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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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hunger and thirst to be like Jesus.

It is the *merciful* who are promised mercy from God. Most marital problems arise from a selfish preoccupation with one's own rights and desires. However, the process of repentance found in the Beatitudes brings people into the love of God, and this is especially true in the marriage setting. Consequently, rather than each spouse settling into a selfish preoccupation with hisr own rights and desires, they both learn to consider the needs of the other. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," said Jesus (Acts 20:35). One of those blessings is that the more each mate shows mercy to the other, the more they are sure to receive in return.

By this point in the process, another fruit of repentance, purity of heart, will emerge. Not only will the *pure in heart* see God, as the beatitude promises, but they will also enjoy freedom from controlling sin. The effects of habitual sin on the marriage are deep and pervasive. As both spouses proceed through the process of repentance, however, sinful attitudes are exposed in the Light. Issues that are buried deep within the heart come to the surface and are dealt with. Little by little their hearts will become purified and they will gain a greater sight of God. What is happening in their individual hearts will also be expressed in the marriage.

Finally, as a couple allows the first six spiritual truths to be worked into them, this last beatitude simply arises as the culmination of all the others in God's transforming process. The closer a person comes to Christ, the more he or she will become what Jesus called a *peacemaker*. Where once strife and disunity permeated the marriage, the couple is now able to reconcile differences and enjoy godly communication with each other. Harmony in the marital relationship is the crowning fruit of a life of repentance.

The previous section offers a roadmap for the restoration of an ailing marriage. Having a clear-cut path to marital unity should be a great source of encouragement to the sincere husband and wife. However, that map to success is only valuable to the degree that it is actually followed.

Sometimes when we come to God for help, His answers are not what we want to hear. There were times the Pharisees were so frustrated with Jesus' answers that they were ready to kill Him. It takes humility to hear and received a "hard word." Most couples who have come to Rose and me for counseling through the years have come expressly looking for solutions to their marital problems. Many times, however, what we tell them doesn't sit well with them. Some couples are interested only in a temporal fix for their marriage while God is interested in building His kingdom.

Rose and I have been counseling for nearly 15 years and are still amazed at the level of resistance we face from Christians who claim to believe the Word of God. In spite of the fact that our counseling is all based in Scripture, it is amazing how often people respond with statements like, "God wouldn't expect me to do that," or "That's not what Dr. So-and-So wrote in his book." Still others protest, "You don't understand what I have been through." It grieves me to hear these kinds of responses, because I know these people are only evading and prolonging what God needs to do for them.

To put it bluntly, marriages fail because people are unwilling to conform their lives to God's Word. Restoring a marriage is difficult, and the work of restoration nearly always goes against the grain of our natural tendencies. Winning this battle requires people to consistently do things that are uncomfortable.

Rose and I are continually amazed at the goodness and mercy of God. He has blessed our lives and marriage more than we ever could have imagined. He is a "more than" God: *more than* able, *more than* willing, and *more than* sufficient. He always goes beyond our expectations and there are no limits to His offer of mercy. He is "able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). ■

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# Person of the Month:

*Philip P. Bliss*

(1838-1876)



Although there is some dispute as to his birthplace, it seems that Philipp Bliss was born July 9, 1838, to Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Bliss of Clearfield County, Pennsylvania. Not liking the extra “p” at the end of his name he later changed his name to Philip “Paul” Bliss to make use of the extra “p.” Philip’s parents were devout Christians who lived out their faith before him. The family attended the Methodist church. His parents also were lovers of music. From them Bliss acquired his love of music as well as much of his education, since his years of formal education were few and scattered. The family was poor and resided in a log cabin. At the age of six, in 1844, Bliss moved with his family to Trumbell City, Ohio, and then back again to PA (this time in Tioga City) three years later when Philip was 9 years old. Moving back and forth happened several times during his growing-up years and was a hindrance to his schooling.

Between the age of 11 and 13 Philip Bliss worked on farms. In 1850, at the age of 12, he was converted to Christ as the result of revival meetings held in the school he was presently attending. He then joined the Baptist church in Elk Run, PA, near the school.

At the age of 14 he worked in sawmills and lumber camps. He was big for his age and was able to handle the work assigned him. During these years he also went to school whenever and wherever he could. He was eventually able to pass a teacher exam and in 1856, at the age of 18, he became a schoolmaster in Hartsville, NY, and the next year taught in Rome, PA. While in Rome he boarded in the home of the O. F. Young family.

In 1857 he had the opportunity to attend a singing school as well as a music convention.

Over the course of his stay in the Young’s home Philip’s acquaintance with Young’s daughter, Lucy, grew to friendship and then romance. Three years later, at the age of 21, Philip married Lucy on June 1, 1859. Being a musician and poet herself, Lucy was a great help and encouragement to her husband and fostered his love of music as well as his innate ability as a poet and composer.

Bliss desired to get formal music training but did not have the needed funds. In 1860 Lucy’s grandmother generously gave Lucy and Philip \$30, so that he could fulfill his dream. They moved to New York and he enrolled in a six-week music course at the Normal Academy of Music at Geneseo.

During the next four years Bliss took music classes while also teaching music workshops. As the Civil War was winding down, the couple moved to Chicago where Philip became Sunday school superintendent as well as choir director in their church.

In 1864, at the age of 26, Brother Bliss was contacted by Root and Cady Music Publishers with a job offer. He was asked to represent the company at singing schools, make all the arrangements for their conventions for musicians, and oversee company-sponsored sacred concerts. He was offered a very handsome monthly salary, for the time period, for doing a job he loved! He willingly accepted the offer.

That same year he began writing his own songs: words as well as music. Not only did he have the ability to do both, but what made him unique was the fact that he could do an excellent job of singing the songs as well! The songs seemed to flow out of him without much effort. When he would hear sermons or stories he would put words and notes to paper and produce a gospel song that brought home Biblical truth. The songs were as much loved then as they are today. He never copyrighted his songs nor received royalty money from them since his salary was quite adequate. Instead he gave the royalty money to charities.

During his time in Chicago he was approached by D. L. Moody, after one of the revival meetings, and asked if he would travel with Moody and be his song leader. Being happy in his work, he declined the offer, but after a letter from Moody encouraging Bliss to use his notable singing talents as part of an evangelistic team, Philip Bliss felt called by God to join with evangelist Daniel Whittle, which he did in 1874, at the age of 36. Bliss did some evangelistic preaching on his own, as well.

That same year, Bliss composed the familiar gospel song "Almost Persuaded" as an invitation song. However, he did not present it in public until two years later when he sang for Moody at a large meeting of church leaders. The time was November of 1876. Brother Bliss was now 38 years of age.

Philip Paul Bliss is remembered as a man of strength as well as compassion. It is thought that had he lived longer he would have surpassed in popularity other well-known composers such as Fanny Crosby, Ira Sankey, or Charles Wesley. He wrote the words and music for such beloved gospel songs as "Whosoever Will," "Almost Persuaded," "The Light of the World Is Jesus," "Hold the Fort," "Jesus Loves Even Me," "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning," etc., as well as composing the music for the favorite song "It is Well With My Soul" written by Spafford.

Following his singing for Moody in the November meeting of 1876, Philip, Lucy, and their two children left that evening on a train bound for Towanda, PA. Philip's mother was living there and he wanted to spend the Christmas holiday with her. In planning for their trip back home they decided to leave the children at his mother's home. On December 29, 1876, they left Pennsylvania in a blinding snowstorm to head back to Chicago. Except for the storm, which slowed down travel, the trip was uneventful until they neared Ashtabula, Ohio. The train began to cross a high trestle whose pillars had been weakened by the floodwaters of the Ashtabula River. The first of the two engines crossed successfully, but at that point the trestle gave way and the second engine and the eleven passenger cars plunged seventy-five feet below into the icy water, sending many unsuspecting passengers to their death. Philip survived the fall and was able to climb from the wreckage only to realize that his wife had not escaped. Even though the cars had caught fire Bliss went back inside the damaged car only to find Lucy trapped by the wreckage. Although he could have escaped the flames he chose to stay with his wife and died there by her side.

Upon hearing of this tragedy thousands showed up for the service in memory of this beloved couple. The companies who had published his songs then placed the royalties in a trust fund to support his two young children.

- Gail L. Emerson

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# Maybe God Would Appreciate Some Soft Pretzels

by Aaron Lapp, Kinzers, PA

The biblical words *justified* and *justification* are not in common usage now. What does *justified* mean? Several words are in the same family of meaning: *vindicate*, *remission*, *exculpate*, and *amnesty*.

*Justify* is an accounting word. It is what we do when we balance our checkbook. When the balance agrees with the bank statement, the checkbook balance is affirmed (justified) with the bank's balance statement.

Last winter, I lived with my new wife at her house in Michigan. There I could connect more with her children, siblings, and mother. But I ran into a big problem with my bank back home. I was overdrawn. Checks bounced. Insufficient account charges! Penalties! Interest charges! It was horrible!

My meticulous record-keeping seemed to go over a cliff and crash. I sent in some money to take care of the problem. But the problem continued—only worse!

My balance still showed that I should be in the black. Mail forwarded from Kinzers (PA) to Sturgis (MI) was slow. One statement never reached me. I was almost sick physically and suffered a great deal emotionally from this ordeal.

We returned to Pennsylvania. My checkbook balance showed more than enough money to cover my expenditures. I was too spent physically and emotionally to look at it anymore.

I have been teaching that men should always balance the checkbook. But I did something I had never done before in 50 years of writing checks. I gave my checkbook to my wife to get me out of this mess,

if possible.

She took into account all the overdrafts, finance charges, the penalties, the interest charges, and whatever else. (Financial institutions have an amazing sense of creativity when it comes to reducing one's account.) Esther was methodical. Her first time over this fiscal nightmare resulted in matching the bank's statement—to the penny! She justified the bank's monetary conclusion. I could not justify my actions. I had failed. I had made a big basic mistake. We had earlier come back to Lancaster County in mid-winter for a weekend. I needed to go to the bank to make a deposit. My son (Curtis) also had business at the bank, so I took his deposit along.

Later, I recorded both deposits into my account. Putting his \$4200 into my account wrought havoc. I credited myself with money the bank never did. Of course not!

*Lesson #1:* In the same way the good deeds of my children, my parents, my wife, and my ministers do not accrue to my account with God, the bank did not need to justify their actions. That is all spelled out in the fine print of the checking account agreement.

*Lesson #2:* God does not need to justify Himself in His accounting with anyone. It is all spelled out in His Word. When Esther and I made a trip to the bank, I was nearly in tears. I felt so guilty and condemned by having to pay several hundred dollars in overdraft fees. I hate finance charges. I knew the debt I owed was legal. I also knew it was inescapable.

*Lesson #3:* We are all overdrawn in our account with God, outside of being saved by

His grace in Christ. “Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Donna is the head person in the bank. I hoped for sympathy, and maybe a respectable reduction of these charges. I assumed my most earnest Aaronic form: I explained my mistake. It was an honest mistake. I spoke of delays in the mail’s forwarding system. One month’s statement never arrived in my mail in Michigan. I pled ignorance. I spoke of my weakness. I was a victim of fiscal circumstances. Surely she would recognize that this sorry mess was not all my fault. Then the biggest surprise of all my dealings at a bank happened. Donna said, “Aaron, we will forgive you all of those charges.” *Really? All \$212.50 of it?*

*Lesson #4:* My explanation to Donna was part confession to start with and mostly self-justification to end with. Most times I will confess wrong either by claiming ignorance or weakness, which is no confession at all with God. Our own self-justification (righteousness) is like stinky rags to God. “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isaiah 64:6).

*Lesson #5:* God forgives us—not for our plausible answers and our efforts at making an “airtight” case of our victimization. God forgives us when we have no personal self-justification for our situation. “Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling” (Toplady in “Rock of Ages”). We fall prostrate at Jesus’ feet. We are nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing to save ourselves. It is altogether and alone by God’s mercy and His grace.

*Lesson #6:* True confession is effected when we agree with God. Our balance comes up negative, in the red, to the penny. There is nothing good to claim personally. Nothing.

Esther and I left the bank so happy, so free, so relieved, so healed, so blessed! The experience of being forgiven is a special, thrilling experience. My entanglements were over. No penalty, no charge, no payment was needed. I felt deeply indebted to the Hometown Bank!

Ideally, from a biblical perspective, my article should end right here. I am free of debt. I have been forgiven by the bank. I have a good testimony of the bank’s grace. But then I spoiled it, as far as the Bible analogy goes.

Esther makes the best soft pretzels. I asked her to make a fresh batch. We took it to the bank and gave all the tellers and personnel (Donna first of all!) a fat, nicely-browned, salty, soft pretzel.

*Lesson #7:* Being made free from our debt of sin places no obligation on us to pay God back for his grace. “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justified the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:4, 5). Working for our salvation appeals to our sense of what’s right. Accepting God’s free gift of grace in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, the great imbalance in our account with God, is God’s only requirement of us for attaining right standing with Him.

Interestingly enough, the bank statement with our forgiveness was circled with red ink! There had been many fiscal transgresses. Red ink indicated forgiveness.

*Lesson #8:* God’s forgiveness of our great debt in coming up short is covered by the blood of Christ. God’s timeless principle of justification for any of us is only possible by the blood of Christ. “It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). “And without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:9).

Giving Donna and her co-workers some  
*(continued on page 6)*

## **From the Editor's Desk**



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

## **Learning From the Flu**

by Bruce A. Stauffer

**E**pidemics of the past have claimed many lives. The bubonic plague of the Middle Ages claimed sixty million lives, and the influenza of 1918 caused twenty million deaths. God has mercifully spared us from a severe influenza. Although the acuteness of H1N1 (swine flu) may have been overplayed, it was nevertheless very widespread. Solutions to halt its spread were futile. What if it had been a terminal illness?

God speaks through man's helplessness in the face of disease and death. Doctors acknowledge their inability to cure many illnesses. Panic over rumors of strange diseases reveals the insecurity of a self-confident society. God desires that we would turn to Him for healing.

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon made a profound parallel between man's physical dependence and his spiritual need. He prayed, "If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew . . . what prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall

know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest" (1 Kings 8:37-39).

Did our bouts with the flu remind us of the plague of our hearts? Is our sympathy aroused with a brother's spiritual struggles as it would be if he were diagnosed with cancer? God delights in healing man, especially of spiritual illness. Our physical needs are divinely crafted to portray the paramount need of our soul.

The contagious plague of sin spreads rapidly. "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11).

Often the symptoms of a disease are not immediately evident. Even after symptoms appear, we may ignore them.

“Yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not” (Hosea 7:9). Only after we “know . . . the plague of [our] own heart” can the Physician freely heal us.

Our spiritual virus may be detected first by others. They may observe a dull look in our spiritual eyes. We should seek spiritual counsel from healthy Christians rather than from those who carry the same infection.

A virus can be deterred with certain precautions. Hand sanitizer is encouraged to avoid infection. God specified that the priests “shall wash with water, that they die not.” Daily washing with the soul-cleansing detergent of the Word is imperative. We must scrub between our fingers and under nails!

Quarantine is also an effective disease deterrent. Those with lower resistance must be given special protection. Parents who allow youth unmonitored use of cell phones, computers, or music players may someday stand trial for reckless endangerment. However, total quarantine from evil is not possible (1 Corinthians 5:10). We cannot get away from ourselves (James 1:14), and the sick need the care of the healthy.

Treatment for illness is costly and dis-

appointing at times. Although God’s prescriptions cost dearly to the flesh, they surely heal. The cost is less in the end.

Quackery is rampant today. The devil takes advantage of our gullibility and advertises an alternative remedy. It is sad to see his poisonous philosophies sincerely administered instead of God’s cure. Parents with spiritually sick youth tend to dispense the same faulty medicine that contributed to their illness. We ensure chronic illness if we pamper relationships when the true love of firm direction and discipline is needed.

There is a cure for the plague. “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Jesus’ victory over sin provides us with the antibodies needed to resist infection with sin. This vaccine works! “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Victory through Christ builds immunity to sin.

A deadly epidemic is afloat. It has claimed the lives of billions. May we spread forth our hands to God that the “plague of [our] own heart” may be healed. “Should not a people seek unto their God?” (Isaiah 8:19). ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Eastern Mennonite Testimony*, January 2010.

## MAYBE GOD WOULD APPRECIATE SOME SOFT PRETZELS . . . cont’d.

pretzels tends to make me feel less indebted to her. Why do we so often feel we need to do at least something to earn at least a little of this salvation of God? To be truly saved and justified from all our trespasses and sins is a powerful lesson in humility. Naturally and carnally, I’d rather give God a soft pretzel or two than to ask His free gift without any help from me. But my pride and egotism must not get in the way. All that is left is giving glory to God “for so great a salvation.”

**The Bottom Line** is: We had a debt with God we could not pay. Christ paid it poten-

tially for the whole world for all time. Any excuses, either of ignorance or of weakness, fail to satisfy the enormous debt caused by our sinful nature and specific acts of sin. Giving God a few soft pretzels is a totally wrong response to His free gift of salvation.

God’s justification by Jesus’ blood frees us from the sins of our past. Believe it! Justification gives us the grace and power to live victoriously over sin. Live it! It is the source of great joy! ■

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# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## *A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**APRIL 4, 2010**

### *Jesus Comforts His Followers*

John 16:16-24; 20:11-16

The time of Jesus' death was drawing near and He wanted His followers to be aware of upcoming events. He had told them repeatedly of His approaching passion, but their hearts were closed to this truth. They found it difficult to believe or accept facts which ran counter to their presuppositions. In the first part of Chapter 16 Jesus had told them He was going away but that He would send His Spirit to teach and guide them into the truth of what He had spoken.

Then as we begin our lesson text, Jesus told them that these things would happen in "a little while." In several days He would be taken from them in death. Then again in a few days they would see Him, this time in His resurrected body. He also hinted here of His subsequent ascension to the Father.

Perhaps the disciples were too embarrassed to ask Jesus just what He meant, so they discussed among themselves what He meant by not seeing, then seeing, and "a little while." Jesus of course understood their questionings and hesitancy, so He opened the subject with them.

Jesus informed them that events which would soon come to pass would cause them grief, but it would make those who did not accept His teachings rejoice. (This shows the great contrast between Jesus' followers and His detractors.) Yes, His followers would grieve, but upon His appearance

after His resurrection, their grief would be turned into joy. He used the example of childbirth to illustrate His point. Their joy at His reappearance would be complete and permanent.

Verses 23 and 24 seem to imply that after Jesus' resurrection appearance, many of the disciples' present questions would be answered and that after His ascension further requests would need to be made of the Father in Jesus' name. Jesus sought to comfort His disciples by assuring them that in one way or another He would always be present with them (see 16:7-13).

As we turn to the resurrection experience in our second text, we see Jesus giving comfort to another grieving follower. (Read verses 1-10 for context.) Mary Magdalene had become a devoted follower of Jesus after He had cast seven devils out of her (Luke 8:2). She had then ministered to Him during His ministry, was present at the crucifixion, and was one of the first to the tomb on resurrection morning.

Finding the tomb empty she hurried to tell Peter and John. Then, returning to the tomb, she grieved at the absence of Jesus' body, assuming someone, perhaps Jesus' enemies, had removed it. As she stood looking into the empty tomb she saw two angels who inquired as to her grief. (See the other gospels for their fuller response to her.) As Mary turned away from the empty tomb with tears blinding her eyes, she met a man whom she assumed was the keeper of the garden. He posed the same question as had the angels: "Why are you weeping; whom are you seeking?"

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Then Jesus spoke her name and her eyes and her mind cleared and she responded, "Master!" What joy! What comfort! Jesus then gave her instructions to tell the other disciples that she had seen the risen Lord.

Though many questions remained unanswered for the present, at least now the disciples' sorrow had turned to joy and they found comfort in the fact that Jesus was alive.

Rejoice as they did on this glorious Easter day.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. Do we at times allow our presuppositions to blind us to truth as did the disciples? What is the problem? What is the antidote?
2. Do we gain or lose by discussing things which are unclear among ourselves instead of going to Jesus for answers? Or should we do both? Discuss.
3. How do we handle those in the "world" who refute the teachings of Jesus? Discuss.
4. What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?
5. Has the glory of the resurrection pervaded your life? Has it changed your life? Reflect on its tremendous impact on mankind.

*Lesson emphasis:* How Jesus brings comfort to the community of believers—then and now.

*Key verse:* 16:22

## **APRIL 11, 2010**

### ***True Love Expressed in Community***

1 John 2:7-11, 15-17

Love has always been the identifying characteristic of the follower of God. In the Levitical Law given by Moses, love for one's neighbor is commanded within the general framework of personal holiness (Leviticus 19). The proper treatment of one's fellows is both a requirement of God for His followers

and serves as an identifying mark of those who claim His Lordship. Here in 1 John, John emphasizes that since God is love and the source of love, all who claim to be His followers must also exemplify love in their relationships.

While the command to love was from old time, the coming of Jesus added a new dimension to love that superseded simply doing no harm to one's neighbor. Over and over in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quoted the demands of the law and added, "But I say unto you." To fully understand how we are to love one another, we must comprehend how Jesus lived, how He responded to others, how He exemplified the essence of true love in all of life (see John 13:34).

Jesus, as the epitome of love, brought into a world of darkness light to guide men in their living (John 1:4, 5). Therefore, those who claim to be His followers must not only walk in that light but prove their walk by their attitudes and deeds toward their fellowmen (John 13:35). The absorption and manifestation of the light of love will keep one from stumbling both in his relationship to God and to his fellowmen. But where hatred is manifested toward one's fellows, that soul is still walking in darkness and has been blinded by that darkness to the light which gives life, thus condemning him to a life of uncertain wandering.

In verses 15-17, John turns from explaining how love works in human relationships to warning against a love of the world which would separate one from a holy God and end in eternal damnation. The world system controlled by Satan is diametrically opposed to God and all holiness. It emphasizes personal sensual gratification, not the denial of self required by a follower of Jesus. John says those who have overcome the wicked one (v. 14) will stop loving the things of the world.

John highlights three primary areas which depict a love for the world. First is the lust of the flesh: the desire and fulfilling of sensual pleasures. Secondly is the lust of the eyes: the desire for things, greed,

covetousness, materialism. Third is the pride of life: boasting over one's position or status, vainglory. It's easy to see that where these are present the individual is still walking in darkness and does not have the light of life.

In verse 17 John portrays the great contrast between following the sinful pleasures of the world and doing the will of God. This morally corrupt world, with all its sinfulness and evil, will one day pass into eternal oblivion. "But he that doeth the will of God [i.e., walking in the light, loving his brother] will abide forever."

The choice should not be difficult to make. But the darkness ever encroaches. It can be overcome only by continually and consciously walking in the Light. Choose Light. Walk in light. Walk in love.

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

1. How would you define *love*? How is it demonstrated? Good for class discussion.
2. Does the love Jesus commanded reach only to our brothers, or does it have a broader application? Discuss.
3. Why does it seem so hard at times to truly love our brother? What is at work here?
4. If the "things of the world" still entice, what does that mean? Does verse 14 help our understanding?
5. What can we do to help those walking in darkness see the eternal folly of their ways?

*Lesson emphasis:* That the only way to proper relationships and eternal joy is by walking in God's light, hating the things of the world, and loving others as He has loved us.

*Key verses:* 7 and 8

**APRIL 18, 2010**

### ***Requirements for God's Kingdom***

Matthew 5:17-20; 22:34-40

Jesus had just launched into the Sermon

on the Mount, where He had begun instructing His disciples in the principles of His kingdom. Before drawing contrasts between the Old Law and what He would demand of His followers under the New Covenant, He inserted the disclaimer we find in verses 17-20. He wanted to assure His followers that He was not doing away with the principles of the Law, but rather that He was elevating them to a higher standard. Instead of the negative emphasis of the Law, there would be an emphasis on personal holiness motivated by deep love for God and one's fellows.

Jesus affirmed the permanence of the principles for conduct laid down by the Law and the prophets—the whole of Scripture as understood by the Jewish people. He also asserted that His teachings would not abolish these principles, but bring them to perfection. He assured them that everything, even the smallest details of the Law and what was spoken by the prophets would be fulfilled. Nothing would be overlooked.

Then, in an obvious reference to the scribes and Pharisees, who had abrogated the intent of the Law by the addition of a multitude of minute, unimportant details, Jesus said that those who practice and teach such minutiae will garner to themselves a position of dishonor in the present aspect of the kingdom of God. They will not necessarily miss Heaven, but will certainly not enjoy respect while on earth. Jesus emphasized that one's righteousness must exceed that taught and practiced by the scribes and Pharisees in order to secure one's entrance into His kingdom. Righteousness is defined primarily by being, by attitude; not by simply doing or not doing certain things, however good and right they may be in themselves.

As Jesus' time on earth drew to a close, the intensity of the conflict between Him and the religious leaders rapidly increased. In our second scripture text we see how they attempted to entrap Jesus in order to discredit Him with the people (see verse 15). Of course it didn't work. They were

slow to admit they were no match for His wisdom and insight into their perfidy.

These teachers of the Law had an ongoing debate as to the most important commandment of the Law. They were sure that Jesus' answer would alienate at least some of the people. But Jesus' answer put them to silence (see verse 46). It was simple. It was direct. It encompassed the entirety of the Law.

Every Jew knew that love for God was of primary importance. They repeated the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4 daily. Jesus in His answer also quoted verse 5, and then rounded out His answer to the lawyer by quoting Leviticus 19:18 as well. These two commandments, Jesus said, comprise the entirety of the Law and are alike in that both must be motivated by love. To fully practice these in all their ramifications, is to keep the essence of the entire Law.

Jesus' answer gave them much to think about. And it does for us as well. Love to God, love to our fellowman. Those requirements cover all of God's commandments.

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

1. In what way(s) did Jesus and His teachings fulfill the Old Testament scriptures?
2. If you are ever tempted to ignore one of Jesus' "least" commands, take a close look first at verse 19. What will be the result to you? to others? What are the dangers?
3. What was the "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"? How do we exceed that? What is true religion? Discuss.
4. Is it possible to keep one of the two great commandments and not the other? Discuss.
5. What does it mean to love God with heart, soul, and mind? What differences does this make in our living, our ambitions, our desires? Discuss.

*Lesson emphasis:* The imperative of giving wholehearted obedience to all of God's commandments.

*Key verse:* Matthew 22:37

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**APRIL 25, 2010**

### ***Understanding the Great Invitation***

Luke 14:15-24

It was a Sabbath day and Jesus had been invited to dine at the home of a prominent Pharisee. However, there were ulterior motives behind this invitation as we note in the first part of the chapter. In essence, this was a set-up to entrap and discredit Jesus for breaking the Sabbath. (Read verses 1-14 for lesson context.) This experience provides a sad commentary on the motives of the religious (so-called) leaders. That they would use the pretext of hospitality to further their evil designs to destroy Jesus is the height of hypocrisy and malevolence.

But, as we note in our lesson text, Jesus turned the tables on them by the use of a parable. A guest who had heard Jesus' previous response made a statement which drew out Jesus' reply in the form of a life-story. Did this man assume he would automatically be eligible to participate in the heavenly feast simply because he was a Jew, a son of Abraham, a member of God's chosen race? Perhaps. Jesus' response, however, added another dimension to that invitation. It was to be open to all who would freely accept, regardless of race, nationality, status, or position in life.

In Jesus' story a man invited friends, he assumed, to a great banquet. However, once the meal was ready and he sent his servants to call the invited guests to the meal, they began with one accord to make excuses. One had bought land and he thought best to check it out. Another had bought oxen and he felt he should try them out. Another had just married and he thought the time would be better spent with his new wife. Frivolous excuses, every one. The bottom line was that they did not want to come. They felt their personal affairs were of more importance than honoring their host's invitation.

The host was understandably upset when this lack of respect to his invitation

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

was reported by his servant. The food was ready and needed to be eaten, so the master sent his servant out to call the poor, crippled, and blind to the feast (see verses 12-14). These were the unfortunates of society, those held in low esteem by the elite, those to whom Jesus was speaking. Such would not normally have been invited to a meal as they were now enjoying.

Jesus goes on to add yet another thought-provoking element to His story. When it was determined that there was still room for more in the banquet hall, the servants were instructed to go out again and strongly urge travelers, wayfarers, strangers, vagabonds, the very outcasts of society to come in and partake of his feast.

Did Jesus' audience get the message of His story? Did they understand that He was speaking to them of their arrogance? Did they understand the connection between the banquet and the feast in God's kingdom? Did they grasp the message that God's invitation was open to all men, regardless of race, position, status, or background? Did they realize through this story that their excuses would not hold water in God's sight? We don't know (see 13:28-30).

God's kingdom-feast would be open to all men—Jew, Gentile, outcast, poverty-stricken. But they must accept His invitation. Those who snubbed His invitation

would not taste of His supper.

Jesus' message was for the supercilious of His day, and ours. Let's be sure to be humble enough to accept His invitation on His terms, and thus secure our place at His eternal banquet table.

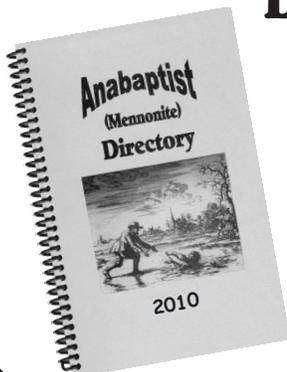
#### **For thought and discussion**

1. Hospitality is a Christian virtue. Let's practice it, but let's also be sure we do not do so from wrong motives.
2. Review the reasons Jesus used parables in His teaching. What place do stories and illustrations have in our teaching? Discuss.
3. Have you ever found yourself making a flimsy excuse for not accepting God's call to a specific service for Him? What was the result? What are the dangers? Discuss.
4. Do we ever get the notion that due to our heritage we have special access to God's banquet table? How does this lesson straighten out that thinking?
5. What do we give up when we accept God's invitation? Look carefully at the lesson story.

*Lesson emphasis:* That to be a participant at God's banquet table we must come humbly, accepting the invitation on His terms.

*Key verse:* 15 ■

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



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# Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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## Catastrophic Earthquake Hits Port-au-Prince, Haiti

A 7 magnitude quake hit 16 miles from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on January 12, 2010. There have been 170,000 confirmed deaths (up to 200,000 estimated), which is 2% of the population of Haiti. (If 2% of the US died, that would be 6.3 million people, or the entire population of the Dallas-Ft. Worth metro area.) The quake has left 1.2 million homeless (or 12% of the population). Haiti is one of the world's most impoverished nations, tying for second in the world in percentage of population living below the poverty line (80%). 72% of the population live on less than \$2 per day, while 55% live on less than \$1.25 per day.

For more information, stories, and photos, or to donate, visit IFMHaiti.org, the website of International Faith Missions, a conservative Mennonite mission that has worked in Haiti for years.

—Sources: *Wikipedia*, *CIA World Factbook*

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## Haiti: iPhone Helps Save Man's Life

Dan Wooley, an American film producer working on a documentary about efforts to help Haiti's poverty-stricken children, was trapped in a collapsed hotel in Port-au-Prince for 65 hours. He saved his own life with his iPhone. He used the light on the phone to see and used a

medical diagnosis application to figure out how to stop the bleeding and keep himself from going into shock. He gave glory to God, saying, "God was with me." He thought he was going to die, so he wrote the following note to his family: "I was in a big accident. Don't be upset at God. He always provides for His children even in hard times. I'm still praying that God will get me out but He may not but He will always take care of ya."

—Source: *NBC Miami*

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## Haiti: Churches Helping Churches Amidst Lawlessness

In Haiti vulnerable children and teens are being sold into slavery and the sex trade, or simply shot in the streets for no reason. [T]wo American pastors, Mark Driscoll and James MacDonald . . . say the churches offer the fundamental social network for education, welfare, and health in a nation with virtually no government.

Driscoll and MacDonald report they were standing near the entrance to the Evangelical Theological Seminary, a 75-year-old school on a hill that is now sheltering 5,000 homeless Haitians, when they heard, "Pop! Pop!" They looked just a few feet outside of the refuge and there they found a teenage[r] murdered "for no apparent reason. He was just shot in the head and left in the street." Driscoll and MacDonald also saw a glimpse of what lies

ahead for many young girls. “If you want a phone, cigarettes or a teenage girl you can get them here in Port-au-Prince. Like the American who said he’s on a relief mission and bought a hungry girl despite our confrontation.” The incident has left Driscoll, a father of four, shaking with anger.

Nicolette Gramms, who worked with the International Justice Mission that specialized in rescuing the victims, says: “In today’s world, the twin causes of human slavery—poverty and vulnerability— increase exponentially after natural disasters. . . . Even without the pandemonium unleashed by a 7.0 earthquake, an estimated quarter-million Haitian children are trafficked (into slave labor or the sex trade) within the country each year.”

On his blog Driscoll reports: “A church building that hosted over 1,000 fell in the quake, with many choir member bodies still trapped. The largest evangelical church in Port-au-Prince is in ruins. The pastor is in his 60’s and many of his people are dead. [I] just prayed for a 24-year-old man digging the body of his 26-year-old brother from a rubble heap. He was the worship leader. But amazingly the Christians we met were full of faith, talking about how God is spreading His people for evangelism. They offer hope to the nation.”

—Abridged version reprinted with permission from *Joel News International 717, Joel News.org*

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### **U. S. Military Weapons Have Scripture References Inscribed**

Trijicon has a \$660 million contract to provide 800,000 sights to the Marine Corps, in addition to other contracts to provide sights to the Army. Trijicon has always inscribed their sights with Bible verses, even before they began supplying the military with sights. The verse references they inscribe on the sights include 2 Corinthians 4:6, which reads, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of dark-

ness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” Also, John 8:12: “Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’ ” They also include other references from Matthew and Revelation that talk about Jesus as light of the world.

A photo from Iraq shows Iraqi troops being trained using guns with these Scripture references. Michael Weinstein of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation said, “It’s wrong, it violates the Constitution, it violates a number of federal laws. It allows the Mujahedeen, the Taliban, al Qaeda and the insurrectionists and jihadists to claim they’re being shot by Jesus’ rifles.” He also said that soldiers have told him that their commanders have referred to these guns as “spiritually transformed firearm[s] of Jesus Christ.”

This is deeply disturbing from an Anabaptist point of view, because it reinforces the false image, especially in the Muslim world, that Jesus came to seek and destroy that which is lost. This kind of thing builds resistance to the gospel. It does, however, give us a megaphone when we as conservative Anabaptists share the gospel while teaching love for our enemies, because it’s so different from what they’ve seen from “Christians.”

—Source: *ABC News*

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### **More Climate Change Scandal**

The head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has admitted further falsifications in their oft-cited report. Many of the claims and data were lifted from news articles and interviews rather than peer-reviewed studies, and were greatly exaggerated. For example, the report says that Himalayan glaciers “will likely shrink from the present 500,000 to 100,000

square km by the year 2035.” In fact, there are only 33,000 sq. km of glaciers in the Himalayas. The report also overstated the rate of shrinkage by an order of magnitude (or six times). The expert who was interviewed for a magazine article that formed the basis for the section on the Himalayan glaciers didn’t recognize that he was the “source” of that information until he read the footnotes. He instantly contacted the IPCC to correct the distortions.

—Source: *The Times of London*

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### Democrats Continue Decline

Obama’s popularity has continued to slide, primarily due to his socialist health care package and deficit spending. His RealClearPolitics Average (an average of all reputable polls) approval rating stands at 49.5% approve, 46% disapprove, a +3.5% spread. That’s down from 65.5%-25.5% in February of 2009, a +40% spread. This disapproval of Democratic policies was most graphically illustrated by an unknown Massachusetts Republican State Senator Scott Brown defeating the well-known Democratic Attorney General Martha Coakley in a special election to fill the U. S. Senate seat of the late Ted Kennedy. Brown is the first Republican Senator from ultra-liberal Massachusetts since 1972. Also, that specific seat has been held by Democrats for all but six years since 1926. Brown’s election was very important because it reverses the Democrats’ super-majority of 60 in the Senate that allows them to invoke cloture on filibusters.

—Sources: *RealClearPolitics.com*, *Wikipedia*, and *Der Spiegel*

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### North Korea Still Tops Global Persecution List

Each year *Open Doors* releases the World Watch List, a detailed analysis of Christian persecution worldwide.

This year North Korea is topping the list again. “There is no other country in

the world where Christians are being persecuted in such a horrible and systematic manner,” says Carl Moeller, president of *Open Doors USA*. An estimated 40,000 to 60,000 Christians are currently in prison labor camps because of their faith. One expert on North Korea stated: “Christians . . . were used as guinea pigs to test chemical and biological weapons.” [A]uthorities have executed people found to possess a Bible. Three generations of a family are often thrown into prison when one member is incarcerated. Despite the intense persecution, the group of Christians in North Korea is strong and actually growing in number.

Overall, eight of the top ten countries on the list have Islam as the dominant religion. Among the top 50 countries, 35 of them have Islamic governments. “Many are coming to Christ in the Muslim world,” Moeller commented. “But we need to continue to embrace them in prayer in 2010.”

The 10 nations [in order] where the persecution of Christians is most severe: North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos, and Uzbekistan.

—Abridged version reprinted with permission from *Joel News International 715*, *Joel News.org*

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### Quote of the Month

“Christians are still smiling. They are in a very dark night, but they still have the candle of the Lord, the candle of hope. The enemy can always kill the dreamer, but no one can kill the dream.” —about Christians in Gaza, by Majed El Shafie, president of *One Free World International*, who grew up in an Egyptian Muslim family but became a Christian at age 18. He was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to death for his faith, but he escaped and fled to Canada.

—Sources: *Christian Broadcasting Network*, *JoelNews.org*

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

# Mesmerized by Technology

by Timothy White

Satan is a master at mesmerizing the people of the church world. I am fifty years old and I grew up across the road from a Bible school. Our church was a fairly strong church. We had an outstanding pastor for nine of my most formative years. My father was a seeker after God in my early years. When I was six or seven years old my father would take me to the six o'clock morning prayer meetings with him. He would weep and cry and pray earnestly. When we had revival meetings, and even in between revival meetings, my father would seek and pray and weep at the altar. God would help him in a measure. I'm not sure what his besetting sin was, but he had become ensnared by technology.

The CB radio and the ham radio began to take the upper hand with my dad's affections. A turning point downward seemed to be when he spent several hundred dollars that we could not afford on two brand-new Midland CB radios. They were top of the line, and he never could seem to get back to that place of tenderness in his spiritual life until in his later years.

After the CB it was the ham radio, and the crowning point of his downfall was the computer. On the CB you had to search and search for somebody who would talk clean and that would have good values. Now the computer seemed to be something you could immerse yourself in and not struggle with the unclean. That was, of course, before the Internet. Did I say anything yet about addiction? Addiction to technology robbed my father of time with God, with his family, and even to do necessary things that fall to a father's lot to do. I see the same pattern today in other people's lives. They can't even read the Bible unless it is on the computer. The computer is their brain. The

computer has their affections. They are going to be angry when they read this honest article. The computer takes their spare time as well as some they don't have to spare. We are accountable to God for our time. The computer takes their money. It takes their spare money as well as money they don't have to spare. We are accountable to God for our money. The computer takes up their Christmas, their family, their calling, their meditation, and their life in general. You can't talk to the computer addict for five or ten minutes without the computer becoming the center of conversation. Some will try hard to disprove this point and they will do better for a little while, but they are addicted and soon they will be caught up in their addiction again.

It is interesting that some of those who criticized my father's addiction to CB and other technology are addicted to the computer and the Internet. That's where they read their Bible. That's where they study their commentaries. That's where they read their books. That's where they do their research. That's where they get their recipes. That's where they play their games. If anything happens to pull them away from the screen, they fly back to it as soon as possible. They use it in their bedroom. They use it in their living room. They use it in their car. The preacher uses it in the pulpit. They would eat their meal on it, if they could. They can't even sit down and visit with company very long until they are at it again. When they open gifts, they must do it so family many miles away can view it on their computer.

Because of this overwhelming addiction to technology (which, by the way, goes far beyond just the computer), we have lost some things. We have lost the *well-worn Bible* that almost becomes a part of you.

When you have to change Bibles nowadays it is only to a more updated version or study Bible on the computer. We've lost our *passionate praying*. We zip online and send our prayer list all over the world in seconds. Our prayer time has become gossip time. We spin off our prayer requests and we almost feel giddy about the thousands of other computer addicts who will read our request. We got it online before anybody else. We forget that the other person's prayer life is just as shallow as ours. He spends most of his time on the computer too. We have lost our *family worship*. If we have family worship today it is technological family worship. No more prayer requests. No more singing. No more pondering that Scripture we have so lovingly read together. No more little Johnnie reading his first Scripture aloud for family worship. No more Scripture memorization. We have lost our *ability to think*, to ponder, to quietly meditate on the things of God. There are so many resources. How did we ever think that we could depend on the Holy Spirit to open up the Scriptures to our minds without them? We have lost our *families*. Our families are addicted too. The children almost always are addicted to even deeper levels than the parents. Things that Mother and Daddy still hesitate about the children plunge into.

We have lost our *morals*. More of you than will admit it are doing things on the computer and online that you would have been convicted of a few years ago. Maybe it's not outright pornography, and maybe it is. God knows. You would have never allowed your children to play violent games with each other. You would have been horrified. Almost every game you play on the computer has a level of violence. You would never have tolerated selfishness when your children were playing. You would have insisted on them sharing and taking turns. Now, all of you have to have your own computer because you cannot stand to give someone else a turn. You are selfish and you will not admit it. You would never have tolerated the TV in your home. Now you look at one every day. You are more addicted to

the screen than that person you call worldly. You watch movies made by friends and family and in your excitement things are now cute and funny you used to call immoral. You sneak a look at other things besides friends and family. Now it's not so bad. You have lost your *carefulness* about developing a familiarity between married men and women. You have lost your *commitment* to attend church. You can easily find an excuse to stay home and watch the big church online. You have hardened your conscience.

Satan originally helped you to reason that it was needed for the legitimate. I know. I've been there. Now it has you hooked. You argue for it. You call anyone who stands against it legalistic. That's what you say about this article, but in your heart you know I'm right. You won't use a preacher who is honest about your technology. You will cancel this paper today. This is the last straw. You want to believe that people who live a more careful, humble, worshipful Christian experience have gone off the deep end. Times have changed, and so have you.

You're mesmerized by technology. It makes you sleep spiritually and you don't want anyone to bother you. You're almost completely asleep. You are almost comfortable. You are almost in complete darkness. You are almost beyond any soul-searching truth.

Thank God it's not too late. The voice of conscience is stirred. The voice of Truth is getting through. God is calling one more time. There is hope. There is help. There is deliverance. There is victory. There is One standing near who bears the nail prints in His Hands. His Spirit calls to you today. "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts."

Will you continue down, down, down, until your conscience is dead? Will you continue on until it is complete darkness in your soul? Will you allow God to revive you today? Turn from your wicked ways. Turn from your ways that grieve God. Turn to Jesus. He is ready. He is waiting. He is yearning for your fellowship today. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Evangelist of Truth*, January 2010.



## 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 expositional 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](mailto:swandtrump@verizon.net).

# *The Means, Mandates, and Motivation of Biblical Womanhood*

by Eric M. Schumacher

*“That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:4, 5).*

Sitting in a hospital waiting room, I came across a copy of *Forbes* magazine containing their 2007 list of the “100 Most Powerful Women.” I read a summary of what made each woman “powerful.” Many of the women were presidents, chairmen and CEOs of large companies, or held political offices. None of these women, however, was noted for being a wife or a mother. Several of them likely were—but they were not noted as “powerful” or “influential” for that reason.

None of them was commended for possessing the qualities listed in Titus 2. Not one was commended for her reverence, love for her husband and children, purity, kindness, or for working at home and being submissive to her husband.

The world’s picture of what makes a woman significant is much different from the picture painted by Scripture. If we are not careful as Christians, our minds will slowly be conformed to this

world and not, as Paul writes in Romans 12:2, “transformed by the renewing of your mind” so that we may discern what God approves.

God is the one who created women, wives, and mothers. Therefore, He is the one who defines what they ought to be. His opinion is the one that ought to matter to us—even if it offends and confuses the world.

### THE MEANS OF BIBLICAL WOMANHOOD

In Titus 2:3-5, Paul calls for the older Christian women to instruct the younger Christian women in how to live.

These verses are instruction for *all* Christian women about Christian womanhood. We discuss them on Mother’s Day because biblical motherhood cannot be divorced from biblical womanhood.

Being a biblical mother, wife, and woman is not a matter of evolutionary instinct. Biblical womanhood is devel-

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This sermon was preached on Mother’s Day, May 11, 2008. The audio is available at <http://northbrookbc.org/sermons/080511am.html>.

oped through the means of biblical teaching and training. It is not something that you grow up “just knowing.” It is something that you are trained in by those who have gone before you. If this training is not provided, then it is likely we will fail to be what God calls us to be.

Training in womanhood begins with the church and its doctrine. Christian instruction does not begin with what you ought to do, but with what you ought to believe. Nevertheless, sound doctrine will always move into what our lives should look like. The Gospel trains us how to live. A mind full of the Gospel should result in a life that displays the Gospel. And so, the church that does not value instruction in sound doctrine will not value sound living.

Titus’s task as an elder is to teach sound doctrine that calls the older men and the older women to live godly lives. They, in turn, are to teach the younger men and women, respectively, how to live godly lives. Mature, godly women are called on to teach the younger women, training them to embrace biblical womanhood.

In our verses, the older women are to be intentionally encouraging, advising, and urging the younger women by setting an example in word and in deed of what it means to be a biblical woman. Practically, this will mean an older Christian woman investing herself in the lives of younger Christian women with the intentional purpose of helping them to apply the Gospel to their lives as women.

So, let me ask you:

- As a mature Christian woman, are you intentionally teaching and training the younger women in what it means not only to be a Christian, but also to be a *Christian woman, wife, and mother*?
- As a younger Christian woman, are you intentionally seeking out teaching and training from a mature Christian woman in what it means not only to be Christian, but also to be a *Christian woman, wife, and mother*?

## THE MANDATES OF BIBLICAL WOMANHOOD

Paul continues by listing six things to which biblical women are called.

***Biblical mothers, wives, and women are called . . .***

***(1) . . . to love their husbands and children.***

Have you ever considered that it requires training and teaching to love your family? If “loving” your husband and children were a matter of mere instinct, then Paul’s command for the older women to “train” the younger women to “love their husbands and children” would be senseless.

What does it mean for a woman to love her husband and children? Certainly, laundry, dishes, dusting, vacuuming, cooking, and playing taxi with the minivan are all included in love. But, we would be sadly mistaken if we concluded that this was the sum total of love.

Gospel love goes beyond the realm of duty. In any relationship to which we are called, our model for love is the love that God has for us in Jesus Christ. God’s love for us is seen in His working on our behalf—sending His Son to die on the cross for our sins, raising Him from the dead, pouring His Spirit into our hearts and drawing us to Himself—but it is not limited to that.

God’s love in action flows from the affections of His heart. Our Father God is a God of tender compassion, mercy, and grace, a God who works for the good of His people, over whom He *sings* and *rejoices* (Zeph. 3:17). The love of God that He shows to us in the Gospel is not the love of duty, but the love of delight.

Biblical love is not duty separated from the affections of the heart. God has never been pleased with people who go through outward forms of worship while their hearts are far from Him. It does not honor Him. And such duty, devoid of any affection, is not honoring to your husbands and children.

Mothers and wives, the love of God is

the model of the love that you should have for your husbands and children. Does your heart rejoice and sing over the family that God has given you to love? Do your husband and children know of this affection? Is your love directed toward your family, your husband, your children? Or has the love of career, reputation, physical beauty, and comfort captured your heart?

Notice that this command includes no contingency clause, no qualifications. Paul does not say that women should love their husbands and children “only as much as they deserve to be loved” or “if they are doing their part in return.” Paul says nothing about what your husband and children deserve. Again, that is because our love for one another is based on God’s love for us in Jesus Christ.

Christian love in marriage and family is not based upon the law, giving to one another what we deserve. Law-love says, “If you do what I want and keep your end of the bargain, then I will love you.”

Christian love in marriage and family is based on the Gospel. In the Gospel, God shows us tender compassion, grace, and mercy freely. God loves us even though that is the last thing we deserve. Gospel-love says, “Even though you are a sinner, who daily offends me—I will love you as God has loved me in Jesus Christ.”

### **(2) . . . to be self-controlled.**

This refers to living in a “prudent and thoughtful” manner, subduing your own life and exercising dominion over it. This too is an outworking of the Gospel. Paul says in verse 11 that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared . . . teaching us . . . to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope,” the appearing of Christ.

The Christian life is lived in response to the Gospel and in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. We apply His thoughts (biblical wisdom) to our speech, our eating, our sleep, our actions, and our relationships.

A woman who is self-controlled is one

who has learned not to be loud, boisterous, domineering, manipulative, and controlling. She does not blurt out her every opinion, thought, and piece of advice without first stopping to think of how it may reflect on her Saviour. She does not pout or nag when things do not go her way. She is not a slave to sleep, television, food, the scale, the fashion magazines, or the opinions of others. She has learned the liberating strength of submission to her master, Jesus Christ.

### **(3) . . . to be pure.**

To be pure means to have moral sense. Purity knows the difference between right and wrong and how to live in a way that pleases God. Purity is the application of the Gospel to our lives. This is what Paul means later in the chapter (2:11-14), where he writes that the grace of God in the Gospel trains us to renounce “ungodliness and worldly lusts.” Jesus Christ redeemed us from all “lawlessness” to purify us to be a people “zealous for good works.”

We live in an age when purity is not valued among men *or women*. Women, supposedly “liberated” from old-fashioned views and purity scruples, are encouraged to pursue their own pleasures, to use men sexually, to dress immodestly, and to be self-centered divas.

Such impurity is not an option for the Christian woman. She now belongs to her master, Jesus Christ. Her sex life is purified within the confines of marriage. She does not flirt with or fantasize about other men. Her mind and body belong to her husband alone.

She does not adorn her body with suggestive and revealing clothing so that she might be the object of the lust of men. Purified by the Gospel, her modesty and good works adorn the Gospel and show the world its beauty.

Her mouth is not full of the filthy speech of gossip, slander, grumbling, and complaint. It is full of the sweet words of edification, encouragement, and grace.

**(4) . . . to be working at home.**

No doubt, this is the most controversial of any of the things that God commands in this passage. Its lack of popularity does not make it any less clear. The word *working* reminds us that the younger women are not merely to be at home. They are to be “*working* at home.” Being a wife and mother is “work.” There are, too often, women who have not only chosen not to work outside the home, but have chosen not to work *at home* either!

Paul is most likely countering what he warns against for younger widows in 1 Timothy 5:13. There, he warns of young widows who “learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.” So Paul writes that he “would therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.”

Being an idler, a gossip, and a busybody is not a danger for young widows only. It is a danger for married women too. We can probably all think of those unfortunate examples of women who are at home and simply have too much time on their hands. They are persistently on the phone or e-mail; too often, as Paul writes, “speaking things which they ought not.” (With modern technology one does not have to go “from house to house” to be a busybody anymore.) They are persistently complaining and gossiping, stirring up trouble and meddling in business that is not theirs.

This is sad, because Paul says such women give “occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully”—they bring shame on the Gospel.

Paul’s advice is this—if you are still young enough, get a family to care for! Have some babies! Take care of a home! If you are too old for that, then find a younger woman and teach her how to do it.

“At home” means that you should view the home as your primary sphere of influence and your husband and children as your primary ministry.

That statement too can be quite offensive

(much like the Gospel of Jesus Christ). Our culture has convinced the modern woman that she cannot be successful, complete, or fulfilled unless she is working outside the home. The world says that a life spent in the tireless service of others without a paycheck (much like Jesus’ earthly ministry) is a life that has been wasted. According to the world, the life that is spent serving oneself in search of promotions and profit is a life that has been well-used.

God created the woman to be a helper, a nurturer, a sustainer. If there is no helper, everyone else suffers. A husband *needs* a wife. That is why God created the first woman, because the first man needed a helper. Children *need* a mother. The old proverb says, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” When women choose not to devote themselves to raising their children, they are forfeiting what may be the greatest position of world influence that exists.

The temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden was the beginning of feminism. The serpent called Eve to pursue what seemed good to her. After all, she saw that the tree was “good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). She pursued what the serpent told her would be fulfilling and rewarding.

Fulfillment does not come through pursuing what we think will fulfill us. Fulfillment comes through pursuing the purpose for which we have been created. God has intended that a woman’s primary sphere of influence be her home, her husband, and children. This is not to say it is always wrong to have a job outside the home. There may be some instances when this is unavoidable. There are times when children have not yet come or when children are grown and more independent that such work will be more of an option. However, we should ensure that our biblical commitments are fulfilled first.

**(5) . . . to be kind.**

This word for “kind” (or “good”) is found in Acts 9:36, where we meet Tabitha who was “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.” It refers to benevolence—

loving action that aims at the good of others. Kindness is the sincere desire for other people to be happy. Such desire results in actions to bring that happiness about. It is shown in treating others well, working for their good.

Why does the command to be “kind” come immediately after “working at home”? Naturally, it is because husbands and children are sinners, undeserving of kindness.

Are you a wife and mother who is kind? Is the attitude of your heart one that desires the happiness and good of your husband and children, so that your actions pursue such an end? Or are you bent on making them miserable because he failed to be Prince Charming and they aren’t Brady-Bunch-obedient?

Do you walk around perpetually upset and angry about what hasn’t gone your way? When your husband comes home in the evening, does he have reason to believe you may have spent the afternoon sucking on green persimmons? Do you pursue the happiness and the good of your family? Or do you use guilt and intimidation to manipulate situations according to your will? Are you harboring and acting out of self-serving, self-pitying bitterness? Or do you model the meek and gentle kindness of Jesus Christ shown to us in the Gospel?

**(6) . . . to be submissive to their own husbands.**

God made men and women equal but different. There is no inferiority between men and women, but there is an order. When God designed Adam and Eve, He established an order for the marriage relationship. He assigned Adam with certain responsibilities and then created Eve as his helper in carrying out those responsibilities. So, they are both responsible for carrying out that purpose, but responsible in different ways. Adam is primarily responsible for seeing that the task is done. Eve is responsible for helping Adam and following his leadership in doing so.

In Ephesians 5, Paul explains that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church.

You can’t be a picture of Christ and the church if one of the characters is out “doing his own thing.” If husbands are too proud and lazy to be kind and loving sacrificial servant leaders, then the picture doesn’t work. A self-centered or weak or abusive or unfaithful husband presents a picture of a self-centered or weak or abusive or unfaithful Jesus Christ—a false gospel is presented.

Husbands should lead like Jesus and lay down their lives for the good of their brides. They should listen to their wives as Christ listens to our prayers. They should seek only the good of their wives as Christ seeks only the good of His church.

Likewise, if the wife is too proud and self-centered to model a loving, obedient church, then a false gospel is presented. A self-centered, self-pursuing, disobedient, dishonoring wife sends the message that the church should be self-centered, self-pursuing, disobedient, and dishonoring to Christ.

**THE MOTIVATION OF BIBLICAL WOMANHOOD**

We have seen six commands the older women are to teach the younger women to obey. Why is it that the young women are to be trained to live such lives? What is our motivation? What is our goal? What is driving Paul to write these things, as controversial and counter-cultural as they may be?

Paul ends this string of commands with this simple reason: “that the word of God be not blasphemed.” The “word of God” probably refers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, the motivation of biblical womanhood is the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You will have noticed that in describing each of these six callings, I have taken us back to what we see in the Gospel. As Paul writes in verse 14, the Gospel is that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

We are sinners who have offended God, disobeyed His commandments, and

exchanged His glory for something less. We deserve only the wrath of God. Yet, “Christ came himself for us to redeem us.” He did not treat us as we deserve. Rather, He took the penalty that we deserved upon Himself when He died on the cross. And, rising from the dead, He showed that satisfaction had been made for our sins. When we turn from our sins in repentance and trust that Jesus paid for those sins through His death and resurrection, God forgives us, declaring us to be righteous in His sight.

Paul writes in Chapter 3, verses 5-7:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

We are made “a people for his own possession” and “heirs of eternal life.” We become the people of God, and He becomes “our God.” God promises us that He will dwell with us forever as our God. That begins with His Holy Spirit dwelling in us, purifying us, and conforming us into the image of Christ. God’s presence will continue eternally when Christ returns for us and we are resurrected to dwell in a new heaven and a new earth with Him forever.

That message then is all that matters to

the Christian. It is the most important thing in the world. All our lives ought to be lived in a response of faith to that message.

Our goal is to bring glory to God by declaring and displaying the truth of the Gospel. That is what Paul appeals to when he gives his reason for all these commands. When a Christian woman lives out these six callings, she “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.” She displays the beauty of the Gospel. And, therefore, in her the “word of God [is] not blasphemed.”

However, when a Christian woman rejects or neglects these six callings, then her life is not displaying the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She presents with her actions a message that is different than she professes with her mouth. The world may then revile the Gospel because it does not see its power worked out in the one who professes it.

#### **Woman, What Is Your Purpose?**

Feminism tells women to be concerned about themselves, to pursue their own fulfillment, freedom, and significance. Scripture tells women to be concerned with displaying the glory of God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ—and to give their lives to that end.

Christian wives, mothers, and women, what is the goal and purpose of your life? ■

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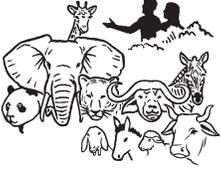
### **— The Devastation of Compromise . . . cont’d. from p. 23 —**

denominations or godly men for religious purposes. However, over time, compromises made by their respective leaders opened the door to erroneous theology and eventually apostasy. Princeton, one of our oldest and well-known educational institutions, in its original founding statement included the following: “Cursed is all learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ.” I wonder how prominent a role that statement plays today?

The educational institutions and the church in the western world have been radically altered by the moral and philosophical implications of living under a worldview shaped by lies. We didn’t always believe them,

but through compromise—just one at a time—our foundation has been shifted. Only those who rebuild on the right foundation will stand the test of time and eternity.

Dr. Terry Mortenson’s book, *The Great Turning Point: The Church’s Catastrophic Mistake on Geology—Before Darwin* (Master Books), which is based on his research for his doctoral thesis, is an excellent resource on the men who fought the compromise that led us from predominant belief in a Biblical view of history to a long-age naturalistic view of history; which in turn set the stage for the acceptance of biological evolution. ■



## Beginning Issues



# The Devastation of Compromise

by John Mullett

I believe it is well documented that one of the most effective ways for an institution (nation, church, family) to be rendered as an ineffective or non-threatening entity is to be corrupted from within. Compromise is almost always more devastating in its effect than is outright blasphemy, and Scripture gives clear warning against it in the Book of Jude or passages such as Revelation 3:15, 16. When we compromise, instead of providing answers to our culture, we only contribute to its confusion by muddying truth. It is readily apparent that in western culture (Europe and America) the church has lost a significant portion of its effectiveness. While there are multiple reasons for this, I want to address one specifically for its foundational significance to where we are today.

Today, the majority of people believe the earth is millions (even billions) of years old, but that wasn't always the case. It wasn't until about 200 years ago that geology became a separate field of science.<sup>1</sup> Fossils were first confirmed as mineralized remains of living things in the late seventeenth century, and until the late eighteenth century, were interpreted as the result of a catastrophic event, which was generally attributed to Noah's Flood.<sup>2</sup> Eventually catastrophism came under attack by proponents of uniformitarianism, who believed that current natural processes had operated at the same

rates throughout all of time. What proved to be something of a final straw for catastrophism was the publishing of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* in the early 1830s.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1800s the church began accepting the idea of the Earth's history stretching out over long ages, although the debate between uniformitarianism and catastrophism was still underway and geology was a new field early in its development. By the time of Lyell much of the foundation for an old-earth view had been laid in the church by the compromise of its own leaders. There were a significant number of scriptural geologists who published competent works on geology disputing the long-age views that were in conflict with Scripture, both scientifically and philosophically, but their voices were largely ignored. In 1859 when Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, the young-earth view had largely been eradicated from the church. This compromise played a key part in paving the way for the acceptance of evolution, and it very quickly infiltrated the church.

The problem with compromise is that it is never contained in any one issue. Because it involves our worldview, it affects all of our decisions and thus has the ever-widening ripple effect in our lives. Early in American history the vast majority (nearly 100%) of colleges and universities were founded by

1. Mortenson, T., *Where did the millions of years come from?* <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/wow/where-did-millions-of-years-come-from>, June 21, 2007. Featured in Chapter 7, *War of the Worldviews* (Answers in Genesis, 2005).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.



# 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.*

## This Joyful Eastertide



by Woodward/Parker

**Lyrics:** George Ratcliff Woodward (1848-1934) was an English poet and composer, as well as a deacon in the Church of England. He wrote this text for the existing Dutch tune “Vruechten” and did a masterful job of matching text to music. It was first published in 1894 in a small book called *Carols for Easter and Ascension*, but it did not become widely used until 1902, when it appeared in the *Cowley Carol Book*, which was also published by Woodward.

The text speaks of the joy that Christians can have because of the Resurrection, and discusses some of its implications. The first line calls for the banishment of “sin and sorrow.” Atonement for sin was accomplished at the cross, but if Christ had not had the power to rise from the dead, there would be no power to keep us from continuing to sin. The second thing that Christ’s resurrection accomplished was to prove to us that He had the power to raise us from the dead, as well. The second stanza expresses the hope of a future resurrection of the dead. As a result of that hope, we can say with confidence that “Death’s flood has lost its chill.”

After every stanza, the refrain briefly explores the dreadful prospect of life without the Resurrection, as theorized by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. If Christ had merely died, we would have no hope of eternal life. “And if Christ be not raised,

your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (v. 17). The refrain concludes with a rousing declaration that Christ has indeed risen from the dead, thereby validating our faith and giving us hope of eternal life.

**Music:** The logical sequence for quality hymn composition is to write the text before the music, and then use the music to complement and describe the text. Many hymns in our hymnals simply combine a text and tune that work together metrically, and the result is sometimes humorous but often detrimental to the intended message of the text. It is a little unusual to find an old tune with a new text that works as well as does this combination.

It is interesting to note that many Easter songs begin with or have as a central theme a very strong rising melodic idea (e.g. “Lift Your Glad Voices,” “Low in the Grave”). While the rising phrase that begins this hymn tune does not have the strength that is present in “Lift Your Glad Voices,” it seems an appropriate way to begin the lilt-ing tune that accompanies this Resurrection hymn. Another “rising” idea in this tune occurs in the refrain with the word *arisen*. The word is repeated four times, with each repetition successively higher in pitch, with the last one being the climax of the whole tune. ■

# This Joyful Eastertide

David's Psalmen, AMSTERDAM, 1685

GEORGE RATCLIFFE WOODWARD, 1902

HARMONY BY ALICE PARKER, 1966

1 This joy-ful East-er - tide A - way with sin and sor - - - row!  
My love, the Cru - ci - fied, Hath sprung to life this mor - - - row.  
2 My flesh in hope shall rest, And for a sea-son slum - - - ber:  
Till trump from east to west Shall wake the dead in num - - - ber,  
3 Death's flood hath lost its chill, Since Je - sus crossed the riv - - - er:  
Lov - er of souls, from ill My pass - ing soul de - liv - - - er.

Had Christ, that once was slain, Ne'er burst His three-day pris - on,

Our faith had been in vain: But now hath Christ a - ris - en, a -

ris - en, a - ris - en, a - ris - - - en.

# An “Emergent” Deception

“But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:  
for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matthew 5:17).

When the serpent, “that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan” (Revelation 12:9), tempted Eve to take the forbidden fruit, his first tactic was to question God’s word. “Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” (Gen. 3:1).

The devil’s tactics have not changed throughout all human history. Still today his first attack is “Hath God said?” Is God’s Word true? It is not possible to overstate the importance and urgency of knowing and believing God’s Word.

From the middle of the 18th to the early 20th century, Bible-believing Christians were ridiculed by scholars and clerics who aggressively taught that the Bible was simply a man-made book. Unlike their skeptical predecessors, these cynics doubted not only the accuracy of the texts, but the authority of those who authored the Bible. “Higher Criticism” as this approach to the Word of God was called, undermined the confidence of millions of professing Christians.

In the middle of the last century, Bible-believing Christians were ridiculed as unscientific and unreasonable. The creation account, Noah’s Flood, and the miracles of Scripture were all discounted as moralistic fables. It is noteworthy that even in many of the evangelical and conservative Christian colleges and universities, the possibility that “God breathed into man the breath of life” is no longer considered factual.

And today, at the dawn of the 21st century, we are met with the spectacle of “The Emergent Church.” Their leaders have managed to fuse the dominant philosophy of our generation, “nothing is certain,” into a basic theological tenet. For them, “truth is not a destination, it is a journey.”

Their leaders write:

“We are half-finished, half-baked, and not driven by the need to find final and definitive answers.” – Jason Clark

“Modern foundationalism, with its emphasis on the objectivity, universality, and absolute certainty of knowledge, is an impossible dream for finite human beings whose outlooks are always limited and shaped by the particular circumstances in which they emerge.” – John Franke

“Moving from Absolute to Authentic”  
–The subtitle of the book *Stories of Emergence*

“The problem with the critics [conservative Evangelicals] here is that they think they have a superior, timeless gospel that floats above any culture . . .” – Brian McLaren

Of course we are humble enough to know that we do not possess all truth. We have never made such an outlandish claim. But we do believe that Jesus is “the truth” (John 14:6).

We reject the notion that Truth is unknowable, for we know Him! He bears witness of the Truth (John 18:37). Pilate, the same who ordered Christ’s execution, wondered aloud, “What is truth?” But those who crown Christ King know Truth.

While we acknowledge that the life of faith is a journey from the City of Man to the City of God, it is certain that no one will make it to Heaven without Him who said, “I am the door”! (John 10:7). Only those who definitely and unreservedly commit to Christ will be saved. No one can be admitted into the City of God who fails to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. He is the Way!

And we reject the idea that since we can

never know all the Truth, we should not commit to the Truth that we do know! That would be like saying that since I do not understand calculus, I will no longer believe the multiplication tables.

Truth perfectly corresponds with reality, but it is more. It is propositional, but it is also personal. “The Word was made flesh . . . and we beheld his glory . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

And we believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is superior to any and all cultures—American, Roman, Greek, or any other culture on earth. Let God be true and every man a liar. We are Christians first. He is the Life! (John 14:6).

Ours is a generation that would rather discuss all the options than commit to a specific truth or person. We love to talk. We loathe commitment. But it is this unwillingness to commit that lies at the heart of all that troubles our soul—our churches, our politics, and our culture.

Leaders would rather waffle than clearly state their positions. Men are afraid to commit to be loyal husbands. Women are hesitant to commit to be faithful wives. Young people are unwilling to commit to virtuous living. Pastors are afraid to say “Thus saith the Lord.” We’d all rather just go along and see what happens than commit ourselves to another person, to a particular choice, or to an idea.

Many are hoping that what they lack in commitment they can make up in sincerity. They imagine that so long as they are sincere they will “live happily ever after.” How tragic!

When President Kennedy’s son JFK Jr. was flying his wife and sister-in-law to Martha’s Vineyard, he sincerely thought he was heading for a safe landing, but his inexperience cost him and his passengers their lives.

Actually, when we fail to commit or when we justify our lack of commitment we are making a choice. We are choosing to believe that the cost of commitment is greater than the cost of failing to commit.

But it is not. When it comes to the most important commitment a person makes—the choice to believe Christ—our eternal destiny is at stake.

Moses urged Israel to choose: “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Joshua made his choice: “If it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

Elijah challenged Israel to choose: “Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

The Apostle Paul knew that half-hearted commitment would not suffice at judgment. When King Agrippa testified, “Almost thou persuadest me . . .” the Apostle urged, “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am” (Acts 26:28, 29).

If Paul had been an “Emergent Christian” he might have said, “Agrippa, I know you are on the journey so that’s fine. Just keep searching around.”

If Paul had been an “Emergent Christian” he would have written, “I am pretty sure whom I have believed, and I’m sort of persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’m considering committing unto Him against that day,” instead of “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 2:12).

*(continued on page 31)*



## Counseling From the Word

# Pastoring in Pain: Serving God When You Suffer

by Bruce Martin

“On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate the pain?” the neurologist asked. “Pain at Level 1 would be stubbing your toe. Level 10 would be the most excruciating pain you could imagine.”

His matter-of-fact demeanor irritated me. Surely he could feel my hurt. The pain on the left side of my face throbbed mercilessly, as always. “Most of the time about a five or a six,” I groaned, “but sometimes as high as a seven or eight.”

For close to six years, I have lived with what doctors now label “Atypical Facial Pain.” One side of my face is in constant pain, without any discernible cause or any prescribable cure. One medical website notes tersely, “Treatment: none available at present.” Pain has become my companion whether I am praying, studying, preaching, spending time with my family, exercising, or trying to sleep.

Like Paul, I have asked the Lord to take away this thorn in my flesh. So far, He has not. Faithful friends, colleagues, even complete strangers, have laid their hands on me, anointed me with oil, and prayed that God would heal me. So far He has not.

I have read books on pain and healing. I have been through X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, and spinal taps. I have tried 16 different prescription drugs. I have had surgery. I have altered my diet. I exercise more than ever before. So far nothing has taken away the excruciating pain. And so I live with

constant pain.

In my darker moments, I grumble. I experience the aches, and I can only pray and pine that the Lord will heal me—now. In my brighter moments, I actually welcome the pain. My spiritual life—and my pastoral experience—has been enriched through coping with the constant agony.

### *Paralyzed by Pain*

I would be dishonest to say I am thankful for pain. If I could do something to never feel pain again—or had never known pain in the first place—I would do so, instantly. Yet I am beginning to appreciate some of the subtle blessings of pain. Years into this journey, I am starting to see some of the good things that come from suffering.

When my health began to fail, I found myself in very unfamiliar territory. For the first time I was overwhelmed by the reality that I could not solve my own problems. Up to that point, life had gone smoothly. I had done well by most criteria. I had graduated as the outstanding graduate of my high school and university department. I earned two master’s degrees from two different universities in four years. I completed a PhD in three years while pastoring full time. I had been blessed with a wonderful wife and three beautiful, healthy children. My pastoral ministry has been “successful” by most measures: people were coming to faith and growing in

spiritual maturity. The churches I pastored grew. I led churches through building programs and into new ministry territory. I was involved in denominational leadership and had opportunities to shape new and exciting ministries.

Then the pain began. Between the pain and medication, I was dizzy and ill for months. Most weeks, all I could muster was a scratchy sermon. I preached sitting down because I was too nauseated and weak to stand. I could not visit. I could not teach. I could not meet with anyone. I had to excuse myself from committee meetings. I had to resign from community and denominational leadership. I was humbled. I was helpless. For the first time in my life I felt physically and spiritually powerless. And I felt physically and spiritually destitute.

I began to wonder, *What if I cannot continue? What if I am physically unable to work?* I looked at prospects for my family and myself, personally. What could I do besides ministry? My skills, abilities, gifts, and education did present options. But all the alternatives were similar to pastoral ministry in their physical demands: speaking, teaching, administering, or counseling. I found myself lying awake at night, experiencing panic attacks.

Spiritually, I was exhausted. I prayed. But my prayers for healing went unanswered in the way I had requested. I read the Bible. The words sat on the page, irrelevant to my life. People offered spiritual wisdom and prayer, but their insights did not fit my situation. Their prayers for healing seemed to be ignored. One well-meaning friend prayed fervently, anointed me with oil, and claimed healing. When the healing did not happen, she politely informed me I ought to have more faith. I was angry with her, but I also wondered if she was right.

Other Christian friends and pastoral colleagues evaporated. Whether they were unsure of what to say or do, overwhelmed by other needs, or uncomfortable with a friend and colleague in pain, most of these friends never called. I felt very alone.

But I did keep praying.

### ***Cries From the Depths***

Several years of hindsight later, I am surprised by the practical lessons I have learned through this ordeal. For instance, I have discovered prayer—real prayer. On my worst days I have been forced to pray, “Lord, just help me make it through this day!” I had never prayed such a basic prayer before. And the Lord has helped me through every day—just. Some days I barely drag through, only to collapse into bed at night, thanking God that I survived.

I read the raw passion of the Psalms with a renewed respect for the suffering of God’s people. I am encouraged that I can pray brutally honest prayers.

My Christian faith has become much more relevant and pragmatic than in systematic theology class debates. I still believe and teach solid biblical Christian theology. But my preaching and teaching on complex issues, such as pain and suffering, is less trite. My reflections are tempered with more compassion than before. While I still champion spiritual truth, I find myself more empathetic with those who struggle with their pain and how their faith intersects with their life challenges.

I believe more passionately than ever in the great truths and promises of Scripture, especially the sovereignty of God. He can heal; I believe that absolutely. But I continue to appreciate that God does not heal at my command. Healing is His initiative and His gift. Healing is not some genie I can conjure up by the right prayer. Appreciating God’s sovereignty, I have learned, is not blind submission, but a statement of profound faith in an omnipotent, omniscient God.

My theology has also become more eschatological. As my present experience has become painful, I find I reflect more on eternity. Until the pain, I rarely thought of Heaven. My day-to-day experience was quite comfortable. No longer. Now I find myself yearning more and more for the promised perfection of resurrection. I find myself more able to understand the biblical

concepts of faith and hope—as yet unfulfilled promises that one day will be our lived experience—than I had before.

### ***Pain Partners***

I have discovered new credibility in my ministry with others in pain.

Last spring I held Pat's hand in the emergency ward when the doctor told him his diagnosis: lymphoma. I was there less than 48 hours later when he came out of his first chemotherapy treatment. The five tumors that the scans had identified were growing faster than any of the internists at the hospital had seen.

Lymphoma explained those splitting headaches that had crippled Pat since December. Test after test had revealed nothing. But the pain had persisted. And Pat and his wife, Nancy, had yearned for a diagnosis. Over the months they agonized, wondering what the problem really was. Now this.

My wife and I knew the stress of waiting for test results and diagnoses. We had waited two and a half years for the source of my pain to be identified. Cancer? In my case, twelve months of tests finally ruled that out. But it was a year of agonizing worry, waiting for the verdict.

Doctors then guessed neuralgia. They prescribed treatment. Ten months, five prescriptions, and merciless days of drug-induced nausea later, no change in the pain.

Multiple sclerosis? Another MRI. A spinal tap that took weeks to recover from. More medication. Another five months. Another dead end.

Another hypothesis. Another failure. Another test. Another blizzard of prescriptions. Another roller coaster of emotions (and side effects). Finally, the neurosurgeon pronounced a “diagnosis of exclusion”; having ruled everything else out, he announced I had “Atypical Facial Pain,” a rare neurological condition in which one side of one's face is always in pain.

My diagnosis is not nearly as severe as Pat's. But both he and Nancy appreciated that my wife and I had been there. We had

endured the “not-knowings,” the “what-ifs,” and the “what-nexts.” We knew the agony of waiting weeks and months for a diagnosis. My suffering has given my ministry credibility with the Pats in my life.

I live 24 hours a day, 7 day a week with pain. Of course, Pat's suffering was much sharper than mine. But as we shared, he knew I walked in pain too. Though our experiences and diagnoses were unique, we shared a bond. As we talked and prayed, he knew that my body was not whole either. We were both wounded. We were kindred spirits, aching together, crying together, and laughing together about lab tests, lunch trays, and tourniquets. Without my pain, we would still have related well. But we bonded more deeply because we shared physical suffering.

When Pat's wife called at 11:18 p.m. on a Friday night, when I held his hand, when he slept in the Lord during my prayer over him moments later; Pat, his wife, and I shared a bond that will last into eternity. Our shared pain led Pat into a shared relationship with Jesus too. That night was one of the most beautiful evenings of my life. And pain was one gift God used to make it possible.

This pain has built bridges of compassion and caring that otherwise might never have come into being.

### ***Pain Support***

My pain life has pushed me to ongoing, intensive evaluation of my life and ministry. I ask the Lord, myself, my wife, and my church leaders to help me discern the absolute essentials of my ministry. I do not have the energy or ability to be all things to all people. We appreciate that I need to be in a team ministry context, where others can complement my strengths and compensate for my weaknesses.

As a consequence, I have changed the way I do ministry. Before the onset of the pain, despite a theological commitment to team ministry and priesthood of all believers, I did everything in the church. I was a solo pastor who shoveled the snow, wrote the bulletin,

taught classes, visited shut-ins, and so forth. I knew I should have had others involved, but it was easier to do it myself.

My disability has demanded that others use their gifts and do ministry with me. I cannot do it all anymore.

I have focused more time and energy developing people who can do ministry and provide leadership in the church. Ministry teams now do much of the work of the church. I encourage the team, but they do the work of the ministry.

Treatment and medication have stabilized the pain at a manageable level. These days the pain is about three on the ten-point scale. I have learned that to keep the pain at that level, I must be disciplined. I swim or walk for an hour every day. I manage my diet carefully. I make sure I have stress-free leisure time structured into every day. I rigorously ensure I take time off. If I get too tired or too stressed, the pain escalates rapidly. I need Sabbath. Now I do not just teach others about Sabbath, I live it.

### ***Painful Faith***

Last year I was one of several speakers sharing my spiritual story at a year-end banquet. The person who spoke before I did talked about a painful condition he had had. He had prayed, “in faith” (he emphasized this phrase several times), and now his pain was gone. His message was on how to pray “in faith.” “If you have enough faith, and pray,” he triumphantly proclaimed, “God will heal!” His experience led him to present a cause-and-effect formula. If you are in need, pray. If you have enough faith, God will act. Guaranteed.

I spoke next. I had not been healed. I spoke of my roller-coaster journey of faith. And I emphasized that though God had not healed me, I had found His Spirit sustaining me, grown deeper in my faith, and developed a more profound daily dependence upon God. My pain has been instrumental in my spiritual growth.

After dinner, the other speaker spoke to me. “How can you be a pastor?” he asked. “You don’t have faith.” In his cause-and-

effect world, my experience did not make sense.

That evening still haunts me. Was he correct? As I thought and prayed, I felt an affirmation that God was still calling me to pastoral ministry. I was reassured that I had genuine faith. But my journey has been different than my friend’s.

God, I believe, deals with us individually. For some, faith manifests itself in healing. For others, God asks us to be faithful by walking through the valley of the shadows. That faithful walking, day in, day out, is real faith too. I have needed tremendous faith to walk, hour by hour, with the pain.

By walking with pain, every minute, I am forced to be faithful. Every day I am forced to depend on God’s grace and mercy. This pain has become one of God’s most effective tools to keep me close and faithful to Him.

If God were to heal me this instant, would I rejoice? Absolutely! I look forward, eagerly, to some day enjoying a pain-free existence. But if God chooses to tarry, allowing me to bear this pain throughout this life, can I see His blessing? Yes. The lessons I have learned, the opportunities for ministry that have come, the growing maturity I have experienced, have been blessings to me and those around me. ■

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### **AN “EMERGENT” DECEPTION . . . cont’d from p. 29**

If Paul had been an “Emergent Christian,” he would have concluded his ministry with, “I have struggled with what I should fight for, I think I’ve come quite a way down the track, and I have kept my heart and mind open,” rather than “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

May God grant that we will not be changed by the wrong-headed, weak-willed, rebellious spirit of this Age, but that by God’s Spirit we will change the spirit of our Age! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Faith in the Future*, the monthly publication of Crusaders Church, USA.

# Building Healthy School Morale

by Luke Bennetch

Johnny pulls his shoes on reluctantly as Mother encourages him to hurry or the school van will have to wait on him.

"I can't stand school this year," he offers with a sigh.

"Oh, Johnny, next year you will have Brother Mast for a teacher and then you will enjoy it a lot more."

"But, Mom, he's just as bad. The boys say he's stricter than Sister Ellen. They got in trouble yesterday just for sliding on the wet hall floor."

Mother groaned within herself. Yes, the children were having a rough year again. Why must school cause so many problems? Why can't our teachers be a little easier on our children?

"Johnny, just do your best," she answered. "Dad will talk to the board chairman. Maybe some things can be changed."

\* \* \* \* \*

Everyone has a state of morale. School morale is the sum of the mental and emotional attitudes of everyone involved in a school towards each other and the tasks at hand. The above story depicts an unhealthy state of affairs in relation to school morale. One can easily understand that parents, teachers, students, and school board are stressed in this story. School morale does not have to be this way. If all the parties involved put forth effort, it is possible to accomplish something much better than this!

## ***Why is it imperative that we maintain healthy school morale?***

First of all, the morale of the school affects every child. Their learning processes will be improved in a good setting but hindered when the setting is poor. Good school morale produces teachers in the rising gen-

eration; poor morale produces students who leave school never wanting to consider returning as a teacher. The psalmist recognizes the need for the rising generation to take up the work of teaching in Psalm 78:6, "*That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children.*"

Also, school morale is closely related to church attitudes and morale. If there is a good level of respect and support in the church, this will foster good school respect and support. If the school has a poor morale it will eventually have its impact in the church setting as well.

Further, we simply cannot afford the consequences of unhealthy morale. Healthy school morale is costly in many ways. It takes a lot of effort from teachers, parents, and school boards. It also takes finances. It requires time. But to allow unhealthy school attitudes to continue will be even *more* costly. Children will grow up to despise God and the church and they will have little resistance to the pressures of worldly society.

Finally, God knows the attitudes present in our schools and churches. We will answer to Him for our thoughts. He will bless us for godly attitudes and thoughts but will condemn us for wrong attitudes.

## ***How can we improve the morale in our schools? What things are important to keep school morale at a good level?***

Most critically, it takes the blessing of God on our schools. We should pray much for the work of the school. We must honor God's Word in our standards and practices. Bible reading, prayer, and Bible classes must be an important part of our school.

Without securing God's blessing, we will labor in vain no matter how hard we try!

It also takes a great deal of cooperation between parents, teachers, and boards to accomplish good school attitudes. There must be open and free communication. We should seek to be unified in our vision and ideals for our school. We ought to communicate early when troubles arise. Students should know that their parents and their teachers are pulling together to make the school effective in achieving its goals.

If there are differences to work out, children should not be aware of this. It should be worked out with the authorities involved. We should never be guilty of spreading rumors. Teachers should know that they will not be gossiped about and families should know that they will not be gossiped about, either.

Trust is an important part of this cooperation. Teachers should be hired with care so that parents can place trust in them from the start. Teachers should also trust the parents. Suspicions, fear, and rivalry will effectively destroy a good school atmosphere.

School also requires good leadership to address the issues that arise from this type of work. Principals and school boards should be alert and actively involved in the school. Teachers may need encouragement on how to relate to parents and parents may need some help to know how to respond to their teachers' efforts. School boards and principals must give direction when these types of needs arise. Parents want assurance that someone is in charge at school who will provide the children with proper supervision. They want to know that the school values every child and works for their welfare. Teachers want assurance that parents support them and appreciate their efforts. They deserve to know where the board stands on issues and what the board expects of them.

A good school experience requires clear, consistent rules and discipline. Teachers must be a good example of the life they require their students to live. Classrooms should be orderly. Students should understand the rules and procedures of the class and be expected to obey the directives of the

school. When there is disobedience, corrective discipline is necessary. Inconsistency confuses students and detracts from good school attitudes. Disorderliness encourages laxness and carelessness. Often the disciplines needed to keep a good classroom require more vision and energy from a teacher than actually teaching the lessons.

We should balance this last thought of discipline with some consideration of freedom to enjoy life. An occasional extra recess, a fall hike, or a hands-on science project will lift spirits and put freshness into a day of school. Students should know that their teacher also enjoys these diversions. Teachers need to be in control of these events and carefully consider what they will do and how it will affect their class. These times must be kept from deteriorating into something that will destroy order and respect in the classroom.

Good school morale also takes a healthy dose of the love of learning. Teachers need to be enthused about their subjects as much as possible. Parents should show interest in their children's studies, even when they themselves struggled in school. To keep this interest, it takes good library books, encyclopedias, and science equipment. It requires well-written, up-to-date curriculum. Homes can inspire this interest by researching things they relate to in their home and job. They can do some study on a historical event related to their community or a place they plan to visit on a trip. Interest in missionaries in other countries can stir the love of geography.

Long-term teachers also help boost school morale. Experience does add something to the classroom. Familiarity with the likes and dislikes of the patrons and board will help school personnel make wise choices. A quick changeover of teachers can bring changes and challenges that require extra work. What other business is satisfied to have such a high turnover of employees?

God help us to each do our part in promoting good attitudes in our schools, and may the church reap many good blessings from the efforts of our schools. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Pilgrim Witness*, January 2010.

# Strange Bedfellows

by David L. Burkholder

In the October 2008 issue of *Christianity Today*, there were two main articles evaluating the (then) presidential candidates from the perspective of the evangelical voting bloc. Abortion and same-sex marriage were hot-button issues in this election and the candidates' views were being scrutinized closely by evangelical voters. Interestingly, neither candidate seemed to be on clear ground with most professed "conservative Christian" voters. And that should come as no surprise to anyone.

Anyone who knows even the elemental facts about election campaigns knows that politicians freely, and at times out of both side of their mouth, say whatever they think will garner the most support from major blocs of voters. Often they will shade their meanings or even back-pedal on previous statements if it will enhance their position or standing with voters. There seems to be little stable conviction based on moral or spiritual standards as firm guiding principles in their lives. Yes, they can be bold in their statements when support is sure and certain. However, when a firm statement rankles supporters or a potential supporting group, they may claim to have been misunderstood, or their comment taken out of context, etc. To put it bluntly, politicians are wishy-washy. Gathering support is the primary and important thing, not necessarily firmness of position or policy. Often running-mates are chosen to shore up a candidate's weak position on a particular issue or with a particular group of voters. This was clearly evident in the recent campaign.

In the campaign much was made of the "faith" or "non-faith" of the primary candidates. One was described as a "postmodern, liberal Christian." In another review it was said of this candidate that he "admits to

doubts and uncertainties, [and] discomfort with some aspects of Christianity, and [has] a belief that there are many paths to God and salvation." One did not even claim to be born-again or baptized and was characterized as having a "generically Christian spirituality"—whatever that means. It seems as though the faith factor was brought into play only in an attempt to influence votes, not to declare a specific Christian conviction on the part of the candidate.

The candidates' stands on moral issues often ran counter to what one would consider a true biblical position. They more reflected a politically expedient position rather than a bold statement decrying issues described by the Bible as sin—abortion, homosexuality, and same-sex marriages, to name the most conspicuous. It was stated in the article concerning one candidate, "Whether evangelical voters can reconcile (his) talk with his walk remains an open question." Thus so-called evangelical voters were in conflict over whom to vote for and which of the candidates espoused the least objectionable principles in regard to their own views on issues of faith and morality. Assuming they would vote, it became a matter not necessarily of good over evil, but of choosing the lesser of the evils with which to align themselves. Strange bedfellows, indeed. Professed Christians and self-seeking politicians. A strange mixture.

If thinking Christians ever needed a clear call to disassociate from involvement in the affairs of the world, this campaign should have provided it. For those espousing a two-kingdom worldview, and because of that the avoidance of civil involvement, this situation would have provided clear verification of their belief. After all, how can one who professes adherence to Christ and His

principles of morality even think of aligning themselves with or supporting one whose life and beliefs are diametrically opposed, or at best questionable?

Maybe this conundrum says as much about so-called “conservative evangelicals” as it does about the candidates themselves, or the overall political process. We have come to expect deviation on the part of politicians. It is common knowledge that they will say or do almost anything to garner votes. A high view of morality or Scriptural integrity does not seem to be their first regard. It’s all about getting the vote. However, we do reasonably expect those who call themselves Christian to be upright in their actions, forthright in their convictions and espousing biblically moral life-guiding principles. It seems, however, that those who identify themselves as the “conservative Christian voting bloc” are more concerned with influencing the voting process than they are in influencing souls to follow Christ. And that’s a shame. A tragedy, really.

The follower of Jesus Christ should have as his primary aim in life to honor God and point others toward Him. That is God’s kingdom work. The political process is part of the affairs of this world, the world system controlled by Satan. As such there should

be no intimate cooperation between the two. They operate in entirely different realms, with entirely different guiding principles and entirely opposite goals.

The Christian’s responsibility to his government can be summed up succinctly in three short words: pray, pay, and obey. If, and as, the Christian follows his obligatory principles, society will become better because individuals will turn from selfishness, pride, and ungodly behavior to behavior which models the life of Christ. It would certainly seem that such would do more to change society than helping to elect officials whose motives and principles stand in opposition to biblical standards, or are at least suspect.

So, fellow believer, are you aligned with the praying bloc or with the voting bloc? Are your energies and interests focused on advancing the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the world? Do you hold to high biblical and moral standards of behavior for yourself and those you support, or are you willing to compromise those principles for the sake of political expediency? The facts leave us with a clear choice. Just whose side are we on, anyhow? Are we making our bed with the world, or with God’s people? ■

## ***Rebuilding a Devastated Marriage***

by Jeff Colón

**I**nternet pornography and sexual sin has flourished in the Church in recent years, destroying innumerable marriages in the process. In an online poll of 10,000 Christians conducted by Focus on the Family several years ago, 47% stated that pornography had been a problem in their home. No doubt this onslaught of sexual sin has played a part in the fact that the divorce rate within Christian homes is

hovering around 50 percent—about the same as the rest of our nation.

Commenting on this phenomenon, Barna Project director Meg Flammang said: “We would love to be able to report that Christians are living very distinct lives and impacting the community, but in the area of divorce rates they continue to be the same.”<sup>1</sup> Christians divorcing at the same rate as unbelievers? Is it possible that we

1. Meg Flammang, Barna Project. [http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr\\_dira.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm).

can do no better than the unbelieving world in dealing with our problems?

My own marriage could have easily become one of those statistics. Rose had every reason to divorce me, and she most certainly would have if God had not intervened and performed a miracle. That was over 15 years ago. Since then, I have been privileged to witness countless marriages lifted from the ash heap and transformed into beautiful representations of God's love and forgiveness. That's what can happen when both husband and wife live in repentance and appropriate God's tremendous promises for their lives.

Ultimately, marriage is a matter of the heart. If a marriage is to be preserved, then hearts must change. This is where God always does His work in a person's life. And it's amazing how all of the other problems besetting the marriage are somehow resolved as God deals separately with each spouse's heart.

My book, *From Ashes to Beauty*, is drawn from Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes found in Matthew 5 are meant to become a spiritual foundation in each heart. God can use those building blocks to raise a marriage out of the ashes of sexual sin and into His glory. If the Holy Spirit is allowed to have His way, He will construct a marriage truly reflecting Christ's beauty on earth.

The truth is that the Beatitudes reveal seven states or qualities of the spiritual life that God desires for His people. They also represent seven aspects of His character. It could be compared to the spectrum of colors generated by passing a beam of light through a prism. The light is broken down into seven distinct colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. Just as we can observe that there are seven different colors in the same beam of light, so the Beatitudes enable us to behold and appreciate each of the aspects of God's character individually. He desires His children to reflect these divine qualities in their own lives. This is the greatest reflection of His glory possible.

In the same way that those seven blessings provide a road to spiritual recovery for a life ruined by sin, so too they provide a blueprint for the restoration of a marriage devastated by sin. Let's take a cursory look at how this process unfolds.

Before this rebuilding process can begin, there must first be a solid foundation. Thus this building project must begin with *poverty of spirit*. God must bring both spouses to an end of their own resources, abilities, and strengths in order to accomplish His work in their lives. It is as they stand empty-handed at the foot of the Cross that He is able to begin the work of rebuilding their lives and marriage.

The first place the Lord begins this marvelous restorative work is teaching each spouse how to focus on his or her own failures, rather than on those of the other. This awareness of one's sinfulness brings about a sense of godly sorrow: *blessed are those who mourn*. As each spouse acknowledges and repents over his own sin, they become compassionate toward their mate's struggles. This new camaraderie further strengthens the foundation within the marital relationship.

Sinful behavior, and the marital problems that result from it, are ultimately rooted in a lack of submission to God's authority. But the repentance that comes about through godly sorrow humbles the person into a state of *meekness*: a subjection of one's will to the will of Another. As both spouses begin to obey and to actually live God's Word, a new atmosphere fills their home. Mutual support and camaraderie replace the selfishness, defensiveness, and finger-pointing.

Inevitably, meekness begets a *hunger for righteousness*. As the couple grows in their desire to please God, Christ is able to reign in the center of the marriage. This new mindset will cause the couple to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Couples will need to examine their priorities in life, including how they invest their time and resources. God can only bless a marriage that is in line with His desires. Ultimately, a marriage can only glorify God when both spouses