bifurcate our spirituality from sex. That would separate nature from grace. Buying into the worldview that “my soul is for Jesus to save but my body and sexuality is not included in all that spiritual salvation stuff” is just a new spin on an old bad idea—Gnosticism. Our soul and body are integrated, fundamentally unified as one, not dual. The error of body/soul dualism drives the sexual license among professing Christian men.

How a man stewards his sexuality is probably the best way to measure his spiritual maturity. Our sexuality answers the question, “Who do you love?” John confronted this dualistic error in his first epistle. Regarding sexual immorality, I think John would say, “You can’t tell me that you love God and act like your sex-life is independent of the Lord. You are deceiving yourself. Christ Jesus does not just want to save you from your idolatrous heart, He wants to save you from your selfish sex drive.” As King of kings, Jesus ought to run our heart and our sexual urges.

Ironically, back in 1 Corinthians 6:13 Paul completely debunks the sexually licentious spirit of our day: “*Now the body is not for fornication [porneia], but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.*” The problem among many men of the Church is this worldview problem. Many of us fall to the temptation to believe such lies, whether for a few minutes at a time or for decades. We are tempted to separate nature and grace, the Creator from the creation, our spiritual health from our sexual practices, salvation from sanctification, and Jesus as Saviour from Jesus as Lord. This is worldly thinking.

### ***Many Christian Men Believe Sexual Sin “Works”***

Since men believe *porneia* is the norm, they act like it. And, when a man believes

that pain is worse than sin, he will sin to escape pain. Besides that worldview commitment that sex somehow operates by a separate set of rules, men find that they can use sex to cope with pain.

What pain? Physical ailments? Yes, sometimes, but there are deeper pains—there are pains in all aspects of life in this fallen world. While men may not be in touch with their emotions, men are reacting to pains like: job stresses, job losses, and a host of circumstantial problems and disappointments. Men react to the pain of loneliness, friendlessness, and isolation. From the past, there are emotional wounds like father wounds, mother wounds, peer wounds, or dating regrets. Then there are the pains in marriage disappointments, hurtful relationships with children.

All sons of Adam face the pain of their own existence—like feelings of meaningless, futility, emptiness, and hopelessness. Crises of identity cause men great pain. When a man does not know who he is or what he is supposed to do he feels confused. That deep confusion causes pain, exasperation, and sometimes desperation. In our day most men suffer confusion about their identity and purpose, and in today's affluence and ease, men become very bored. Boredom is a pain—a murky, low level anger—frustrated in finding meaning. Confusion and boredom are deadly for genuine manhood. We all know that bored men do foolish, destructive things. Internet pornography enslavement is a prime example.

It is not sin to feel pain. But the entitlement, "I should not have to be in pain" is a form of pride. Pridelike entitlement drives the impulse toward autonomy with a vow, "I will fix my pain." Autonomy is simultaneously faith in "myself," faith in "my efforts to right my life on my terms," and the sin of unbelief in the goodness of God and His provision.

*Porneia* offers pain control. Doing any

form of *porneia*, temporarily numbs such pains. Few experiences are as intense and powerful as sex to bring pleasure, comfort, and soothing. So men manipulate their mind, pornographic media, and other people to self-servingly sooth their pains and fill up the emptiness of their self-centered life. Sexual immorality yields "false intimacy," not real intimacy and love. False intimacy is a selfish attempt to manipulate someone or something for your own gratification. It is seeking one's own pleasure, comfort, security, etc., by using another person.

*Porneia* teaches men not to think. It is inebriating. *Porneia* has been aptly called the evangelical men's drug of choice. *Porneia* trains our hearts to live life for the next biochemical hit—orgasm. *Porneia* dehumanizes us, squashes the image of God inside, and invites us to live by animal instinct.

*Porneia* works powerfully to train our hearts to fix our non-sexual, emotional, and spiritual needs with sex—a bodily experience. But sexual sin keeps us from real intimacy with God, our greatest need, and the grace of godly relationships with other people.

In *porneia* we find a way to do life apart from God, to push Him away, to save ourselves (at least temporarily), and to worship our own selves. **Sexual sin is ultimately a worship disorder.** It's a way we rebel and run from God our Father and Jesus our King as we worship created things and our self. So, sexual idolatry not only ruins many covenantal relationships, it also **works** ultimately toward self-destruction as it turns to self-worship.

In the next issue, we will examine what we shepherds must do to equip the saints for sexual brokenness ministry to men who live in the sexual wasteland of sexual idolatry. ■

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

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**When a man  
believes that pain  
is worse than sin,  
he will sin to  
escape pain.**

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# Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

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

## He Leadeth Me



by Gilmore/Bradbury

**Lyrics:** The theme of God's leadership in life often comes into focus at the beginning of a new year. This month's hymn pulls images of God's leadership from the well-known Psalm 23. The hymn writer, Joseph H. Gilmore, tells his own story:

As a young man who recently had been graduated from Brown University and Newton Theological Institution, I was supplying for a couple of Sundays the pulpit of the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. At the mid-week service, on the 26th of March 1862, I set out to give the people an exposition of the Twenty-third Psalm, which I had given before on three or four occasions, but this time I did not get further than the words "He leadeth me." Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw them in a significance and wondrous beauty of which I had never dreamed.

It was the darkest hour of the Civil War. I did not refer to that fact—that is, I don't think I did—but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God's leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or whither we are led, so long as we are sure God is leading us.

At the close of the meeting a few of

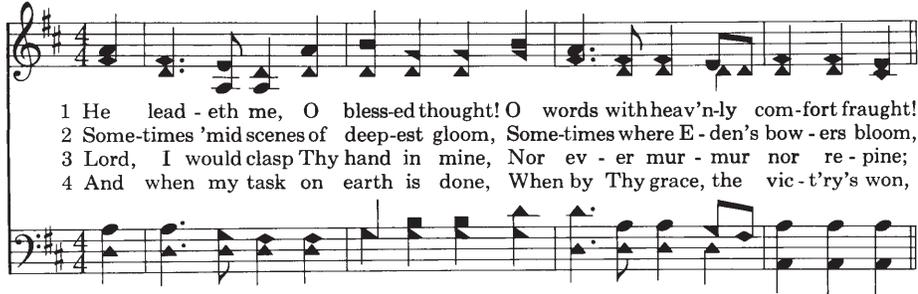
us in the parlor of my host, good Deacon Wattson, kept on talking about the thought which I had emphasized; and then and there, on a blank page of the brief from which I had intended to speak, I penciled the hymn, talking and writing at the same time, then handed it to my wife and thought no more about it. She sent it to *The Watchman and Reflector*, a paper published in Boston, where it was first printed. I did not know until 1865 that my hymn had been set to music by William B. Bradbury. I went to Rochester to preach as a candidate before the Second Baptist Church. Going into their chapel on arrival in the city, I picked up a hymnal to see what they were singing, and opened it at my own hymn, "He Leadeth Me."<sup>1</sup>

**Music:** From an analytical viewpoint, this hymn tune is very simple, consisting only of three two-measure phrases with minor alterations. The last half of every line is essentially the same, with the first and third occurrences ending with a dominant chord, and the second and fourth ending with a tonic. The "verse" part of the tune uses the same musical phrase to begin each line, and the chorus uses a different phrase that also opens both lines. The repetitious nature of the music may be partly inspired by the rep-

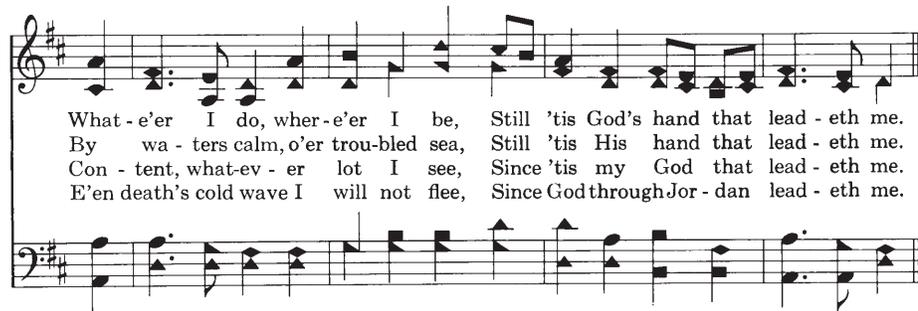
# He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought

JOSEPH H. GILMORE, 1862

WILLIAM BATCHELDER BRADBURY, 1864

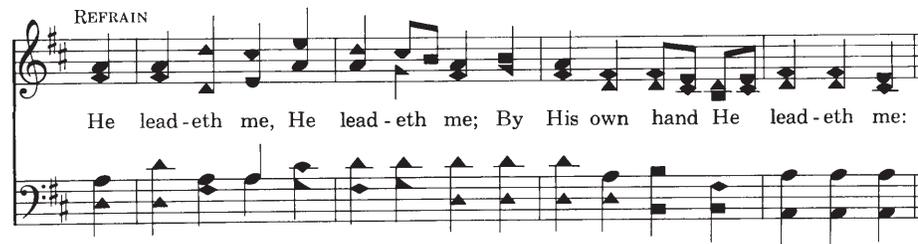


1 He lead - eth me, O bless-ed thought! O words with heav'n-ly com-fort fraught!  
2 Some-times 'mid scenes of deep-est gloom, Some-times where E-den's bow - ers bloom,  
3 Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine, Nor ev - er mur - mur nor re - pine;  
4 And when my task on earth is done, When by Thy grace, the vic - t'ry's won,

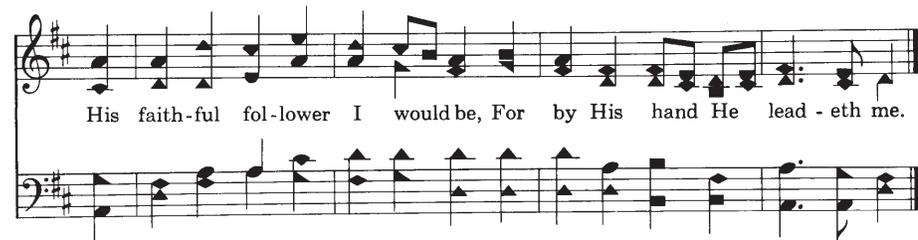


What - e'er I do, wher - e'er I be, Still 'tis God's hand that lead - eth me.  
By wa - ters calm, o'er trou-ble-d sea, Still 'tis His hand that lead - eth me.  
Con - tent, what-ev - er lot I see, Since 'tis my God that lead - eth me.  
E'en death's cold wave I will not flee, Since God through Jor - dan lead - eth me.

REFRAIN



He lead-eth me, He lead-eth me; By His own hand He lead-eth me:



His faith-ful fol-lower I would be, For by His hand He lead - eth me.

etitious message of the text. In addition to composing the music, William Bradbury added the text for the chorus.<sup>2</sup> ■

1. [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org)
2. [songsandhymns.org](http://songsandhymns.org)



## 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 E-mail to: Editor, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803; swandtrump@verizon.net.*

### Christ & Culture

***"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.  
If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."***

**- 1 John 2:15**

by E. O. Jack Jones

as adapted by Marsh W. Jones

**I**t is reasonable and right for a Christian to submit all standards and practices of prevailing culture to the teachings of Christ and the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit may reveal God's will for Christian faith and practice. The Christian is not different for the sake of difference, but is willing to adopt those behaviors that tend to holiness and to lay aside those that tend to sin or worldliness. Culture is the behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought that make up human society on a local and national level.

Modern culture offers many challenges to the Word of God and our faith. Some churches have given in to cultural and social pressures and have changed their understanding of God's Word or rejected portions of it. This has only enabled the further deterioration of our society. We are desensitized to pornography and indecency, we accept immoral living arrangements as the norm, we see the distinction between male and female blurred and the pursuit of holiness is ridiculed and discarded as unnecessary to salvation. The result of this is that these sins against God have become more evident in our world and there has been a further moral decline in America's culture; when the church fails to stand against evil,

the last defense falls.

Culture is not static; it is a changing aspect of any society. The Word of God, on the other hand, does not change, cannot change, and will not be altered though many would like to do so. Culture, for example, constantly dictates changes in clothing styles, in hair styles, in attitudes toward promiscuity, marriage, and in beliefs regarding God. Those who have compromised the standards and beliefs that were held by Christians in the last century have surrendered to the cultural relativism of the modern world. What was a sin one hundred years ago, is still a sin today.

There are many passages of Scripture that teach us to avoid the world, to keep popular culture and the things of the world at bay, and to stand by what our fathers and forefathers knew to be the truth. The words of John and of Paul (Corinthians) are perhaps most poignant: *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever"* (1 John 2:15-17).

*"Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:16b-18).*

### ***Personal Entertainments***

The Christian submits all personal entertainments, as well as what the world calls "art" to the Lordship of Christ.

The professional stage theater and the dance have been condemned by the church from the beginning, as has attendance at the motion picture theater since its beginning. Motion pictures shown in theaters, whether on film, video, or television, are deleterious to Christian life and are avoided by Christians. All of these forms of the theater have tended to encourage less moral restraint and have often been the place where the morals of a society have first begun to decline. Christians should be careful to avoid all entertainments that include inappropriate language, immodest attire or nudity, suggestive situations or talk, and comments that degrade God, the things of God, or His church.

Some radio programs, and some printed materials are also used to portray or praise behaviors incompatible with the Christian life, and Christians reject them. The basic appeal of these entertainments and activities is to *"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"* (1 John 2:16) and are derogatory of holiness. It is not surprising that the world prizes them, nor that the church opposes them.

### ***Christian Communication***

Christians will obey the Ten Commandments regarding the taking of God's name in vain in all of its forms. In addition, Christians do not curse, which is taking God's name in vain and using words to wish someone or something was sent to Hell; this is the responsibility of God our just judge. Christians also abstain from obscene and vulgar speech, as well as impure suggestive speech.

### ***Purity and the Family***

Living arrangements that could appear to the world to be evil, as well as those that are evil in themselves; i.e. involving fornication, adultery, or perverted relationships, must be avoided. These illicit relationships are encouraged by modern culture and seriously weaken the moral fiber of society. They are decidedly against the teaching of Scripture. God established the family as the basic unit of His world. Parents should naturally want to care for their children; husbands will love their wives and wives their husbands. Many aspects of modern culture militate against this and teach individuals to put themselves first; this is against the teachings of Jesus who taught us to put others first and to love one another. When this basic unit of society, the family, comes under fire by those who want to please their own flesh more than care for and support their family, then our society is in danger of falling just as ancient societies did when they gave that basic building block of society up to sinful pleasure and self.

### ***Modesty and Appearance***

Modesty of temperament, and self-control of all bodily appetites, are universal rules for those who love Christ.

The subject of Christian modesty requires application of Scripture to style and fashion. The Scriptures forbid those things which naturally engender carnal pride, the wearing of gold and jewels, clothing which is extreme in cost or style, and elaborate hair styles. Ladies are particularly instructed by the Apostles Peter and Paul. Modesty requires them to wear clothing that does not incite lust either by being inadequate in covering the body or by being too fitted, and to refrain from the use of face, lip, and nail rouge, and other cosmetics which are incompatible with the Scripture which admonishes women to be meek and sober (see 1 Peter 3:3, 4 and 1 Tim. 2:9). Women are to wear their hair long, except in extraordinary circumstances, as a sign of submission.

Since effeminate men cannot inherit the Kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9, 10), we conclude the same is true of masculine women. The Apostle connects such conduct with homo-

sexuality and excludes from the Kingdom those who practice it. Christians do not wear the clothing that is traditionally for the opposite sex.

Christian men wear their hair short to show they are under the authority of God (1 Corinthians 11), and to avoid effeminate appearance. They do not wear immodest attire in mixed company any more than a Christian lady would, and they testify of their temperance and verify their testimony by their conduct as well as their clothing. Modesty in attire is taught in Scripture (1 Timothy 2:9) as is the importance of avoiding the sin of lust (Jesus in Matthew 5:28) which is encouraged by scant clothing. This applies to males as it does to females. In our modern society, we must also note that biblical injunctions against gold, pearls, and costly array apply to both genders for they seek to address the sin of pride which is not particular to either males or females. This is the teaching that the

Church has proclaimed from the first century. Its origin is apostolic, and its wisdom is irrefutable.

#### *Holy Living and Culture*

Holiness and peaceableness are characteristics of Christians, so we must pursue both. Let us obey God first and always. Let us keep our consciences sensitive and void of offense in every area of life. Let us be a positive influence for Christ in our culture and determine to stand for what is right, regardless of what others are doing. Let us determine to make a difference for good and right in our time. Let us resolve to bring our culture and society back to the tenets of the Word of God and the truths of our Saviour. This may mean sacrifice and persecution, but it will be for the benefit of our nation, our world, and the salvation of our own souls. ■

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## Parental Guidance Required

### *Making Wise Media Choices for You and Your Family*<sup>1</sup>

by Kurt Gebhards

No one would deny that our culture is media-saturated. And few would disagree that, as Christians, our consumption of media needs to be moderated. But how can believers make wise media choices for both themselves and their families? It's a question most of us face every day.

Western culture is awash in an ocean of electronic media. Movie theaters, television, video games, laptops, cell phones, text messages, music downloads, emails, podcasts, and blogs bombard us with a constant flow of audio/visual stimuli. Every day, our lives are inundated with more media than we can possibly process; and much of it,

from the dramas on cable to the banner ads online, is decidedly ungodly—depicting sin as pleasurable and without consequence.

When one stops to think about it, the rapid growth and unrelenting pervasiveness of media is quite alarming. We no longer have to leave our homes in order to be exposed to sins and temptations of every kind. Just logging onto the internet can be a spiritually dangerous undertaking. Yet most Christians do not seem appropriately concerned.

They should be.

As those who are called to walk in holiness and purity, believers need to take care in protecting the purity of their minds. Dads

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1. This chapter is an excerpt (Chapter 4), with permission, from the book *Right Thinking in a World Gone Wrong* written by John MacArthur and the elders of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and published by Harvest House Publishers (2009).

and moms, especially, have a responsibility to safeguard their children. In a culture where parents excel at sanitizing little hands, bandaging little cuts, and vaccinating little immune systems—we must not neglect the spiritual well-being of little eyes, ears, and hearts.

So what are God's safety instructions to countermand the crush of entertainment? How can we, by God's help, protect our kids from the evil influences of the world? We need to go to the Scriptures to help us make wise decisions for both ourselves and our families. The challenge of this chapter is twofold: 1) to identify the Scriptural principles that should shape our media choices, and 2) to assist parents in shepherding their families in a media-crazed society.

### ***Biblical Principles That Address Media Choices***

Media is a powerful influence in our world and in our lives. But it is not more powerful than the Spirit of God who indwells believers. By filling our minds with the Word of God (which is the sword of the Spirit), and resting in His strength, we can make godly choices that will neutralize the threat media poses to us and our families. Though the Bible does not mention electronic media specifically, it does provide us with the principles we need to make godly decisions. We begin with three major Scriptural points.

#### ***1. Carefully avoid temptations that feed your areas of weakness.***

Sometimes we need to be reminded of the weak, frail creatures that we are. Our hearts are still prone to wander away from the Lord (Isaiah 53:6), and we can be tempted in many ways (James 1:13-16). If one of the champions of our faith, the great Apostle Paul, struggled with indwelling sin, we are certainly vulnerable as well (Rom. 7:15, 24). Scripture makes it plain that we are spiritually weak, easily tempted, and spiritually vulnerable (1 Peter 2:11).

God warns us repeatedly in His Word regarding immorality. James 1:27 states that pure religion includes "keep[ing] him-

self unspotted from the world." Furthermore, we are called to distance ourselves from the influence of the world (1 John 2:15-17). To disregard God's warnings is to foolishly place ourselves in danger.

With these realities in the forefront of our thinking, we must accordingly be careful to "keep thy heart with all diligence" (Prov. 4:23). We are our own worst enemy, and it is the enemy within (the sinful lusts of our flesh) that must be conquered (cf. Jer. 17:9). Though Satan can tempt us, using the worldly pleasures around us as bait, it is ultimately our own sinful lusts that cause us to sin (James 1:14). Since a battle rages in the heart we must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 14:13) but rather "sow seeds" to the Spirit (Gal. 6:8). If we sow seeds of holiness, we will reap righteousness as a consequence. And vice versa.

Temptations are cunning and often so subtle that it can be difficult to discern morality from immorality. We must not adopt Hollywood's view of sin as our own. There is a stark contrast between the Bible's depiction of sin and the media's. Consider the sins of adultery, witchcraft, homosexuality, lying, stealing, cheating, and slandering. In Scripture, the result is grief, regret, remorse, pain, difficulty, discipline, and ultimately eternal death in hell! In the media, however, these very same sins are usually glorified and upheld as fun, satisfying, and fulfilling. The negative consequences of sin are rarely depicted. Popular films, shows, sites, and songs feed us the tempting lie that sin leads to happiness and carries few if any repercussions. But this is the polar opposite of biblical truth. When we buy into the world's lies we bring danger to our souls.

Repeated indulgence in media naturally begins to dull the senses. If we are not vigilant, our thinking can become jaded, and lines of morality blurred. But, as one of my fellow pastors has stated, *We should not be entertained by the sins for which Christ died.* Lusting after electronic images, laughing at immorality, becoming discontent with our life circumstances, filling our minds with anti-Christian messages—these are

sins we must avoid.

But *avoidance* is only part of the biblical approach to media. The Christian life is not only concerned with avoiding immorality; it is also consumed with pursuing Christ. In putting off “the works of darkness,” we must also “put on the armour of light” (Rom. 13:12). Accordingly, let’s consider two additional principles believers need to think about.

### *2. Make the most of the time God has given you.*

Ephesians 5:16 challenges us to redeem “the time, because the days are evil.” James reminds us that our life is fleeting (4:14). Redeeming the time means that we are zealous for good works (Titus 2:14) and that we are “careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). God saved each of us from our sins for the purpose of performing good works (Eph. 2:10).

Movies, the internet, and other forms of media present a daily temptation to pull us away from God’s purposes for our lives. How many times have we sat down for “a quick show” and three hours later wondered where the evening went? Or logged on to “check email” and two hours later found ourselves still surfing the web? We need to be aware of the temptation that media can be to waste time. Even relatively small amounts of wasted time on a daily basis, can add up to large amounts of life spent mindlessly gazing at a screen. Wasted time means wasted opportunity; wasted opportunity means poor stewardship; and we will give an account to God for how we spent our lives (cf. Rom. 14:10, 12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

Thoughtless media consumption runs counter to the purposefulness of the Christian sojourn. Along with the psalmist, ask God to teach you to number your days (Psalm 90:12). How are you using God’s precious gift of time?

### *3. Worship God above all else, even in your media choices.*

Third, as Christians, God is to be our all-encompassing passion. Jesus Christ is the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45, 46). There

is nothing greater than knowing and pursuing Him (Phil. 3:8). Christ is our supreme value (1 Peter 2:7). He offers us unending joy and satisfaction (Psalm 16:11). The treasures of His fellowship are found deep within the mines of prayer, Scripture-reading, and worship (Psalm 63:1, 2). In our relationship with Christ, we invest whatever is necessary to gain infinite returns.

How shocking that we can know these truths, and yet still be pulled into the mundane and immoral things of life! If we know that His “lovingkindness is better than life” (Psalm 63:3), why are we so easily lured into so many lesser things? We must fight to worship Him above all else (1 Tim. 6:12). In what ways might your exposure to media dim your desire for God and quench your passion for Jesus Christ? Why would you not give those things up and pursue the Lord with that time instead? It will not be wasted time!

Along with the three points above, consider these additional biblical principles that inform our media choices:

1. Ensure that Jesus Christ is exalted in all that you do (Col. 1:18).
2. Understand that all things are lawful but not all things are profitable (1 Cor. 6:12).
3. Do not fall under the dominating influence of anything except God (1 Cor. 6:12).
4. Beware especially of sexual lust because of the severity of sexual sins (1 Cor. 6:15-20).
5. Fear the destructiveness of worldliness (Matt. 13:22).
6. Realize that exposure to sinful examples is corrupting (1 Cor. 15:33).
7. Recognize that even small amounts of foolishness are significant (Eccl. 10:1).
8. Do not give serious consideration to the world’s philosophies (Psalm 1:1).
9. Avoid friendship with the world (James 4:4).
10. Be inexperienced and a novice in regards to wickedness (1 Cor. 14:20).
11. Stay away from exposure to evil (Prov. 22:3).
12. Flee lust and all inducement to sin (2 Tim. 2:22).

13. Fight materialism and covetousness which is idolatry (Col. 3:5).
14. Protect your eyes from sinful and worthless images (Psalm 101:3).
15. Pursue purity in both thought and deed (Titus 1:15).
16. Make no provision for the flesh and its sinful desires (Rom. 13:14).
17. Thank God that He has given us all things to freely enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17).
18. But do not use your freedom for selfishness but for service (Gal. 5:13).
19. Train your senses to discern between good and evil (Heb. 5:14).
20. Take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).
21. Distance yourself from the entangling corruption of the world's lusts (2 Peter 2:20).
22. Look to Christ for rest, joy, peace, and fulfillment (Matt. 11:28-30).
23. Rejoice in the fact that heavenly reward awaits those who are faithful (Heb. 11:6).
24. Fill your life with thoughts that honor Christ (Phil. 4:8).
25. Ensure that you put nothing before your eyes that would induce you to lust (Job 31:1).
26. Remember that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, watching the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3).
27. Cultivate your contentment through godliness (1 Tim. 6:6).
28. Set your mind on the things of Christ (Col. 3:1, 2).
29. Expend yourself in the spiritual ministry toward others (2 Cor. 12:15).
30. Live to the end that God is glorified in all that you do (1 Cor. 10:31).

### ***Shepherding Your Children Through Media Choices***

In addition to the principles listed above, Christian parents must take special care in making wise decisions for their families. Whether we like it or not, our children are targeted as prime consumers in the media market. Without parental guidance, they are especially vulnerable, not only because they generally lack discernment but also

because they are being exposed to media more than any previous generation. Parents need to be aware of the threats media can pose, and alertly stand guard. Dads and moms should set the tone in the home and uphold a godly standard for their children. The effort parents make in this regard will not go unrewarded (cf. Prov. 22:6).

*Be a good example.* Parents must set an example that is worthy to be followed. Wise choices must be made, and self-control must be employed. The sobering fact is that our children will emulate what they see in us. They learn as much by what we tell them as they do by how we live. No matter what we say, we will not convince them that Jesus Christ is our highest love if the way we spend our free time suggests otherwise.

*Stand guard.* Parents must watch over their family with vigilance. They need to know (and be in control of) the influences to which their children are being exposed. Ignorance is no excuse. If there are headphones on a child's head, the parents should know what's on the MP3 player. If there is an internet connection in a child's room, the parents should know what websites are being visited. (For that matter, parents should seriously think through the potential temptations and risks involved *before* allowing their children to have private access to any media device, especially televisions, cell phones, or internet-capable computers.)

Media must be muted in our homes so that the noise doesn't drown out the voice of God. If we are not careful to shield ourselves, we will be overtaken by the deluge, and more significantly, so will our children. As their spiritual (and legal) guardians, we must be proactive in the struggle against the assault of entertainment. Parents are called by God to be the prime influencers of their children. They must not surrender that role to a corded box that sits in the living room.

*Stimulate spirituality.* Your evenings at home are *prime time*, not for surfing on the internet but for investing in your family. If you spend that time on the computer, instead of spending time with your children, you are neglecting your God-given responsibilities as

a parent. Consider two things—among many others—that you trade for a few fleeting moments of relaxation and entertainment: a deep relationship with your children, and gospel opportunities to lead them to Christ.

If you spend time with your children, investing in them, learning about them, showering love upon them, and playing with them, *they* will want to turn off the media. When your children are all grown and gone from the house and you think back on the years you spent with them as a parent, what things will you regret? I've never met anyone who wishes they had spent more time with their media and less time investing in relationships.

Parents (especially fathers) need to take an active role in the spiritual development of their children. Youth pastors and other spiritual influences can be helpful supplements. But the primary spiritual responsibility for raising up godly children rests in the home. As God commanded Israelite parents 3,500 years ago, “Thou shalt teach them [God’s statutes] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:7). If we are to fully counter the effects of media, we must diligently teach our children the truth about God, sin, and salvation.

As an aside, here are five practical questions that parents should consider in creating a strategy for their own families.

1. Honestly assess your media consumption. From the biblical standards you’ve learned in this chapter, do you need to make some changes? Are you exposing yourself to corrupting influences?
2. Understand your responsibility to redeem the time and use it wisely for God’s glory. Are you spending too much time surfing the web or participating in other media-driven activities (like video games)?
3. Consider what you want to make of your life in light of Christ’s call for faithfulness to Him (Matt. 25:23). Are you abusing your “freedom in Christ” for your own leisure and pleasure (Gal. 5:13)? Or are you exert-

ing yourself in service to the Lord?

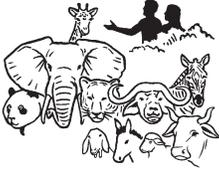
4. Compare your media intake with your intake of God’s Word. Are you more devoted to your own entertainment and amusement than you are to God’s precious Word? What plan of action will you take to address this?
5. Honestly assess the example you demonstrate to your children. Do you need to make any changes or improvements? Will you sit down with your family, admit your failure in this area, and set up a new plan of action? Remember that your responsibility as a parent is to provide spiritual leadership and guidance for your children in the home.

### ***Setting a Higher Standard***

Our culture yearns for recreation and rest. The entertainment industry feeds us the notion that we all deserve a little R&R, and then happily presents us with many options. *You work hard all day, so you deserve a little time to unwind.* Right? Yet God’s Word sets a more exacting standard for those who claim to follow Jesus Christ. We are called to live our lives exerting all of our energy for Christ, to spend and be spent, to fight the good fight of faith, to clamor after something far more worthy and infinitely more fulfilling than anything this world has to offer. We are to live for the glory of Christ!

If we do, not only will our homes be bastions of godliness in a wicked world, but the sacrifices we make for His sake will be abundantly rewarded in Heaven. We would do well to join with Jonathan Edwards in being “resolved, that I will live so, as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.” Why would we spend our lives being amused by the available media, when we could be breathlessly enraptured in the blazing brilliance of Christ’s glory? Let us keep our eyes on Christ, the Author and Perfecter of the faith. In so doing, we will have little appetite for the fading illusions of this passing world. ■

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## Beginning Issues



# A Good Defense

by John Mullett

*“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15 ESV).*

Christians should always be prepared to defend their faith as this passage in 1 Peter exhorts us to do. The Greek word for *defense* is *apologia* from which we get our word *apology*. It’s not an apology as an excuse, but “in defense of” and hence we have apologetics. To “build” a good apologetic or defense of my faith is hard work, but when the church provides inadequate answers to her critics it only fuels additional attacks on the church’s credibility and relevance to society. As Christians defending our faith, as we are called to do in 1 Peter 3:15, we must always be sure to build an excellent apologetic.

One of the ways we sometimes fail in this regard is when we lose sight of the nature of the battle we face. The foundation of creation apologetics is not (or at least shouldn’t be) about how old the universe is or whether evolution is true or not. Those issues all play a part in the discussion to be sure, but the foundational issue at stake is the authority of God’s Word. In any area of discussion the reason for debate should be to defend the authority of God’s Word. Since God is truth and the source of all truth, to live by His Word is to live in reality. When we compromise His Word we compromise the platform on which to build our lives and interpret the world around us. Should we discuss and

defend other issues such as abortion, divorce, or sexuality? Absolutely, but we must learn when and where the appropriate time and forums are for those discussions and the appropriate approach to take when we do engage. If you don’t have the right foundation, and in our dialogue I focus on issues such as these in an “it’s right or wrong” argument, it will be highly unlikely that you will be able to receive my message, because I would be trying to impose a morality on you that wouldn’t be logically compatible with your foundation. The focus of creation apologetics in science should be to defend the authority of the Bible as God’s Word. If the authority of the Bible is compromised, as it has been, then its morality is more readily rejected because its logic is no longer consistent with the worldview of those who have compromised.

It is easy to get caught up in the debate of creation versus evolution as though it were some evidence-finding race. It is decidedly not that. Both sides of the debate live in the same world and have the same evidence. We study the same layers of strata and the same fossils. The difference is not in the evidence, but in how it is interpreted. When we get caught up in an “evidence-gathering race” we may have a tendency to compromise in the quality of

our apologetics, in our efforts to “get a leg up on the competition.” There are arguments we should not use for that reason. Science is limited to present-day observations and we should not be dogmatic about things we cannot prove or don’t have an eyewitness account of. For example, while Scripture never mentions rain before the flood, we shouldn’t dogmatically state that it never rained before the flood because Scripture never explicitly addresses it. Why does a creationist hold so ardently to cre-

ation week being in six literal days when that is something that can’t be proven by observation? It’s because Scripture directly and clearly addresses it. Where Scripture speaks clearly on something we must never compromise. However, when it doesn’t directly address something we must be much more careful not to be too dogmatic or to drum up some evidence that is not sound scientifically. In next month’s article I will address some of the arguments we should avoid. ■

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## Offer Hope

by Mark D. Avery

While Christians spend too little time considering Heaven, most also spend too little time considering Hell. The Bible describes Hell as a place of the most horrible punishment. Our imaginations only begin to grasp its reality. Outer darkness, burning flames, intense anguish, and a total absence of the presence of God are the constant realities there. My mind recoils at these thoughts.

To be fair, we have to realize that constant thinking about Hell would very likely cause physical and emotional problems. Preaching about Hell, talking about Hell, even writing about Hell causes me to lose sleep and feel physically ill. Yet the reality is, unless Christians do something about it, we have friends and neighbors who will be lost in Hell for eternity. We must do something! We must do all within our power to help bring some of those friends and neighbors to Jesus.

Spirit-filled believers are motivated to share their hope in Christ with others. What a tragic setting it is if most of the people in our neighborhoods do not know Jesus. Yet as Christians, we have a responsibility and an empowering to reach our neighbors with the gospel.

I wish I could honestly write that we could see all of our neighbors saved. Sadly, that does not seem possible. At the same time, however, we must do all that we can to point them to the only one who can save them. With that in mind, let me offer a few suggestions.

*Pray for your neighbors.* My Bible and my experience both tell me that God still answers prayer. One friend walks her neighborhood praying for the families in each house as she walks past. She does not know the names of all the people, but she prays for them anyway, knowing that God knows them.

*Get acquainted with your neighbors.* It is true that some people are not friendly; some seem genuinely afraid to talk to strangers. Yet the walls people have erected around themselves often fall quickly when that stranger shows an interest in their lives. Find an area of common interest or knowledge and exploit it for the sake of the gospel.

*Befriend your neighbors.* Everybody hurts. Some people hurt deeply. If you can win someone’s confidence so that he is willing to share a hurt, he has opened the door for you to share some healing. You might be surprised to learn that behind the walls is a