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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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altered Adam's DNA, which would have been necessary to prevent the rib from resurfacing in the next generation. In fact, it is very possible that even Adam himself was not short a rib. Today it is well documented that when removed properly ribs normally regrow. Doctors using procedures such as bone grafting frequently take advantage of this. Who would know better than our Creator, who designed our bodies, the proper procedure for properly removing the rib to facilitate regrowth?

God's Word, as recorded in the Bible, is sufficient to accurately interpret our world without resorting to just-so stories just because they sound "good." When we pre-

scribe to such stories we are doing far more damage than good. ■

1. *Did Darwin Renounce Evolution on His Deathbed?* John D. Morris, Ph.D. <http://www.icr.org/article/2834>.
2. *Darwin's Deathbed Conversion—a Legend?* Dr. Tommy Mitchell, AiG-U.S. March 31, 2009 <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2009/03/31/darwins-deathbed-conversion-legend>.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. *Did Darwin Renounce Evolution on His Deathbed?* John D. Morris, Ph.D. <http://www.icr.org/article/2834>.
6. Was Darwin a Christian? Did he believe in God? Did he recant evolutionism when he died? <http://www.christiananswers.net/q-aig/darwin.html>.

"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.

Person of the Month:

W. R. Hershberger
(1902-1954)



Willie Raymond Hershberger was born in Cass County, Missouri, near Garden City to Daniel and Mary Kropf Hershberger on May 11, 1902. Of the four boys and four girls he was the fifth child.

Hershberger's parents were a godly couple who provided a home that was very pleasant and adequate, though not luxurious. Raymond's father was a farmer and "W. R." lived all his life on the home farm with the exception of eleven years.

His education was received in the Smith rural grade school.

In 1914, at the age of 12, he accepted Christ's offer of salvation and was subsequently baptized. He became a member of the Sycamore Grove Church. As a youth he became active in the Sunday school and gladly served at Sycamore.

Ida Pearl Kauffman, a member at Sycamore, took Raymond's notice and on January 21, 1926, Raymond, now 24, married Ida. They moved to a nearby farm of their own where they resided for eleven years. At that point Raymond's father was ready to retire from the farm and W. R. moved his family to the home farm to take over the work there.

God gave the couple three sons and one daughter but sadly, Hershberger's namesake, Willis Raymond, died at the age of seven months.

At the age of 36, Raymond Hershberger was ordained as a minister on April 9, 1939, to assist in the work at Sycamore Grove. His responsibilities increased in 1941 when he was ordained again: this time as bishop on May 11. By 1943 he was in charge of the Sycamore Grove Church. Soon several other churches and outposts were added to his oversight—White Hall near Oronogo; the Argentine Church in Kansas City, Kansas; the Gospel Center in Kansas City, Missouri; an outstation at Morris; and Berea near Birch Tree. Although he was busy farming he still took the time to visit these congregations. He never lost his concern for his own congregation, Sycamore Grove.

Although Raymond's formal education was not extensive and his library was not large, he was diligent in learning on his own so that he could mature both spiritually and mentally in order to serve the Lord well.

Because of his abilities, willingness to help, and a positive spirit of cooperation, Hershberger was also asked to serve in the following positions: conference delegate to the Dakota-Montana Conference in 1944; conference delegate to the North Central Conference in 1947; moderator of the South Central Conference from 1949-51; one term as assistant moderator of the Executive Committee and one term as its associate member. He also served five different times as an evangelist in Missouri as well as Iowa and Kansas. He served on the Conference Sunday School Committee and was a Counselor for the I-W men of Missouri.

As in any church Raymond was acquainted with sorrows and trials, which ministers sometimes have to bear alone. He was concerned about the future of the church and invested his interests in the children and young people of the congregation *(continued on page 5)*

In the Beginning

by Steve Gollmer

*How did we get here and how can we know for sure?
Amid conflicting voices, the answers affect our lives now . . . and for eternity.*

The man certainly had a way of communicating. Whether encouraging his young apprentice Timothy or preaching to godless Athenians, the Apostle Paul reached his audience by first figuring out where they were coming from.

In Acts 17, for instance, he tells the people of Athens that the unknown god they worshiped was, in fact, the Creator who “giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” and that “in him we live, and move, and have our being.” He then says, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Interestingly, Paul frames his discussion of theology around the theory of origins. In order to support the theology of a single God, he states that God created all things.

If only it were that easy today. We continue to struggle over origins as the evolution-creation debate rages on. What theory is correct? The answer to this question either strengthens or destroys Paul’s theological stance. But as it was in the days of Paul, so it is today. The names may change, but the essence of the arguments remains the same. Paul addressed the Epicureans and the Stoics in Athens, and in today’s culture creationism faces off against naturalism and transcendentalism.

Proper Prejudices

As frameworks from which to explain the world, origin theories are not testable in the sense of laboratory experiments. Rather, they stand or fall based on their ability to provide a consistent explanation of all observed phenomena. One must then evaluate whether inconsistencies are due to limited data and understanding or to a fatal

flaw that demands rejection of the model. In either case, origin theories arise from a set of prejudices. But as cosmologist Steven Weinberg explained, “The great thing is not to be free of theoretical prejudices, but to have the right theoretical prejudices.”

Naturalism holds that the sum of all existence can be observed or measured and therefore any theory of origins depends solely on natural causes. Consequently, the universe is either eternal or the result of natural processes. Complex phenomena such as the cosmos, life, and the human mind must come from simpler origins.

Transcendentalism maintains that metaphysical principles extend beyond sensate knowledge. Origin theories based on this worldview do not regard the physical world as permanent, but as temporary and in the process of change. Complex phenomena are not the result of blind chance but the expected outcomes of a universal essence or consciousness.

Creationism proposes that everything results from the purposeful act of a transcendent Creator. The cosmos, life, and the human mind, as well as spirit beings, were created in functionally complete forms. Complex phenomena were inherent in creation from the beginning and reflect the omnipotence, omniscience, and creativity of a personal intelligence.

New Beginnings

The word *cosmos* refers to the systematic order of the universe. From before Aristotle to as recently as the 1960s, many scientists maintained that matter and the universe were eternal. But based on validated scientific theories and recent observations, it

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becomes necessary to concede that the universe has a definite starting point.

As a result of this discovery, naturalism is forced to go beyond observable or measurable data to propose rational mechanisms for creating universes. In addition, life as we know it could not exist if physical parameters such as gravity, electricity, and nuclear forces differed slightly. Our fine-tuned universe is a statistical improbability as viewed from naturalism.

On the other hand, a temporary universe uniquely suited for the existence of life aligns with transcendentalism. Yet, to achieve this comfort, many transcendentalists allude to a universal consciousness that guides the development of the universe from its very beginning. Although at first this may sound like a creationist proposition, the Creation account found in Genesis differs in that the universe was created functionally complete. This implies a complexity in the relationship between space, time, and matter that is yet to be understood, contrary to naturalistic theories that start with relatively simple conditions. Although the creationist position is often denigrated as being a statement of faith, the current Big Bang cosmology proposes a universe composed of four percent ordinary matter and 96 percent “otherness,” which is also a statement of faith.

Life Issues

Although centuries of scientific scrutiny have validated the assertion “life comes from life,” Darwin proposed that the first life came from “some warm little pond.” To him, cells were little more than simple bags of protoplasm. But five years after the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, Louis Pasteur stated that his experiments related to germ theory dealt a “mortal blow” to the doctrine of spontaneous generation (life spawning from non-life).

Since then, the study of cells has not made Darwin’s proposal more plausible but has enhanced appreciation for the complex structures and regulatory mechanisms inherent in even the simplest cells. It may

seem that “life comes from life” supports transcendentalism, but this worldview appeals to a life principle inherent to the universe. Therefore, transcendentalism is even more accommodating to spontaneous generation than naturalism is. And it strengthens the creationist position that functionally complete life forms were created in the beginning by the One who is “the life.”

Mind Matters

The human mind—the essence of our identity—results from the special creation of mankind as described in the Genesis account. Being made in the image of God distinguishes mankind from animals, and the mind is a primary aspect of that distinction. Although animals respond to their environment, demonstrate learning, and exhibit personality, their use of language and ability to conceptualize abstract concepts pale in comparison to that of human beings.

Science has made great strides in correlating physical structures and chemical processes to animal and human intelligence, yet naturalistic models explain the difference as merely the number and quality of neural connections. The perception of “you” is considered an illusion brought about by complex biochemical reactions. Responding to such a cold view of existence, transcendentalists resort to concepts like atman—the self—which is a part of the universal essence of mind.

In the End

The real question when comparing origin theories is: “To whom are we responsible?” In naturalism, physical law and chance drive humankind. Although people may appear autonomous, they are ultimately destined to follow their genes and environment and, therefore, not accountable. In transcendentalism, people are not constrained solely by the physical world but directed by karma or other metaphysical principles. These principles are a law unto themselves and determine the trajectory of one’s life and afterlife.

(continued on page 5)

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Sowing and Reaping

by Ben Waldner

As summer comes to a close and fall creeps over the horizon, farmers and gardeners are anticipating a harvest. Usually, farmers and gardeners plant seeds in the spring and then harvest in the fall what was produced. This cycle of planting and harvesting is commonly referred to as sowing and reaping. Hopefully, sowing—plus hours of fertilizing, cultivating, spraying, and weeding—will be rewarded with a bountiful harvest. The cycle of sowing and reaping has been in existence since God established it on the third day of creation week (Genesis 1:11; Colossians 1:16, 17). This God-ordained law of sowing and reaping is profound, and can teach us valuable lessons. What are some lessons we can learn from the law of sowing and reaping? Let's consider three:

1. *This law is impartial.*

It applies equally to young and old, foolish and wise, and unbeliever and believer. It operates on all continents, in all countries, all cities, and all towns. It

does not respect languages, colors, nationalities, or creeds. It applies equally to strong and weak, great and small, and educated and ignorant. This law has no favorites and is not biased. It affects every person.

2. *This law is predictable.*

Observation, experience, and scientific reason tell us that this law is predictable. When a gardener plants peas, she can predict that she will reap peas. Conversely, when a farmer plants corn, he can predict that he will *not* reap beans. Let's consider what it would be like if this law was unpredictable and would operate at random. Imagine planting corn and reaping soybeans. How about planting potatoes and harvesting radishes? Or even more perplexing, how about planting tomatoes and harvesting chickens? This would lead to utter chaos. Since this is God's world and operates by the laws He established, we do well to take this to heart.

The Apostle Paul taught the believers in the region of Galatia of the spiritual

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implications of this law. He wrote, "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8). Based on this teaching, the principle of predictability would hold true both in the physical and spiritual world. What is sown in the physical world is harvested in the physical world, and what is sown in the spiritual world is reaped in the spiritual world.

3. *This law is immutable.*

In a world that is constantly changing, the law of sowing and reaping does not change. We can challenge it, appeal to it, or attempt to reason it away, but it will not change. People can change, laws will change, and relationships do change, but this is a non-negotiable reality. This law existed in Adam's time, continues today, and will live on till the Lord returns. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7b).

Now that we've considered some lessons based on the law of sowing and reaping, how can we personalize them? What can we do to apply them so that they shape our speech and conduct? Here are a few suggestions to get started:

Because the law of sowing and reaping is impartial, it applies to you and meets you where you are. To personalize this principle of the law of sowing and reaping, memorize Galatians 6:7, 8 and put your name in it. It would look something like this: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked:

for whatsoever _____ (your name) soweth, that shall _____ (your name) also reap." Next, ask God to help you make the connection between the good or bad seeds you've sown and the harvest you are now reaping. Repent of the bad seed you've sown and thank Him for rewarding you for the good seed you've sown. Lastly, ask God to help you sow good seed.

Because the law of sowing and reaping is also predictable, consider the implications of gossip by studying the following verses: Proverbs 11:13; 18:8; 20:19; and 26:20. Write the verses in the first person with your name in them. Then ask God to give you a mind to predict your harvest before you plant. After that, plant with expectation.

As a result of the law of sowing and reaping being immutable, it is wise to plant with harvest in view. Begin by considering what you would like to reap in your lifetime. Ask God to help you identify godly qualities He wants you to develop in your life. Evaluate whether you want to reap compassion, humility, and kindness, or hatred, bitterness, and envy. If you want to reap a harvest of righteousness, begin by considering harvest. Then plan. Be like a farmer or gardener and plan but with reaping in view, because this law is immutable. Finally, plant good seeds today. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Deeper Life Ministries Newsletter*, September/October, 2009.

W. R. HERSHBERGER . . . cont'd.

who would become the future leaders. On August 10, 1947, the Bethel congregation joined with the Sycamore Church. Hershberger was 45 years old at the time.

Sadly, on January 23, 1954, at the age of 51, Willie Raymond Hershberger suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and never regained consciousness. Four days later, on January 27, the Lord took him "Home."
—Gail L. Emerson

FEBRUARY 2010

IN THE BEGINNING . . . cont'd.

The biblical account declares there is a God and He sent a Redeemer to whom we are accountable. Many of the Athenians responded to Paul's remarks with sneers, but some wanted to know more. Others believed and followed. We, too, must decide what we believe about our origins, as it will determine what we believe about God. ■

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

FEBRUARY 7, 2010

Jesus Honors Persistent Faith

Matthew 15:21-28

This month we are looking at evidences of Jesus' Messiahship as seen through the testimonies of those whose lives experienced change through their contact with Him. Since last Sunday's lesson where we see Jesus' rejection by His hometown people, He has been busy healing, teaching, and working miracles. There has also been increased conflict with the scribes and Pharisees in their attempts to discredit His miracles and claims.

To secure relief from the pressure of their attacks and the constant demands on His time by the ever-present crowds, Jesus left Galilee and entered Gentile territory in the environs of Tyre and Sidon. He was also likely seeking undisturbed times to be with His disciples to further instruct them regarding events surrounding the approaching close of His ministry.

Though in Gentile territory, Jesus' fame had preceded Him even here (see Mark 3:7, 8). Here a woman of that area, a Canaanite, approached Him with a request for mercy for her demon-possessed daughter. She recognized His position and identity, addressing Him as "Lord, thou son of David." Jesus initially ignored her but she was persistent to the point that the disciples urged Jesus to "send her away," to get rid of her because she was disturbing them.

When Jesus did finally respond to her

it was with a seeming callous, unsympathetic answer. But He was simply testing her faith. Did she really understand who He was, and that His power to heal was from divine source? He put her faith to the test. He explained that His primary ministry was to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." However, Jesus' statement did not belie the larger scope of His ministry to all men regardless of race or nationality. This was but a specific incident to draw out a response from the seeker.

Not easily put off, she fell at His feet (Mark 7:25, 26) and asked the Lord to help her. She undoubtedly knew that if Jesus didn't help her daughter, all hope was lost. So she humbled herself and pled for help. It was now or never, and she desperately wanted help for her stricken child.

Again Jesus' response seems a bit harsh and unfeeling, even judgmental, reminding her of her non-privileged position as not being of God's chosen race. She, recognizing her inferior position, nevertheless was willing to accept the lesser blessing of the outsider if only her daughter would be healed. Her plea was not for herself, but in utter humility asked a blessing for her tortured daughter.

Once Jesus had assessed the true spirit of her heart He responded in commensurate measure to her faith and granted her request, healing her daughter "that very hour." Not only did He heal the daughter, He commended the woman for her great, unshakable faith. (See Jesus' comment on the centurion's faith in Matthew 8:5-13, especially verse 10.)

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This little vignette of Jesus' ministry shows us several things about His program. It shows that without faith it is impossible to please Him, and that with faith all things are possible (Hebrews 11:6). It also proves that no one, regardless of race, nationality or position, is outside the scope of Jesus' concern or reach (John 3:16, 17). It also proves that persistence pays results in our approach to God.

Here was a non-privileged individual acknowledging Jesus as God's anointed One, and He rewarded her understanding and faith by granting her request. May we also express such faith in Him.

For thought and discussion

1. Jesus, even as God's Son, needed time to refresh and recharge. How can we best balance ministry and downtime? Good for discussion.
2. Do we tend to look down our noses at those less privileged than ourselves with a long history of spiritual heritage? Why so? What does this lesson teach us about equality in God's sight?
3. Do all of your requests to God require persistency, or are there times when we need simply to wait patiently for His response? What makes the difference, if any? Discuss.
4. Jesus' disciples saw Him reach out to this non-Jew with mercy and compassion. Why did it take them so long, once they were in charge of Jesus' ministry, to recognize that all men come to Him the same way, and that He is open to the coming of all men? There is a word that describes both their thinking, and we must also be aware of it today. What is it?
5. Jesus rewards faith and persistence. Have you experienced the blessing of both?

Help for teachers

Lesson emphasis: Jesus rewards faith and persistence and He welcomes all men to approach Him.

Key verse: 28a

FEBRUARY 14, 2010

Peter Declares the Christ

Matthew 16:13-27

As Jesus neared the end of His earthly ministry He retired to the more secluded area of Caesarea Philippi with His disciples to further teach and instruct them concerning His approaching Passion. It was in this setting that Jesus probed their understanding of His person and what they heard the people saying of Him. His purpose was to clarify and establish in their minds that He was indeed the Christ, the Son of God. He also established their role in continuing the work He had begun and laid down basic principles for entrance into His kingdom.

The disciples were picking up varied responses from the crowds regarding Jesus. Some thought He was John the Baptist come back to life, or one of the prophets resurrected—Elijah, Jeremiah, or another of the famous prophets of old. But then Jesus put the question directly to them: "What is your understanding of who I am?" Peter, ever the outspoken one of the twelve, responded correctly, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Then, because the people's understanding was not complete and Jesus did not want them in their incomplete understanding to begin a popular uprising to declare Him Israel's coming King, He forbade the disciples to declare that He was the Christ, God's anointed One. Jesus then declared Himself to be the foundation stone upon which His church would be built (see 1 Corinthians 3:11 and Ephesians 2:20), and that Peter and the other disciples would play a key role in the establishing and building of that church which would prevail in spite of the forces of evil unleashed against it.

As Jesus then began to unfold the events surrounding the completion of His earthly ministry, Peter again spoke up, this time in rebuke, saying, "This cannot be." Jesus assured him that it was true and it was all in God's plan. He then

derided Peter for being a spokesman for Satan to tempt Him away from His purposeful goal. Peter was simply looking at things from the human perspective, not yet understanding the fulness of God's plan.

Jesus then laid down principles for those wishing to be part of His kingdom. To be a true follower of Jesus one must completely give up self, accept the burden of being Christ's disciple, and follow Him unerringly even, if necessary, to death. The principle of losing to gain is brought out in Jesus' next statement (v. 25). Jesus accepts no halfhearted followers. It must be with complete dedication and purpose.

Jesus then contrasts the fleeting gains of this world with the enduring gain of the heavenly kingdom. There is no comparison when man's soul is at stake. To miss Heaven for earthly gain or pleasure will be man's greatest mistake. Nothing of monetary value can redeem man's soul. It must be bought with the blood of Christ and then given back to Him in a lifetime of dedicated service. That is true gain.

When Jesus returns "he shall reward every man according to his works." This is not merited salvation, but an indication that where we place our heart, there will be our treasure. If we give up all for God He will reward us with heavenly pleasures for evermore. If we invest for self, we will lose it all in the consummation of the age. The choice is ours. The reality is stark.

For thought and discussion

1. What led the people to assume that Jesus was one of the old prophets brought back to life? What were the similarities?
2. In the nearly three years the disciples had been with Jesus, what evidences did they have that Jesus was more than mere man? Discuss.
3. Find supporting Scriptures to prove that Jesus, not Peter, is the Rock upon which the church is built. Think through and give reasons why this is true.
4. In what way do we today hold the "keys to the kingdom"?

5. Discuss the cost of discipleship, the alternative, and the rewards.
6. Discuss what it means to "take up the cross."

Help for teachers

Lesson emphasis: Affirmation that Jesus is the Christ, that His church will triumph, and the eternal wisdom of giving up self to follow Him.

Key verses: 16, 24, and 25

FEBRUARY 21, 2010

The Disciples Witness Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-13

Here we have recorded one of the more stellar events in the life of Jesus—His transfiguration and pre-passion conversation with Moses and Elijah. His inner circle of disciples, Peter, James, and John, were also privileged participants in this glorification experience. As we can well imagine, this made an indelible impression on their lives. (Note Peter's reference to this in 2 Peter 1:16-18.) And while Jesus certainly had a purpose for these disciples to witness this event (see verse 5), there was obviously a much deeper purpose for the occurrence. Ferret this out in your study. This event also ties in closely with Peter's confession in last Sunday's lesson from Chapter 16. Don't miss the connection.

Luke tells us (9:28-36) that the setting for this event was that Jesus went to the mountain to pray. During that quiet period alone with His disciples, He experienced the glorious change in His appearance that signified and verified both His oneness with God and approval by Him. The bright cloud that overshadowed them (v. 5) signified the presence of God among them, the Shekinah glory, the visible manifestation of God's presence.

Luke also tells us (9:31) the purpose of the presence of Moses and Elijah. They "talked with Jesus about how he would

soon fulfill God's purpose by dying in Jerusalem" (TEV). As representatives of the Law and the Prophets, they were affirming Jesus in His role as the One who would fulfill the promises of God to provide a Redeemer for mankind (see Luke 24:44-48). Verification was also given by the Father for the benefit of the disciples when He stated, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased: hear ye him."

Understandably the disciples were frightened by this display of God's presence and power. However, Peter, never at a loss for words, suggested building booths for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus in an attempt to maintain this mountaintop experience. But there was still work to be done in the valley so Jesus led them down the mountain, back to the reality of everyday experiences (see verse 14ff).

That this experience was only one facet in God's overall plan and was to provide substance for the understanding of future events is evidenced by Jesus' command for the disciples to keep quiet about it "until the Son of man be risen from the dead." We note from Mark's account (9:10) that the impact of Jesus' statement regarding His suffering, death, and resurrection (Matthew 16:21) had not yet registered in their conscious mind (see Luke 24:6-8).

The disciples did ask about the prophesied coming of Elijah, whom they had just seen on the mountain, and what Malachi's prophecy meant in relation to the consummation of the age which they likely equated with Jesus' statement about His resurrection. Jesus then explained that "Elijah" had come in the person of John the Baptist and that what the people had done to John they would also do to Him, recognizing neither John's role nor His own (see Luke 1:13-17 and Matthew 11:10-14).

John paved the way by preparing people's hearts for Jesus' message. The three disciples had just witnessed affirmation of Jesus as the chosen One to

carry out God's design for redemption. Events were moving forward, but they still had much to learn about God's plan and purposes.

For thought and discussion

1. What was the purpose(s) of the transfiguration? Think it through carefully and discuss with your class.
2. Explain how the visible presence of Moses and Elijah helps to verify certain promises God has given us in His Word. And, by the way, how did the disciples recognize these men as Moses and Elijah?
3. What is the purpose of mountaintop experiences, and how do we sustain them? Discuss.
4. Why did Jesus not want the disciples to tell what they had witnessed on the mountain?
5. Reflect how each of us has roles to play in God's plan that we may not even at times realize. How should this realization motivate our lives?

Help for teachers

Lesson emphasis: The carefully wrought plan of God to provide redemption for fallen man and the varied events and individuals He used to move His plan forward.

Key verse: 5b

FEBRUARY 28, 2010

Mary Anoints Jesus

Matthew 26:6-13

For today's lesson we fastforward to the middle of the passion week. Jesus had continued to teach His disciples and minister to the crowds. He had quieted a dispute among the disciples and entered Jerusalem in triumph on Palm Sunday, being hailed by the crowds. But tension was building between Him and the chief priests, the scribes, and Pharisees. He was becoming bolder in His confronta-

tions with them. Much of His teaching in these last days of His public ministry dealt with endtimes and the need for continual preparation of heart in readiness for that event.

During this last week in Jerusalem, Jesus was spending the nights in Bethany (see 21:17), likely in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. In today's lesson text we find Jesus and the disciples in the home of Simon, undoubtedly one He had previously healed of leprosy, enjoying hospitality in a friendly atmosphere, away from the crowds and the tension of the days at the temple. (The parallel account in John 12 would indicate: 1) that perhaps Simon was of the same household as Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and 2) that it was Mary who anointed Jesus with the costly perfume).

While reclining at the meal, a woman (Mary) approached Jesus and broke open an expensive vial of very fragrant perfume, with which she anointed His head. John tells us that the odor filled the house. This act immediately raised indignation from the disciples. They called it a waste, a misappropriated gesture. They saw the value of the ointment, spilled heedlessly according to their perception, as somehow robbing the poor of their just rights. Commentators tell us that the value of the perfume was equal to a year's wages for a working man—a costly gift, indeed.

But Mary gave no thought to the value of the gift; her focus was on the value of the One whom she anointed. It was given in gratefulness for what He had done for her. To her no gift was too great nor too costly for Messiah, her King, her Saviour. It was a gift of gratitude.

The disciples were keenly aware of the Jews' obligation to the poor. Support for the needy was part of the Mosaic Law and an obligation upon everyone with means. The disciples could not see past this obligation when observing what they considered an extravagant waste of the

expensive ointment.

But Jesus came to the defense of the woman. He understood her purpose. He told the disciples that they will have ample opportunity to minister to the poor, but His time with them was short, very short as they would soon discover. Jesus called the woman's act a good work in preparation for His burial. Again, that statement was likely lost on the disciples. They were not yet fully comprehending of the events shortly to unfold before them.

In recognition of the woman's selfless act, Jesus stated that it would never be forgotten, but spoken of as a memorial to her throughout the world in conjunction with the preaching of the gospel. Mary, devout, humble, was not seeking recognition for her deed, but it was given her for her selfless act of love for her Lord. Her example challenges us to this day.

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to read the parallel accounts of this event in Mark 14 and John 12 for additional insights.
2. Ponder the response of the disciples. What was missing in their evaluation of the situation?
3. What about our obligation to the poor? Do we take it seriously enough? Do we sometimes argue against helping the poor out of wrong attitudes? Ponder. Discuss.
4. Mary seized her opportunity to minister to Jesus in an expedient manner. Do we at times lose opportunities for fear of the cost to us?
5. In these four lessons we have studied individuals whose lives were impacted through their contact with Jesus. How has your life been changed by your contact with Him? Share your testimony with your class.

Help for teachers

Lesson emphasis: Seize the moment to do a worthy deed on behalf of our Saviour, disregarding the personal cost.

Key verse: 13 ■

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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

Director Quits After Watching Abortion

The former director of a Planned Parenthood clinic in southeast Texas says she had a “change of heart” after watching an abortion last month—and she quit her job and joined a pro-life group in praying outside the facility.

“Abby Johnson, 29, used to escort women from their cars to the clinic in the eight years she volunteered and worked for Planned Parenthood in Bryan, Texas. But she says she knew it was time to leave after she watched a fetus ‘crumple’ as it was vacuumed out of a patient’s uterus in September.

“‘When I was working at Planned Parenthood I was extremely pro-choice,’ Johnson told *FoxNews.com*. But after seeing the internal workings of the procedure for the first time on an ultrasound monitor, ‘I would say there was a definite conversion in my heart . . .’

I think it is important to note that her change of heart came after a pro-life group spent time praying outside the facility.

—Includes excerpt from “Planned Parenthood Director Quits After Watching Abortion on Ultrasound” on *FoxNews* (<http://j.mp/8NykAs>)

* * * * *

Why Africa Welcomes the “New Colonialism”

“As the Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, meets African leaders at the

Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in Sharm el-Sheikh today he will look back with some satisfaction on what has happened since the great meeting in Beijing three years ago when 48 out of Africa’s 53 rulers walked up the red carpet of the Great Hall of the People to shake hands with him and President Hu Jintao. Since that symbolic moment of friendship—or obeisance—trade with Africa has doubled from \$50 billion to more than \$100 billion, exceeding China’s own predictions. China may overtake the EU as Africa’s biggest trading partner before long.

“China is already the most powerful outside player in Africa. It assiduously courted Africa’s 53 leaders for their votes as part of its policy to thwart Taiwan’s quest to join the UN. Only four countries have not succumbed to Beijing’s lure and now it feels politically strong enough to challenge the West in Africa. The tipping point was July 12, 2008, the day that China vetoed a British and American resolution at the UN that would have imposed a ban on arms sales on Zimbabwe and a travel ban on its rulers. When Jack Straw was Foreign Secretary he said in a casual reference to China in Africa: ‘Welcome to the new colonialism.’ The Chinese were so angry they cut all contact with the UK on African issues for a year. China is ready to demonstrate its new power there.

“Economically China’s thirst for raw

materials and oil has been good news for the continent, driving up its average annual growth rate to 5.4 percent in the decade before the crash. For the first time millions of Africans can afford watches, new shirts, radios, even mobile phones, thanks to cheap Chinese goods—though clothes exports from China devastated South Africa’s textile industry. And to obtain sweet deals on raw materials, China wooed African rulers with grand infrastructure projects and promises of aid.

[...] “African leaders do not necessarily love China, but its ambassadors do not lecture them about elections, corruption, transparency and human rights. They welcome its non-interfering, government-to-government approach. China’s presence allows these leaders to play off East and West and push against the demands of Western donors, the IMF and the World Bank.

“When Westerners complain about China’s behavior the Chinese point to the state of Africa and ask why it is still so poor after centuries of trade and Western influence, including some 60 years of colonialism.”

—Excerpt from “Why Africa welcomes the ‘new colonialism’” by Richard Dowden in *The Times of London* (<http://j.mp/8f5Kjg>)

* * * * *

Nepal: Church Grows to One Million Believers

“The number of Christians in Nepal is growing exponentially. This is reported by American researcher Dr. Cindy Perry, who recently finished a study on the Nepali church. Many new churches have not just been planted in Nepal, but also in nations where Nepali workers have migrated to. ‘This is a special development,’ Perry says. ‘When a Nepali comes to Christ, he apparently also becomes an evangelist straightaway.’

“Until 1951 Nepal was closed to the outside world. Nepali Christians were few and mainly lived in north India on the border with Nepal. For years,

together with British missionaries, they prayed for open doors into the nation. When in 1951 the country opened up, the missionaries started a hospital in Pokhara, called ‘Shining Hospital,’ and the Nepali Christian David Mukhia founded the first church. Out of these firstfruits missions organizations International Nepal Fellowship and United Mission of Nepal (UMN) developed. They supported church planting and did medical work among tuberculosis and leprosy patients.

“Until 1990 in the Kingdom of Nepal it was officially prohibited to have another religion than Hinduism. It was hard for Christians to fellowship and many were imprisoned. In 1990 a revolution broke out, followed by a new constitution that granted freedom of religion. In 50 years time the number of baptized Christians has grown from 26 in 1960 to one million today.

—Reprinted with permission from *Joel News International* 709, www.joelnews.org

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Cop Killer Killed by Cop

Maurice Clemmons, who had just posted bail on charges of raping a child and who had years earlier been granted clemency by former Arkansas Governor and 2008 Republican Presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee, walked into a coffee shop and opened fire, killing four officers catching up on paperwork. The fourth officer he shot managed to get off some return fire, injuring Clemmons.

Clemmons managed to elude a massive manhunt for two days because friends, family, and partners in crime sheltered him; six-seven of them are being arrested for aiding a fugitive.

A lone officer investigating a stolen car that he found running with the hood up, was confronted by Clemmons. When Clemmons refused an order to freeze and show his hands and started reaching for a gun taken from one of the dead officers, the officer opened fire, killing Clemmons.

—Source: *Associated Press*

* * * * *

Tunisia and Morocco: Muslim Converts Testify

“Two years ago, Arab Vision and a partner organization produced the first episodes of a Tunisian Christian TV program. This was the first time Tunisian Christians were bold enough to appear on TV to talk about their faith in Christ. Since then, many episodes have been broadcast daily into Tunisian homes, thanks to the popularity and reach of satellite TV. There is confirmation that many Tunisian viewers are turning to Christ, as they watch these TV programs. Similarly, in Morocco, Arab Vision has been gathering the personal testimonies of Moroccan people who have decided to follow Christ. The Moroccan Testimony TV Series is one of the biggest projects for Arab Vision’s North Africa work this year.

—Reprinted with permission from *Joel News International 700*, www.joelnews.org.

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“Climategate” Reveals Massive Global Warming Fraud

Hackers broke into the e-mail servers of the University of East Anglia’s Climatic Research Unit and published online a series of e-mails they discovered, dating back to 1996. The UEA’s CRU is the foremost research center that has “reconstructed” historical temperature data. Their data is the most widely used to prove that the earth is warming; it is the temperature data set used by the oft-cited Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The e-mails reveal CRU researchers discussing “tricks” to “hide the decline” in temperatures and convert that decline into an increase. They used various mathematical formulae to “normalize” temperature data gathered from diverse sources. When

CRU received a Freedom of Information (FOIA) Request for their raw, underlying data from which they derived their published “normalized” data, an e-mail was sent instructing them to delete the underlying data (a criminal act) and CRU responded publicly that the data had been “lost.” However, Australian and New Zealand researchers have access to the original data (for AU and NZ) from other sources and have found that all that CRU’s “normalization” of temperatures accomplished was to convert a flat temperature graph into one showing rising temperatures. The *UK Daily Telegraph* writes that the e-mails give the picture of “the CRU scientists hopelessly at sea with the complex computer programs they had devised to contort their data in the approved direction, more than once expressing their own desperation at how difficult it was to get the desired results.”

The *UK Daily Telegraph* goes on to write, “The third shocking revelation of these documents is the ruthless way in which these academics have been determined to silence any expert questioning of the findings they have arrived at by such dubious methods—not just by refusing to disclose their basic data but by discrediting and freezing out any scientific journal which dares to publish their critics’ work. It seems they are prepared to stop at nothing to stifle scientific debate in this way, not least by ensuring that no dissenting research should find its way into the pages of IPCC reports.”

Seeing this maze of deception finally come to light makes me wonder how much of the same kind of thing is happening in the scientific world of evolution.

—Sources: *UK Daily Telegraph*, *Wikipedia*, *BBC*, *The Times of London*

Feedback: hansmast@hansmast.com

Shepherding “Pornified” Men: Leading Strugglers Out of the Wasteland

by Dan Wilson

So many men in the Church are spiritually emasculated by their sexual sins—in a spiritual wasteland—pretending everything is fine at church and home.

But in reality, they are enslaved to the idols of some form of sexual sin, like pornography, hammered by guilt and shame, and they can’t escape the tyranny of living for themselves and self-gratification. What does it take to lead these men to repentance and restoration?

WHAT DOES NOT WORK?

Telling a “pornified” man in a “one-and-done” counseling session, “Just say no!” just does not work. Paul lamented in Romans 7 how he did what he did not want to do. Like him, we are all conflicted in our hearts—that’s the hopelessness of self-salvation for a sinner. There is no pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, especially with secret sexual sin. Sending a struggler off to the resources of his own willpower with simplistic, legalistic answers is futile.

Just doing nothing won’t work either. The ostrich can live in denial, but, with his head in the sand, he leaves an easy target sticking up. Likewise, a pastor who never addresses his men personally and these sexual issues biblically won’t work toward making his church a place where men can honestly and effectively struggle with sexual sin. This stuff won’t simply go away.

Shooting the wounded doesn’t work either. Shunning or immediately exercising church discipline on the man who is caught or confesses will only drive other struggling men further underground. Sometimes repentance takes a minute, but immediate

shunning, whether intentional or because you find his sexual sin repulsive, cuts him off from the very relational means of grace that Christ intended—ministry from the Body of Christ. Sexual immorality is a relational sin, and it takes Christlike relationships to make progress in repentance. Church discipline is a process that starts small but strong before more severe mercies. It is not intended to be a nuclear option for driving off unwanted men.

Remember from politics, “Don’t ask, don’t tell”? We have a “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture of false intimacy in the Church. Yet, it gets worse: “Don’t ask, don’t tell, don’t know, can’t even care.” Galatians 6:1 commands us to “*restore such an one in the spirit of meekness*” and verse 2 says “*bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*”

When we do not know our sheep, we cannot engage them where specific sins are crouching to destroy them and their family members. If we allow our men to subsist on trifling relationships and shallow talk merely about sports or the news without really knowing one another’s stories and temptations, we are perpetuating false brotherhood by empty eldership, despite our formal doctrinal correctness and otherwise orthodox preaching. The false intimacy of empty brotherhood can do nothing to combat the trap of false intimacy of sexual sin.

Studies show that 80% of men in the Church do not have one best friend. This culture of male isolation is a form of worldliness. It is sin not to have and cultivate godly friends. Our pastoral leadership must

be about leading men out of this relational desert where secrecy is the norm. Secrecy never succeeds in combating sexual sin. Sexual sin thrives in relational secrecy.

ROOT PROBLEMS OF THE WORSHIP DISORDER OF SEXUAL IDOLATRY

1. Ignorance or unbelief. It is hard to say which is a deeper root problem. Men languish in ignorance of who they are in Christ and who they are to be as men. Without vision for manhood—including how to steward our sexuality—men perish. We think that many “know better” so that’s where unbelief in what we supposedly know is right and good comes into play with ignorance.

2. Pride. American culture in general is so entitlement-centered that many churches try appealing to men on the basis of self-enhancement—“It’s all about you and your comfort.” When that happens, men are having their pride reenforced by the entertainment-oriented church on the one hand and sexual-entitlement oriented porn and media on the other. No wonder many men act like consumers of value-added services at church and like sexual consumers at many other times. In a marketing competition, such a vision for church will fail to grab men’s hearts like pornography and a “playboy lifestyle” can.

3. Pain. As I mentioned in the last article, men are in various stages of pain, and sexual sin enables them to mediate their pains and losses in isolation, autonomy, and passivity—that is without real manly adventure and challenge. Proverbs says, “*iron sharpens iron*” but iron left alone gets dull and rusty. Isolated men—friendless men—often sooth every pain (even that pesky conscience) with the cotton candy of easy sex.

After the explosion of being discovered, “pornified” men frequently want instant recovery like they wanted instant gratification. There’s a theme here: Get sex easy, get rich quick, and get a quick recovery too. They want to “get back to a normal life.” We should not be shooting for normal or

average. The Christian man and ministers’ life is a life at war, racing and crashing toward the coming of the Kingdom when normal will be forgotten either in Heaven or Hell.

WHAT DOES WORK?

C. S. Lewis once wrote to the effect that “we are not too hard to satisfy. We are too easily satisfied.” Our culture, and perhaps even our fathers, taught us to try to satisfy our hearts with easy sex, which is bad sex—not good sex as God intended. We’ve been taught, trained, and disciplined to be satisfied with shallow relationships—whether that is with two-dimensional women in pictures, computer screens, or sleazy “relationships.” And as Americans, a rugged individualism has taught us to be friendless, isolated, and autonomous. There is much to “*put off*” as Paul wrote in Colossians 3:9.

Yet we must “*put on*” as well. What must we put on? Accountability? To be honest, I do not think that “accountability” is the biblical concept and category. Haven’t you seen accountability measures fail?

The biblical term and concept here is not “accountability” but brotherhood. Accountability or accountability partner, as used in evangelical circles since the 1980s, is a very modern term that can tend toward a very sterile sense. *Brother* is a family term and reality that draws up all the best of “accountability partner” and much more. The Book of Hebrews refers to Jesus, the Son of God, as our great Brother (Hebrews 2:11 – “*He is not ashamed to call them brethren*”), and as such a Brother, He counters in His work on the cross the murderous heart of Cain, the son of Adam, who said, “*Am I my brother’s keeper?*”

Brothers, we must **do** brotherhood. This is a practical theology where we apply and live out the doctrine of the Church, the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). In my own growth in Christ and struggle against sexual temptation and sin, I have found this to be true: it takes me being a good brother to be a good son. In other words, it takes me intentionally cultivating brutally honest

relationships with godly brothers in Christ for me to be a good son of The Father. Otherwise my love grows cold for Him and hot for something or someone He created, which is idolatry. Iron does sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17) and I have found the “wounds of a friend” (Proverbs 27:6) to be precious in my own spiritual health as a man.

Here’s some of my logic, for what it’s worth: 1) Since sexual sin is the biggest presenting problem in the lives of a majority of Christian men in America, and 2) since entrenched patterns of isolation, autonomy, and secrecy only compound sinful patterns of sexual compromise men picked up from their fathers or peers when boys, then 3) there can hardly be more important and strategic kingdom work for pastors and shepherds than enabling men to bond in true, honest, and Scripture-guided brotherhood.

ARE YOU LEADING?

If the theological logic above is true, are you leading men to do Christian brother-

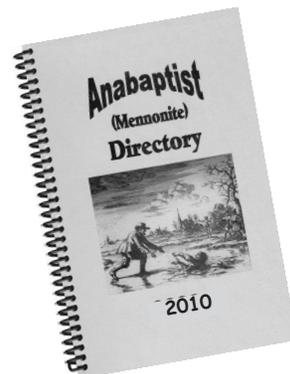
hood—a band of brothers—fighting the good fight of the faith together? Many pastors are isolated and virtually friendless. It is hard to teach and model what we do not practice. Maybe some of us shepherds have need of repentance here in slaying our fears and rationalizations in actually being and cultivating friendships and brotherhood.

Certainly we should teach and preach on how God gives the best sex and sexuality to dispel the lies of the playboy and post-modern sexuality. And we certainly ought to pointedly and practically teach and preach how God enables sexual repentance and grants relational restoration.

Many shepherds need to educate themselves, their staff, and leadership teams with reading and training in the area of sexual brokenness ministry. This can practically fire a church up to form a sexual brokenness ministry plan and start mentoring and/or small groups aimed at restoring the sexually struggling men in the Church. ■

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Sermon of the Month



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

A Life Sentence

by V. Raymond Edman

When God places the final period at the end of our life, we will find that the commas, colons, and parentheses make sense.

The expression "life sentence" may sound ominous and oppressive with all its implications: judge and jury, sentence and incarceration, iron bars and striped suits, prison diet and piles of great boulders to be reduced to gravel.

But that is not our thought at all in considering the sentence of life expressed graphically by the Holy Spirit in this testimony of the Apostle Paul: "*To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*" (Phil. 1:21).

That is a life sentence of liberty rather than one of languishing in some penitentiary. It is a sentence of life accompanied by a heart that is glad and free.

There are marked analogies between the structure of a sentence and life itself. A sentence has been defined as "a combination of words which is complete in expressing a thought and in writing usually marked at the close by a period; a sense unit comprising a subject and predicate, especially one with both subject and finite verb expressed."

Every life, and especially that of a Christian, should be like a completed sentence in which every part of speech and every punctuation mark is meaningful.

The Lord Jesus Christ is to be the Subject of life's sentence. Real life begins with Him, and thus He is to have preeminence in all things. That is the intent of that other great testimony of Paul's:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

To have self as the subject of one's life sentence is to be self-centered and self-sufficient, a person with narrow horizons, shallow objectives, and unrealized achievements. Such a person is unsatisfied and unsatisfactory to himself as well as to the Lord, and his life becomes empty and wasted.

"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it" (Mark 8:35) is true. The extent to which we make our Lord the Subject of our life and are willing to lose it for His sake is the true measure of our life's breadth, depth, usefulness, and meaning.

Dr. A. B. Simpson expressed it:

Once for self I labored,
Now Himself alone.

The life in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the Subject is a life marked also by His presence. There is an experiential awareness of the Saviour as a living, bright

reality. It is a life marked by His peace that passes understanding, by His patience under all the circumstances, and by the power of His indwelling life.

Christ becomes all in all to that heart, and the tongue has difficulty in expressing all that the Saviour means to the trusting soul.

In his day (the fourteenth century), John Tauler sought to express something of what the Lord means to the one in whose life He is the altogether lovely One:

As the bridegroom to his chosen,
As the king unto his realm,
As the keep unto the castle,
As the pilot to the helm,
So, Lord, art Thou to me.

As the ruby in the setting,
As the honey in the comb,
As the light within the lantern,
As the father in the home,
So, Lord, art Thou to me.

As the sunshine to the heavens,
As the image to the glass,
As the fruit unto the fig tree,
As the dew unto the grass,
So, Lord, art Thou to me.

In life's sentence, we are the predicate, being and acting as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. By allowing Him to live out His life within us, we find meaningful life. Again, in Dr. Simpson's hymn:

Once it was my working;
His it hence shall be.
Once I tried to use Him;
Now He uses me.

The life in Christ is not static, stagnant, self-centered or superficial. It is life in the fullest sense of the word, life that is a daily adventure with the Saviour and in His glad service.

The details of a sentence, especially the punctuation, have their significance in life. The Almighty puts punctuation marks into our lives to make them comprehensible and complete. At a given moment, we may not understand the import of the "punctuation," but when the sentence is complete, or even before,

we begin to see its meaning.

For example, a comma may indicate a slight change in the direction of a sentence. It may introduce a phrase or a clause that constitutes an addition to the meaning of the sentence or an enlargement and enrichment of its content.

In our shortsighted impetuosity, we often want to rush onward toward the conclusion of a given matter, but our faithful Lord may put a comma in life where we least expect it. Then He begins to add, after the comma, something new, deeper and richer than we ever could have expected.

We are not to be impatient with such apparent changes of thought or meaning; rather, we are to trust that His comma encompasses His compassion and concern for us. We are to be on our spiritual tiptoes to see what new delight and discipline He will bring to His trusting children in the phrases and clauses begun and ended with commas. His surprises, like His mercies, are new every morning.

Again, a semicolon indicates a more abrupt and basic change in the direction of a sentence. Quite possibly we may come suddenly to a point in life where its meaning has been left unfinished, at least for the time being. For us the light has gone out in the sky, the song turned into silence or even a sob. There may seem to be neither rhyme nor reason to life either in the present or in the future.

The Lord Himself is changing the direction of our life. He is not closing it with the semicolon, for that would mean it is incomplete. On the contrary, not desiring our life to be constrained within its present narrow horizons, He wants to make it broader and deeper. Therefore He puts a semicolon after yesterday's experience, which we would perhaps like to have continued indefinitely. He gives a new turn at the semicolon.

I look back at semicolons in my life that perplexed me at the time. I have enjoyed friends, surroundings, service for the Saviour, only to find that the Lord

brought such delights to an end in order that I should walk in paths hitherto unknown.

My wife and I were happy and busy on the mission field in Ecuador years ago, and we planned to spend all our days in God's glad service there. We rejoiced to see young people preparing themselves to be witnesses and to lead their countrymen to the Saviour. We could visualize no place more useful or happy. But then one day the Lord of the Harvest wrote a semicolon to conclude that Ecuadorian experience, and life moved onward elsewhere.

At a semicolon, there is always the temptation to believe that life has lost its meaning, that God is mistaken in His measures toward us, or that we have failed to heed His guidance.

But circumstances are no criteria of the center of God's will. Those early missionaries, Paul and Silas, were utterly persuaded of God's call to Macedonia because of the vision Paul had. The injustice of their imprisonment in Philippi, with its pain and pitiless darkness, constituted no evidence that they had been led astray by their own thought or desire.

So it is in our lives today. God's semicolons mean that He wants to change rather radically the course and content of our lives.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). At God's semicolons, we are not to sit down and sob inconsolably as though that were the end of the sentence; rather, we are to go forward into the clarifying clause that lies beyond. God will make His purpose plain. The semicolon is both an ending and a beginning. Look for God's "afterword."

Parentheses in a sentence make a change more abrupt and perhaps therefore more bewildering than semicolons. The whole forward movement of a sentence is suspended by parentheses, and something that seems to be totally irrel-

evant is inserted.

We may think that life could well do without such an interruption or delay. We do not need the difficulty or the darkness that we experience; it seems to be entirely without explanation or purpose. We try to understand the reason for the sickroom. We are unable to decipher today's delay and disappointment, to understand its tears and apparent tragedy.

Parentheses may seem inopportune or unimportant or even impertinent, but there they are. However, living in their shadow, in time we learn their meaning.

John Bunyan was bewildered by his long imprisonment in Bedford Jail, but from its shadow and silence came *The Pilgrim's Progress* to bless succeeding generations of Christians the world over.

It is best to allow the Author of our life's sentence to insert parentheses according to His good pleasure and to explain their place and purpose in His own time and His own way.

There are other analogies between the structure of a sentence and the succession of events in our lives. By all means, we are to allow our Lord to complete the sentence with a period or an exclamation point, and not with a question mark.

To a teacher of writing, an incomplete sentence is a serious flaw in a theme. A life sentence on our part that is incomplete because of our disobedience to the will of God will not escape the eye of Him who is the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Our life sentence may be simple or complex, it may have many modifications and necessarily many punctuation marks, it may seem to wander far afield without clarity of meaning until the very end, but it must not be incomplete. We are to continue on until we come to the punctuation that marks its conclusion and records the commendation, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Sword of the Lord*, October 2009.

*Raising Girls to Be Godly Women in a Confused and Conflicted Culture*¹

by Nina Fry
London, England

*Never before in our history have we been so eager
to tear up the blueprint of biology and redefine
our roles as men and women, mothers and fathers.*²

INTRODUCTION

I have watched with growing concern as girls have been molded, influenced, and, in many cases, damaged by a false worldview that has permeated western society at every level. As a teacher on playground duty in the 1990s I saw little seven- and eight-year-old girls forsaking their skipping ropes for the opportunity to sing and dance along to the latest Spice Girls song. They knew the lyrics by heart, and the dance routines were copied exactly as their pop idols had modeled them on the television. The fact that the girl-power lyrics were beyond their understanding and that the sexualized dance routines were performed in all innocence by these little children did not take away from the fact that they were being given a view of womanhood that would affect them deeply and influence their behavior and attitudes in untold ways as they grew up. Even secular commentators are now concerned about what is happening to girls and women in our culture. Maggie Hamilton writes,

Alongside the fragmentation of family and community due to relationship breakdowns, greater mobility, long working hours and time deprivation,

we have seen the rise in the power of the media and the new technologies. These forces are exposing girls to concepts way beyond their years. They make it easy for girls to lead lives that their parents know nothing about. What was once the domain of adults has become part of the lives of our children. The need to appear “out there” helps to explain why girls are pushing the sexual boundaries so young, why pornography has so much appeal to girls, and why there has been an alarming increase in sexually transmitted diseases amongst our teenagers.³

There is obviously more to the decline of womanhood than simply the imbibing of unhelpful lyrics in a pop song. There is an alternate worldview working against what the Bible teaches about womanhood.

A worldview is a way of interpreting the world. It seeks to explain events and set life in a context. Every worldview has its own narrative that can be broken down into three parts: (1) Creation—origins/how things began; (2) Fall—how things have gone wrong/obstacles to progress; (3) Redemption—how things can be put right/the way forward. A person’s worldview can be discovered in the answers he or she gives to four key questions:⁴

1. This essay is based on a message delivered at the Children Desiring God Conference, Minneapolis, MN, April 2009.

2. Anne Moir and David Jessel, *Brain Sex: The Real Difference Between Men and Women* (Mandarin, 1989), 149.

3. Maggie Hamilton, *What’s Happening to Our Girls?* (New York: Penguin/Viking, 2008), 2.

4. James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 115.

(1) Who am I? (2) Where am I? (3) What's wrong? (4) What is the solution? A worldview, therefore, sets forth a "truth"—articles of faith according to its own set of assumptions. Consumerism, secularism, feminism, and every other "ism" has a "gospel" of its own.

We will follow a creation, fall, redemption structure in exploring how to raise girls to be godly women in a confused and conflicted culture.

CREATION: GOD'S GOOD ORDER

Genesis 1 opens with the words of the Creator God who dispels darkness, emptiness, and chaos and brings light, fullness, and order. The eternal relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit spills over into the creation of the cosmos. The sheer power, drama, and exuberance of the event display the greatness of this God. In Genesis 2 He is called the Lord God—Yahweh Elohim—the covenant God. This Creator is not remote. Relationship is core to all that He is. The Trinity will be reflected in the world He has made. There is purpose and there is promise in Yahweh Elohim. And so He makes a man.

In Genesis 2:18 God says that it is not good for the man to be alone, but it is not until all the animals have been brought to Adam and named that woman is formed and brought to him. Adam is made to feel his need before the promise of a "helper" is fulfilled by God.

Eve, like Adam, was created by God to be an image bearer and together they shared the Creation Mandate and the Cultural Mandate—God's command to be fruitful and multiply and to rule and subdue the earth. God's benevolent rule and order were established in this Creation Mandate and in the words of God Himself, "It was very good." The picture, then, is of creation existing in perfect harmony with itself and its creator. Within this context, total transparency and trust characterized the relationship

between God and the first family and was reflected perfectly in the way Adam and Eve related with each other and the creatures they ruled. There was order in these relationships. We will return to that later, but for now we note the following:

Adam and Eve are given "dominion"—kingly rule over the earth. Their own relationship is that of equals. Their origins, gifts, characteristics, and callings, however, are not the same. There are important differences. This relationship is based on complementarity (different but equal) not egalitarianism (equal because of sameness). Just as in the Trinity, there is order but total equality—so it is with these perfect human beings in a perfect world. Sharon James writes, "Adam was incapable of fulfilling the creation mandate alone, and, even more profoundly, he was in need of a relationship with another human being. But although woman was one 'of the same kind' as himself and perfectly equal in dignity, she was gloriously different. They fitted together."⁵

FALL: CONFLICT AND CONFUSION

When Eve was deceived and ate the forbidden fruit, her role of "helper" was corrupted. She and Adam turned their back on the true Word of God and followed a lie. Instead of "being like God" when they ate the fruit, they became separated from God and divided from one another. God's created order had been deliberately and cunningly overturned by the Enemy in the form of a serpent. A member of the animal kingdom speaks a word (a lie) that is acted upon by the woman. The man then has to give account to God. The catastrophic consequences of sin and rebellion against God's commands radically altered the nature of all relationships, and the Creator's order was reversed. After judgment is passed, God restores His original order. He begins with Adam,

5. Sharon James, *God's Design for Women: Biblical Womanhood for Today* (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2002), 54.

then Eve, then the serpent. The effects of sin on the man and the woman will be distinctive. Man has been formed from the earth, and it is from the earth that he will feel the full effects of the curse. The woman had been formed from the man. It is in the area of relationships, especially with men, that she will most feel the effects of the curse. In every age and every culture we find evidence of the tensions this created. From now on, men and women will not live in perfect harmony in a perfect world and in perfect relationship with their God. Until the end of time there will be suffering, pain, and death—physically, spiritually, and relationally.

This conflict introduced at the Fall must frame our thinking about the feminist movement in our own day. We need to understand, moreover, the dominant worldview in our culture so that we can equip our girls to stand for Christ in this generation, discerning truth from falsehood and growing into godly women.

The Industrial Revolution

The upheaval of the Industrial Revolution had untold consequences for the developed world. Before that time, family and community life had continued in much the same way for millennia. According to Nancy Pearcey, “The vast majority of people lived on farms or in peasant villages. Productive work was done not by lone individuals but by families and households. . . . [T]he boundary between home and world was highly permeable. . . . It meant that husband and wife worked side by side in the same economic enterprise.”⁶ “With production centered on the family hearth husbands and fathers were ‘a visible presence, year after year, day after day’ as they trained their children to work alongside them. Being a father was not a separate activity to come home to after a day at work; rather, it was an integral part of a man’s

daily routine.”⁷

Within a generation the advent of the industrial age and mass production shifted the economic base, from the home to the factory and the office. Mass migration from the countryside to the towns and cities followed with unforeseen consequences, particularly within the family. As men left their homes to work in the new industries the following things happened:

- Wage earning and domestic duties became separated. A public/private divide began to operate in society.
- Men spent far less time with their families, and the home became the woman’s domain.
- Skills and attitudes to work that had been handed down from father to son for generations were lost as new and specialized practices were demanded in the new workforce.
- Women were denied the opportunity to develop their skills and make their contribution to the productivity of the extended family. Previously, they had worked alongside their husbands and families in farming or trade, now they gradually moved from being producers to being consumers.
- Social interaction became more limited for women who were confined to home. They were isolated with their children. As opportunities to participate in the wider world decreased for women, so their responsibilities within the family increased—often without the support of extended family around them.
- The workplace became competitive—the place where a man proved his worth and individual advancement was the reward. The ground had shifted. In the colonial period husbands and fathers viewed themselves as the head of the household in order to provide for and protect the whole family and community. It was, at its best, a self-sacrificing model of leadership, but

6. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 327.

7. *Ibid.*, 20.

now self-interest and personal ambition were promoted in the workplace so that the wheels of industry would turn for profit. Individualism overtook communal manhood.

- The requirement for men to take the moral lead was eroding. Increased pressure came upon women to maintain moral values in the home. They now had the primary role of raising the children in the virtues that were necessary for civilized society—communal responsibility, religion, and self-sacrifice, as well as creating a “haven” for the husband—to balance the temptations of the world outside. Religion and social reform came to be seen as predominantly feminine interests. Women were expected to take the lead in maintaining moral standards in the family and in society whilst men were to be the rugged individualists who proved their worth through success in the workplace and whose input to family life was secondary to that of his wife.

The increased pressures that industrialization brought to bear on social structures in general and the family unit in particular were enormous. Some kind of reaction was inevitable.

Liberal feminism began, as a movement, in the late eighteenth century and eventually saw the granting of the vote, property rights, access to education, and to the professions at the beginning of the twentieth century. The radical feminism that replaced it and reached its zenith in the 1960s was very different, as we shall see.

The Righting of Wrongs

There is no doubt that many women have suffered, and continue to suffer, at the hands of ungodly male leadership. It is not difficult to find examples of injustice against women, from the wife and mother who feels isolated and taken for granted on the one hand, to the victim of domestic abuse, on the other. The

oppression of women by men is well documented: [T]hroughout history men have tyrannized women, whether by wife-beating, polygamy, rape, or forced prostitution. There are records through the ages of women being raped by conquering armies, but the worst instances have probably taken place this [twentieth] century.”⁸

Equality and justice are important concepts to us, as human beings. The problem lies in the definitions of those two concepts and the remedies that were offered in order to restore them. The Women’s Movement’s focus on legitimate grievances became the tool for an attack on the traditional roles of men and women, and then for women to attempt to displace men altogether.

According to Sharon James,

A small number of thinkers aimed, in effect, to liberate women from their womanhood. The very things that were of central importance for so many (marriage, motherhood, homemaking) were derided as being fit only for those who were mentally subnormal or emotionally weak. These ideas could not have insulted women more. . . . [T]he adoption of these ideas led to misery and frustration. Far from being liberated by modern feminism, women have been betrayed.⁹

The Corruption of Good Intentions

The sincere feminist then was concerned to see an end to injustice and oppression in the world. Their cause was about the welfare of women and children, and social justice. This was to be achieved through protest, petition, and persuasion, leading to a change in public policy.

But then “equality” became the watchword. The politics that surround this idea and the egalitarian belief system that developed from it are clearly identified in much of the revolutionary rhetoric that found its way into the women’s movement. Let’s take a closer look at its appeal.

8. James, *God’s Design for Women*, 67.

9. *Ibid.*, 20.

What meaning does the word *equality* convey to us?

Equality	Inequality
Fairness	Unfairness
Inclusiveness	Exclusiveness
Sameness	Difference
Balance	Imbalance
Justice	Injustice

It has long been a strategy in debate to disprove or discredit your opponent's argument by taking it to extremes or aligning it with the unacceptable. We would want to align ourselves with the list on the left. These are good ideals. (In fact, the only category we might argue with is "sameness," and that is the nub of the issue. The misguided idea that equality must mean "sameness," has now grown deep roots in popular thinking. To be equal but *different* is seen as contradictory. For the modern feminist, women have to be the same as men, socially, economically, and politically, in order to be equal with them.)

"Ours is the age of modernism, with a great emphasis on egalitarianism and on sexuality," writes Paul Vitz.

These two elements have combined to create the modern emphasis on androgyny. Androgyny or unisex is the notion that sexuality, male and female, is not fundamental to our nature, that all forms of sexuality are equivalent and basically arbitrary. From an androgynous perspective, male and female are not part of the nature of reality—much less of the nature of who each person is.¹⁰

Social Upheaval and Power Games

Early Feminists concluded that the only way for women to gain recognition and engage in the public sphere again was to leave the private sphere of the home—which to them had become oppressive—and join the men in the workplace. This meant that the training

and discipline of the next generation was passed from mothers to "professionals"—child-care workers and teachers. The public sphere was increasingly secular in its philosophy and practice. Within two generations parental responsibility for the spiritual and moral development of their children passed from fathers to mothers to "experts." The family link was severed. Girls would now become influenced by a wide range of people who have little or no contact with their family. The media and education would influence girls in ways that were totally new.

Since the publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (1949 in French, 1953 in English) the history of the female sex has been rewritten. As Sharon James has observed, "Women are the Second Sex, argued Beauvoir, because they are always defined in relation to men, and exist for their good. This injustice is perpetuated in the institution of marriage. For women, marriage is no better than slavery. de Beauvoir was equally hostile to motherhood."¹¹

This publication along with *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963), *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer, and others, reached popular consciousness in the 1960s. Women were told that they must be "liberated" from the shackles of patriarchal rule, male expectations, and the burden of domesticity. It was argued that men had held power for quite long enough. Women should claim the privileges that men had always enjoyed. The power of men was used abusively. The world would be a better place if women took the lead. The "culture of dependency" had to be broken. The dawning of the twentieth century saw a trickle of female assertiveness become a flood during the 1960s and result in a tsunami of legislation in the 1980s and 1990s.¹² The process is still ongoing. It was not long

10. Paul Vitz, "The Father Almighty, Maker of Male and Female, (Support from Psychology for the Fatherhood of God)," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (Feb 1997).

11. James, *God's Design for Women*, 20.

12. See *Past and Present: Key Dates in Equality*, UK Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006.

before equality *with* men turned into independence *from* men. The first casualty of this approach, of course, was the institution of marriage. It is here that the objectives of some in the feminist movement, and followers of Marxist ideas found a unity of purpose.

The Consequences for Marriage, Family, and Society

The attack on marriage was astonishingly successful. The popularizing of the ideas that married women were an oppressed minority, that domesticity was degrading, that motherhood was a burden, and that all men were “users” took root and grew. Women were persuaded that the way out of this depressing life was to find their worth in the same place as men—the workplace. This would give them, not only real status and a stimulating social life but also provide financial independence from men. As James Tooley says,

The feminists on Closing the Gender Gap—representative of a broad swath of opinion in feminist education circles and influential on government policy—are pleased that girls, and working-class girls in particular, are leaving the domestic sphere of home and hearth and becoming increasingly independent of men through work. The education feminists think that this is the only way girls can gain status. It is only in the world of men—work, the public sphere—that women can find fulfillment and happiness, the same as it is for boys and men.¹³

We are all well aware of the social consequences when women across society began to exercise their right to self fulfillment: dramatic rises in the divorce rate, family break-up, cohabitation, illegitimacy, absent fathers, the acceptance of casual sex as a leisure activity, the epidemic of STDs, juvenile crime rates, vio-

lence, insecurity, and mental illness including self-harm and depression in young girls, to name but a few.

Divide and Rule

In the decades since its inception, feminist ideology has, of course, developed and changed. Clashes of emphasis and personality have produced many “brands” of feminism. However, according to James Tooley, they largely fall within two groupings: Equality (rationalist) feminism and Liberal (celebratory) feminism. “Whether it be old feminism, new feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, post-modern feminism, post-structuralist feminism, gender feminism or lesbian feminism, to name but a few—one’s feminist ideas may be usefully categorized as falling into one of these two categories.”¹⁴

What relevance does all this have for us today? You may feel that this is rather a tired subject—that things have settled down after the extremes of the initial debate in the 60s and 70s and that it is time we moved on. Sharon James suggests that

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the movement known as feminism had fragmented. The dream of a united sisterhood had never come to pass; indeed the tabloids were able to revel in vicious infighting between supposed “sisters.” The so-called sameness feminism of the 1960s was soon taken over by the difference feminism of the 1980s (women are the superior sex!) and there was now a major backlash against feminist ideas in the 1990s. It is now said that we live in a post-feminist era.¹⁵

The reason we need to understand what has happened in the past is that it has shaped the way that girls and women think about themselves in the present. James goes on to say, “Popular

13. James Tooley, *The Miseducation of Women* (London: Continuum, 2002), 92.

14. *Ibid.*, 41.

15. James, *God’s Design for Women*, 17.

thinking is still conditioned by the discredited notion that men and women are basically the same. People are nervous of comments about men and women that might be construed as sexist. It is still said that any differences between the sexes are probably only the result of societal conditioning.”¹⁶

The belief that “societal conditioning” was the only basis for differences between the sexes meant that traditional views of the roles of men and women had to be changed. The education system was one obvious means of achieving such change.

The State Takes Over

The advocates of feminism were not content with winning over the intellectual elite and chattering classes; nothing less than the liberation of the ordinary woman in the street would fulfill their ambitions. The best place to accomplish this was in the schools. State schooling became saturated with feminist ideals and the gender neutral curriculum took shape. James Tooley observes,

It is the themes of the early Greer, Steinem and Friedan—that independence and career are what are most important to a girl, that marriage, children and family are just so much domestic drudgery—that match the curriculum and emphasis of schooling for girls today. . . . Just as Betty Friedan realized in *The Feminine Mystique*, it is mainly through their schooling that women and girls can escape the limitations of discrimination and reach their full potential.¹⁷

Referring to the American sex discrimination law, Title IX (1972), Tooley says,

The prejudices of the early Betty Friedan, of the early Gloria Steinem, they are all there, spelled out in legislative detail to ensure gender neutrality that emphasizes over and over again

that the only way to success and fulfillment for women is through achievement in the worlds of business, science, sports, and politics. The family does not get a look in here.¹⁸

Why Is This Important?

The feminist message has been absorbed into our western culture. Its assumptions are reflected in magazines, films, TV, books, music, and classrooms where gender-neutral curriculum has pervaded all subjects. It is impossible to avoid it. The subliminal nature of its assumptions makes it very difficult to resist. In arguing against equality feminism we are in danger of appearing to support oppression and injustice. Christian girls who want to resist the feminist worldview find themselves swamped and cannot keep their guard up all the time. Eventually they may struggle to think biblically about men and their leadership.

The ground, however, is shifting. Some feminist writers have reviewed their earlier rants against traditional female roles. Friedan, Greer, and others have retracted some of their earlier statements, especially about motherhood and homemaking, and lamented the loss of things they despised and undermined. Even Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* has been reread and reinterpreted:

Betty Friedan moved on from her ideas in the Second Stage, recognizing that women need families, indeed, could find the fulfillment of their need for power and security within the family. de Beauvoir was torn between denigrating domesticity—which seemed she had to do, perhaps for ulterior motives—and delighting in it. . . . Germaine Greer’s *The Whole Woman* seemed to fit neatly into this camp too. The alternative women’s voices raised wonder why we need, through education, to create women who are restless and questing,

16. Ibid.

17. Tooley, *The Miseducation of Women*, 54.

18. Ibid., 55.

and whether it might not be better to create a society in which women are happy and fulfilled.¹⁹

They now lean towards celebrating the differences between the sexes and the unique role that women can fulfill. But it is too late for regrets. Laws are not that easily repealed. Two generations of girls have marched to a different tune.

Independence from men has led to dependence on the state. The “freedom” to pursue a career has led to exhaustion and emptiness. There has been a rise in violence and drinking among young girls who are behaving like boys. Casual sex has encouraged men to use women and then leave them—with no guilt attached.

Some commentators are now saying that feminism has not only been bad for men and children but disastrous for women: “By celebrating their independence from men, and pooh-poohing men’s romanticization of gender roles as a throwback to something women have long abandoned, perhaps the feminist educators are themselves engaging in creating injustice for women, the injustice that follows when women are deprived of reliable men to depend upon.”²⁰

The ignoring of sexual differences has led to confusion and frustration—for both sexes. The trail of destruction left in the wake of the feminist juggernaut is endless. Anne Moir and David Jessel comment in *Brain Sex*, “Men are different from women. They are equal only in their common membership of the same species, humankind. To maintain that they are the

same is to build a society based on a biological and scientific lie.”²¹

In her book *Sex-Change Society* Melanie Phillips concludes,

Men need work, women need choice (i.e. whether to work outside the home or not), children need both their parents. Government policies should not promote a sex-change society. They should support the sensitive and complex networks of interdependence between men and women. Without such reinforcement, a serious hole will remain at the heart of any welfare reform, and of society itself.²²

The feminist worldview continues to hold sway, even as it crumbles under its own weight.

Conclusions

Ever since sin entered God’s creation there has been tension in the relationships between men and women. The twentieth-century feminist movement only amplified these tensions. Western culture became “feminized” with disastrous results for both sexes. It is impossible for girls to avoid totally the influence of feminist thinking. It is all pervasive in our culture.²³

So, what is our God-given identity as girls and women? What does true womanhood look like? How are we to teach the next generation of girls to live God-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated lives?

(To be continued)

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19. Tooley, *The Miseducation of Women*, 119.

20. *Ibid.*, 118.

21. Moir and Jessel, *Brain Sex*, 5.

22. Melanie Phillips, *The Sex-Change Society: Feminized Britain and Neutered Male* (London: The Social Market Foundation, 1999), 360.

23. John Piper (“A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [Crossway Wheaton, 1991], 26, 27) writes,

The tendency today is to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing the unique significance of our maleness or femaleness. But this deprecation of male and female personhood is a great loss. It is taking a tremendous toll on generations of young men and women who do not know what it means to be a man or woman. Confusion over the meaning of sexual personhood today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not free and happy harmony among gender-free persons relating on the basis of abstract competencies. The consequence rather is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of God-given identity.



Counseling From the Word

If Not Self-Esteem, Then What?

by Brad Hambrick

self-value	self-worth	self-abasement	self-acceptance
self-criticism	self-defeating	self-idolatry	self-mastery
self-policing	self-understanding	self-deprecating	self-worship
self-denigration	self-validating	self-doubt	self-absorbed
self-expression	self-help	self-revealing	self-centered

These are just a sampling of the current **213** self-hyphenated (I guess that could be added to the list) words in the English language.

Not only are these words abundant in number, but they saturate the way we think about life. They influence the way we think about the goal of life, the function of relationships, how to parent, what the church is about, why Jesus came, and a myriad of other things. This is why it is imperative we understand what the Bible actually tells us to do with *self*.

There are many places one could begin exploring the Bible on the subject of self: the implications of being made in the image of God, the fall and our sinful nature, the price Christ paid to redeem us, our identity as children of God, or the imputed righteousness of Christ to man. This article will approach the subject by examining the New Testament texts that contain Jesus' teaching on the Great Commandments.

The question we will strive to answer is, "Does low self-esteem cause our problems

in life or is low self-esteem an outcome of our problems?" In other words, should we try to solve our problems by raising our self-esteem, or would that effort only increase our problems and distract us from a more pertinent solution?

Self-Esteem: Goal or Method?

In order to answer this question well, we will have to define our terms. Often there is confusion on this subject because people use the same word to mean many different things. Before determining whether self-esteem is a goal (something to be pursued) or a method (a way of pursuing something), it is helpful to define several terms that are used synonymously with self-esteem. These initial definitions are not intended to be distinctively biblical or Christian, but an entry point of conversation with anyone interested in the subject of self-esteem.

Confidence: a positive demeanor based upon an expectation that circumstances will not be overwhelming or defeating.

Identity: a sense of who one is that is not

dependent upon circumstances or peer group.

Purpose: a direction or agenda to life that gives meaning to particular decisions and events.

Security: a disposition of stability in the midst of uncertainty.

Wisdom: the ability to make decisions according to preset, effective principles resulting in a productive, functional, and enjoyable life.

These five words are *goals* that can be pursued. They are matters of character and ability. Self-esteem, however, is a *method* of pursuing confidence, identity, purpose, security, and wisdom. What is self-esteem?

Self-Esteem: a belief system that proposes by loving myself and appraising my own self-worth to be high enough I will attain confidence, identity, purpose, security, and wisdom.

This article is posing the question, “Do people lack confidence, identity, purpose, security, and wisdom because they don’t love themselves enough, or do they lack these things because their focus upon self has distracted them from the true source of confidence, identity, purpose, security, and wisdom?” Now that the question has been clearly articulated, we can begin to approach the biblical texts with the right frame of reference.

What Is the Biblical Foundation?

Jesus directly addresses the issue of how we are to relate to our “self.” In Mark 12:28-31 (see also Matthew 22:37-40) He summarizes all of Scripture and the purpose of man in two statements:

1. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

2. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Interestingly, Jesus even numbers His points, “On these *two* commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” There are only two commands, not three. Not only does Jesus number His points, He also prioritizes them, “*First*, love God . . . *Second*, love others. . . .”

Much Christian teaching from this passage says that Jesus is building a pyramid of priorities; that Jesus is establishing an order of operation for healthy living. They, however, reverse the order of Jesus’ commands and add a third command: making love for self a prerequisite for loving others. The natural train of logic, although few go so far as to state it explicitly, is that we would need to love others before we could love God.

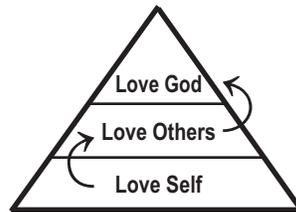


Figure 1: Loving Self as Foundational Love

This model is the natural overflow of the common secular teaching that we must love ourselves before we can love anyone else. For the sake of being appropriately critical, pause to consider how much biblical truth the secular media agrees with. Do they tend to agree with a pro-life position on abortion, a traditional view of marriage, prayer in school, teaching intelligent design as a legitimate alternative to evolution, or the public posting of the ten commandments? Most do not. It seems odd, then, that the majority of secular experts and media outlets would fervently promote self-esteem, if it is a truly biblical concept.

It is also worth noting that many secular counselors and researchers are beginning to denounce the self-esteem movement. The Harvard Mental Health Letter (February 2004) correlates self-esteem with a significant mental illness concluding, “The distinction between self-esteem and narcissism seems to disappear.” The larger article links the self-esteem movement with unhealthy self-obsession in our culture.

Other research is beginning to note that criminals and socially immature segments of the population score very high on self-esteem inventories. These people wholeheartedly believe that they are good, right, worthy, able, and deserve to get their way.

Erica Goode in the *New York Times* (October 1, 2002) cites research to indicate that, “D students think as highly of themselves as valedictorians, and serial rapists are no more likely to ooze with insecurities than doctors or bank managers.”

Dr. Michael Edelstein, a secular counselor of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (a protégé of Albert Ellis), sarcastically comments:

Self-esteem is both the sacred cow and the golden calf of our culture. Nothing is esteemed higher than self-esteem, and no self-esteem can be too high. Nathaniel Branden, a leading exponent of self-esteem, raises the question: “Is it possible to have too much self-esteem?” and gives the resounding answer: “No, it is not, no more than it is possible to have too much physical health.”

Jill Ellish reports on a 30-year longitudinal study conducted by Roy Baumeister (Florida State University), Jennifer Campbell (University of British Columbia), Joachim Krueger (Brown University), and Kathleen Vohs (University of Utah) which found that self-esteem was not the variable that correlated with life success or satisfaction. After a “thorough review of all the major studies on self-esteem,” Baumeister concludes, “Once schools started self-esteem programs, I think they developed a momentum on their own, partly because the exercises, e.g. going around the room and letting everybody say what is special about himself or herself, feel good to all concerned (Elish, web).” Self-esteem was neither proven to increase school performance nor to reduce the likelihood of children smoking, drinking, taking drugs, or engaging in premarital sex.

While there are many psychologists who would differ with the Harvard Newsletter, Erica Goode, Dr. Edelstein, and the thirty-year longitudinal study it is worth noting that the self-esteem theory is not an undisputed fact, even in secular circles. That being said, the more important question is: What does the Bible teach about *self*?

What did Jesus mean when He said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves? The weight of other biblical texts, church history,

and evangelical theology all indicate that Jesus meant, “You already love yourself. What you need to learn is to focus the same amount of attention, interest, and concern that you already give yourself on others.”

In Jesus’ most basic description of discipleship our Lord says, “If any man will come after me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added). Discipleship is to die to self, not love one’s self more. John Piper, in his definition of biblical counseling, reiterates this point: “Love is not possible where self-preoccupation holds sway in a person’s life. So self-forgetfulness is a part of true mental health. This is not possible to create directly, but only as one is absorbed in something worthy and great. The aim is to be absorbed in God and anything else for God’s sake.”

Jesus set the agenda for what is to be pursued in life when He heard His disciples arguing about who would be the greatest. “But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:43, 44). Jesus’ statement is not in agreement with the idea that we must love ourselves before we love anyone else.

Paul, in describing the false doctrines and evil practices that will emerge in the end times, clearly states that love of self will mark those dark days: “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be *lovers of their own selves*, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy” (2 Timothy 3:1, 2, emphasis added). It can be said, that by placing love of self first in the list, Paul is implicating that obsession with possessions, lack of gratitude, irreverence towards parents, and the other vices will emerge from advocating for a love of self as one’s first priority.

John Calvin comments on this passage, “Only let my readers observe that self-love, which is put first, may be regarded as the source from which flow all the vices that follow afterwards.” Modern Testament scholar Gordon Fee (1988) concurs in his commen-

tary on 2 Timothy, “[Paul’s list] begins appropriately with *lovers of themselves* since from such misdirected love all other vices flow” (pp. 269, 270).

Paul goes to great lengths to permeate the church with the idea that life is not about us, we are not worthy, and that our primary focus is to esteem Christ. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

The danger of self-esteem is that it tries to persuade us that we are good enough, capable, and worthy. We need the gospel precisely because we are not good enough, capable, or worthy. Salvation does not give us a righteousness of our own that we can esteem. Salvation gives us Christ’s righteousness that we might worship Him with reverent, grateful awe.

This moves us to the question, “If Jesus was not teaching self-esteem when He gave the Great Commandments, what was He teaching?” It can be affirmed that God wants us to have confidence, identity, purpose, security, and wisdom. It can even be affirmed that Jesus was teaching us how to attain these things in the Great Commandments, but let us look at the wisdom behind the order in which Jesus places the commandments.

First and foremost, Jesus prioritizes our relationship with God. Without the redeeming presence of Christ in our lives we are utterly incapable of genuine love. This does not mean that all lost people are savages and heathens, but that they are solely motivated by what they perceive to be in their best interest. Lost people may believe kindness and benevolence to be the best way to achieve what they want, but this is a different motive than biblical love.

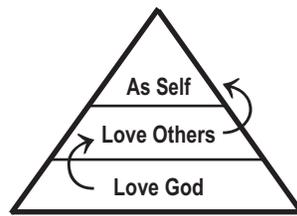


Figure 2: Loving God as Foundational Love

Our relationship with God is to be the all-satisfying foundation for every other relationship. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). As John Piper (1996) states, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him” (p. 50). Augustine said it this way: “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in God.” To make our relationship to ourselves primary is to make *self* a God-substitute, an idolatry.

When that relationship with God is firmly established as the foundation of other relationships then we are prepared to truly love other people. We no longer “need” them to approve us, fill us, complete us, or sustain us, because God does those things. That frees us to love them instead of trying to satisfy ourselves with them.

This idea of “loving others instead of using them for our agenda” is precisely what Jesus meant when He said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. In the same way that we naturally look out for our own good, we are to seek to be a blessing to others. This is the same logic Paul used in Ephesians 5:28, “So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”

Paul does not say husbands first learn to care for yourself and then you will be able to care for your wives. He assumes (based on our natural instincts and selfish, sinful tendencies) that the husbands are already caring for their own bodies. Paul calls them to place that same energy and attention into caring for their wives. Why? Because when a husband places his wife’s cares above his own, he will have a home marked by confidence, identity,

purpose, security, and wisdom.

The debate over self-esteem is a debate over human nature. Are people basically good and, therefore, only need affirmation, insight, education, and encouragement? Or, are people inherently sinful and, therefore, need to learn self-denial, repentance, humility, and selfless love? Jerry Bridges (1994) says it this way: "If we are to succeed in putting sin to death, we must realize that the sin we are dealing with is none other than a continual exalting of our desire over God's known will" (p. 193).

How Do We Attain These Five Things?

It is not enough to merely debunk a defective method without generating an effective alternative. So if self-esteem is not the most effective and biblical method to attain confidence, identity, purpose, security, and wisdom, then what is?

The method of creating an alternative will be to take the five synonyms for self-esteem and give a concise method for growing in these areas. Reflection questions will be given for each to assist you in evaluating where you stand in each of these areas. These sections are not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide an introduction for how to apply this new paradigm. A complete article will be devoted to each subject in future editions of the journal in order to more fully (and biblically) define and apply each synonym.

Confidence

Confidence is a by-product of what needs to be done, the available resources to achieve that, and my assessment of what is at stake. If a basketball player needs to make a shot to win the game and believes he can do it, he is confident. If he doubts his ability and the game is important to him, he is not confident. If he doubts his ability, but is playing with his three-year-old son in the backyard, confidence is not an issue.

Biblical confidence is not about being able to do everything. We were created to be dependent upon God. Any confidence that does not reinforce our dependence upon God is sinful pride. Jerry Bridges (1994) says it this way: "Your worst days are never so bad

that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace" (p. 18).

It is good and right, in some circumstances, to not be confident. This accounts for the "high self-esteem" of most criminals. They are confident when it is wrong to be confident. If you struggle with appropriate confidence, here is a series of questions to help you think about your circumstances biblically.

1. What needs to be done? Sometimes fear emerges from a lack of clarity. I feel timid because I do not know what is expected.
2. Am I or should I be capable of this? There are times that we lack confidence because we demand that God allow us to be good at something He has not called us to do. We also often need to realize there is nothing wrong with not having a particular skill. Much of the self-esteem hype in our culture is the result of making demands of God.
3. What is at stake? Our idolatries always betray us. If I make success at work, getting all A's, being popular, or anything else the end-all of my life, it is likely that I will lack confidence. When I deride myself for a secondary matter, the problem is not confidence. The problem is a lack of purpose (see below) and idolatry.

REFLECTION: When a pivotal moment of life comes, to whom/what do you turn instinctually? Where did you go for advice on the last major decision you made?

Identity

Identity is that part of our character that remains the same despite our circumstances. When people change who they are based on their peers or environment, it is not because they do not love themselves, it is because they do not know who they are. In each environment they do what they think will get them what they want.

What allows a young person to resist peer pressure? Knowing who they are. What allows someone to take action in an abusive relationship? Knowing they are not dependent on the abuser.

This requires that Christianity becomes

who we are, not just something that we believe or do. The Scriptures are full of identity statements. Believers are children of God, ambassadors of Christ, salt and light, a royal priesthood, servants of the King, God's craftsmanship created for good works, and the bride of Christ. The Bible gives us these concepts not to rev up our self-importance, but to remind us of who we are so that we would know how to live.

When temptation arises, the question is not, "Do I love myself enough to be good?" but, "Who am I?" If I view myself as "the awkward kid," "just a paycheck," "a nobody," "the preacher's kid," or any other false identity, then it makes sense to wallow in pity or commit sin. If I discipline and challenge myself to truly consider who I am in Christ, then defeating labels become obvious deceptions and distractions.

REFLECTION: Who are your heroes? When you daydream about "making it," what are you doing and what are the attributes of success?

Purpose

Purpose is the unifying goal that gives meaning to all the individual decisions we make. A lack of purpose results in sporadic, directionless decision making and is often interpreted as a low self-esteem. Again, the deficiency is not in self-approval but in direction.

The Westminster Confession makes the matter of purpose quite clear. It asks, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." This is the purpose for which we live. If we lose this purpose, all our efforts will be as Cornelius Plantinga (1996) says, "If we try to fill our hearts with anything besides the God of the universe, we find that we are overfed and undernourished" (pp. 122, 123). Our effort, no matter how great, will not produce a satisfying, productive result.

Do you have a personal purpose statement? Can you articulate in a few sentences the common denominator of the decisions you make? If not, it makes sense why life seems disjointed.

REFLECTION: How would you complete

the sentence, "If only I could . . ."? When you get a free moment, what do you work on or where do your thoughts go?

Security

Security is a result of where you put your trust. Insecurity is generated when that which I deem trustworthy fails. Terrorism, moral failure of spiritual leaders, car accidents, and health trouble can all result in insecurity because they call into question things we usually deem dependable.

Security is something we can never muster in ourselves. We are sinners; meaning we will disappoint our good intentions. We are dying; meaning we have no earthly permanence. We are limited in knowledge; meaning we will make foolish choices and accept bad information. We socialize with other sinners; meaning trusted alliances will let us down. We cannot generate security.

Security must be sought in God. Only God is eternal, all knowing, and incapable of folly. Security is only found in God. Life becomes a moment by moment trusting of God, not being ruffled by the fact that apart from His grace and wisdom I would destroy myself, because God is dependable and able to sustain my security.

REFLECTION: During your last crisis what did you do? What did you tell that last person who came to you in a crisis? Did God seem relevant at those moments?

Wisdom

Wisdom is the ability to make choices that result in a biblically productive life. Low self-esteem often gets blamed for foolish choices, when the real culprit was the lack of an ability to assess life in biblical categories and respond appropriately.

Wisdom is not the ability to recite (accurately pronounced) all the places and people found in the Book of Genesis. An example of wisdom is the ability to hear a dispute between friends, identify principles of biblical conflict resolution, identify the driving motivation of each person, and lovingly guide them to resolution. This wisdom takes the confidence to speak up, an identity that is independent of your peers, purpose to see

(continued on page 35)



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.

Abide With Me



by Lyte/Monk

Lyrics: That September Sunday afternoon, Henry Lyte returned from his walk on the beach with a deep awareness of his increasing frailty, and the knowledge that he may well not return from his upcoming journey to Rome. For the past twenty-four years he had served the All-Saints Church in the English coastal town of Lower Brixham, and that very morning had delivered what was to be his last sermon to them. In addition to his increasing blindness, tuberculosis had weakened his health, and he had begun spending the winters in the milder climate of the French Riviera. As the sun set on his last Sunday in Brixham, Lyte penned the words of “Abide With Me.”

When he departed for Rome later that week, Lyte took his new poem with him to continue working on it. However, his ailing body did not permit him to reach his destination, and he died and was buried in France. His new hymn was sent back to Brixham, where it was sung at his memorial service.¹

Many dark and fearful emotions are expressed in the first two stanzas of this hymn. The lines are full of darkness, decay, and failure. The “Abide with me” that closes the first two verses seems to have almost a note of desperation, as the poet recognizes that God is his only hope

of meaning and purpose in his rapidly deteriorating life.

The mood of the hymn seems to lift a little through the third verse and into the fourth. The writer begins to focus more on God’s power and grace and the effect that they have on life’s troubles. At the close of the fourth verse, the gloom has been transformed into a note of triumph with the realization that in Christ, “death’s sting” is gone. The final lines of the hymn emphasize our need for God’s presence throughout eternity, not just in our troubled lives on earth.

Music: William Monk was the editor of the Anglican hymnal *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, first published in 1861. It was while he was preparing for the first edition that he discovered Lyte’s text. Monk’s wife says about this tune: “This tune was written at a time of great sorrow—when together we watched, as we did daily, the glories of the setting sun. As the last golden ray faded, he took some paper and penciled that tune which has gone all over the earth.” ■

1. *Abide With Me: A Photographic Journey Through Great British Hymns*. John H. Parker

2. www.classicalarchives.com

Abide With Me

Abide with us: for it is toward evening. – Luke 24:29

HENRY F. LYTE, 1847

EVENTIDE 10s. 41.

WILLIAM H. MONK, 1861

1. A - bide with me: fast falls the e - ven - tide; The dark - ness
 2. Swift to its close ebbs out life's lit - tle day; Earth's joys grow
 3. I need Thy pres - ence ev - 'ry pass - ing hour; What but Thy
 4. I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no
 5. Hold Thou Thy cross be - fore my clos - ing eyes; Shine through the

deep - ens; Lord, with me a - bide: When oth - er help - ers fail, and
 dim, its glo - ries pass a - way; Change and de - cay in all a -
 grace can foil the tempter's pow'r? Who like Thy - self my guide and
 weight, and tears no bit - ter - ness. Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy
 gloom, and point me to the skies: Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain

com - forts flee, Help of the help - less, O a - bide with me.
 round I see; O Thou who chang - est not, a - bide with me.
 stay can be? Thro' cloud and sun - shine, O a - bide with me.
 vic - to - ry? I tri - umph still, if Thou a - bide with me.
 shad - ows flee: In life, in death, O Lord, a - bide with me.

IF NOT SELF-ESTEEM, THEN WHAT? . . . cont'd from page 33

God glorified more than to keep quiet, and being secure enough to withstand temporary conflict and possible rejection.

If my primary concern is loving myself, it's not worth it. The way of wisdom is too hard. There are easier things that would give me a more immediate pleasure. A primary focus on self (i.e., believing I need to love myself before I can love anybody else) prevents us from having biblical wisdom.

For example, the wisdom principle of delayed gratification is based on self-denial not self-love. Self-love would say, "You deserve _____. Go ahead and get it. You

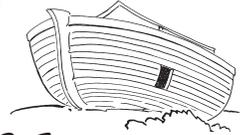
need a reward now and you can pay for it later." Self-denial says, "If God has not provided the means for you to have _____ you should not get it. It might be good to have later, but now is the time to thank God for what He has already blessed you with."

REFLECTION: What have you done in the last month to increase your wisdom? Reflect on one problem that you resolved in a truly biblical manner. ■

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Beginning Issues



Arguments to Avoid

by John Mullett

When participating in the debate of evolution versus creationism or old earth versus young earth it is easy for either side to gravitate to an evidence-gathering-race mentality. As I mentioned in last month's article this view is wrong, because we all live in the same world and have the same evidence; it is our belief system that determines our interpretation of the evidence. When we adapt the view that the best evidence wins, it can lead to claims that are unsubstantiated and consisting of faulty science, inconsistent logic, and biblical inaccuracy. Repeating myself from last month, these types of arguments are damaging to the credibility of the guilty party.

In this article I want to address two of the arguments we should avoid. I may address a few more in future articles, but the two I'll address here are *Darwin recanting on his deathbed* and *Women have one more rib than men*. These are both fairly commonly held views that I have heard personally several times, even over the pulpit in the case of the latter.

After prescribing to Christianity early in his life Charles Darwin eventually renounced his faith and belief in God, the Bible as an inspired book, or Jesus Christ as his savior. His wife was a Christian and witnessed to him throughout their married life, but to no avail according to Darwin himself.¹ Yet, within days after Charles Darwin's death in April 1882, there were reports of a conversion experience. The first report supposedly surfaced in a sermon in South Wales²

and was soon followed by other reports. One report just a few weeks after his death claimed correspondence with a divinity professor in Glasgow in which Darwin supposedly indicated, "He can with confidence look to Calvary."³ However, in Darwin's correspondence on record (over 14,000 letters) no communication between those two men is found.⁴ The most commonly used evidence is a story told by Lady Hope, some thirty-three years after his death, relating how she visited him near the end of his life and received his testimony.⁵ While Lady Hope is an actual person and parts of her story may be true there are several irreconcilable errors as well. Darwin's wife, who was disturbed by his irreligious beliefs and would have welcomed such an account, never confirmed the story. Other family members repeatedly denied the account as well. Darwin's biographer, Dr. James Moore, did a thorough study on the available data and he disputes it as well.⁶ Of course it is very sad that Darwin likely didn't repent of his unbelief, but even if he did we should not use a story that cannot be verified.

Now concerning the rib count in men and women. This is an easy one to refute; all we have to do is count them. Men do not have one less rib than women. While Genesis 2:21 clearly reveals to us that God did indeed take a rib from the man's (Adam) side when he created woman (Eve), the fact that men are not short a rib today in no way creates a problem for the Bible's credibility. What Genesis does not say is that God