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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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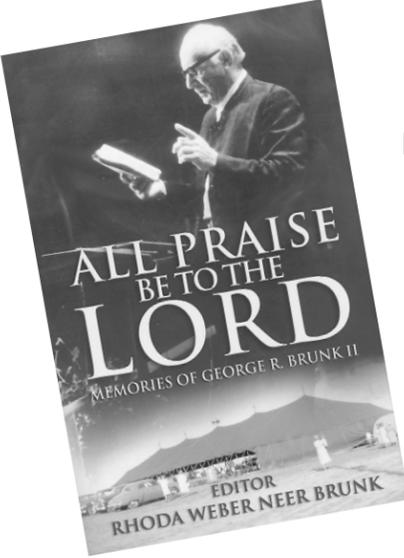
order to somehow make it back to church the following Sunday. I never knew that someone would come alongside of me to instruct me in the disciplines of Scripture reading, Scripture memory, and prayer." That man today has disciplined other men who are now discipling more men. What if Jesus' last

words to His disciples are His first words to you when you meet Him face to face? How will you respond to this question: What kind of disciple and disciplemaker are you? ■

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# Person of the Month:

## *George M. Hostetler* (1883-1951)



George M. Hostetler was born near Allensville, Pennsylvania, on December 2, 1883. At some point his family moved to the West Liberty, Ohio, area where George lived until he was married.

There was no doubt that George came to saving faith in Christ on October 31, 1901, at the age of 17.

Not much is known about him in the intervening years between 1901 and 1911 except that he met a young lady named Mary Belle Smucker and married her on September 5, 1911, when Brother Hostetler was 27 years old. Their first year together was spent at Hesston, Kansas. From there they moved to Canton, Ohio, where Hostetler served at the Canton Mennonite Mission for a year and a half. During their lifetime the Hostetlers were blessed with the births of ten children.

Our next account of this family is in the year 1914 when George was ordained as minister of the Providence Mennonite Church in Oyster Point, Virginia, on July 14 of that year. Hostetler was now 30 years of age. He pastored this church for nearly eight years until September of 1922.

In September of 1922 the Hostetlers moved to Westover, Maryland, and joined the Holly Grove Mennonite Church where George served on the ministerial team for eleven years. Then, on September 17, 1933, at the age of 49, Brother Hostetler was ordained to be the bishop at Holly Grove where he served in that capacity for eighteen years.

As a preacher he studied well and thought deeply. He was a good teacher, making the truths of God's Word plain and understandable. His public reading of Scripture was clear and distinct and people could hear and understand the reading.

When young men were approaching draft age, George Hostetler came alongside with wise advice and counsel and helped them understand the problems they were experiencing because of their Biblical stand.

As one who loved to sing, Hostetler would also teach singing classes.

As to the broader Anabaptist church, Brother George kept track of what was going on in his conference and attended whenever he could.

George Hostetler loved children and always had time for them, no matter how small, expressing his love by speaking to each little one.

George M. Hostetler has been described as a faithful leader with an unassuming disposition. He was known for his kindness, consideration of others, wise counsel, being a leader of his flock, and a sympathetic friend to all. The things of this life did not take precedence over giving help and counsel to his flock. His words and life matched. He gave needed strength and courage to those who observed him. He was not afraid to stand for

*(continued on page 7)*

# Taking Jesus Seriously

by Harold S. Martin

Many times in the New Testament we are admonished to imitate the Lord Jesus—that is, to view His attitudes and to take His words very seriously.

Jesus frequently spoke of “following” Him. He said to a man who wanted first to bury his father, “Follow me” (Matthew 8:22). Jesus called upon the fishermen from Galilee to follow Him (Mark 1:17). To the tax collector Levi, Jesus said, “Follow me” (Matthew 9:9). The word *follow* means “to take as a guide”—and so when Jesus said, “Follow Me,” He was saying, *Accept Me as your guide! Those things that I count important, you should find important.* Taking Jesus seriously means *thinking* His thoughts, *loving* what He loves, and *hating* what He hates. Those seeking to follow Jesus will eagerly try to follow in His footsteps.

To “take Jesus seriously” means that we will accept what He says about the authority of Scripture, about the way of salvation (through Jesus alone), about separation from the world, about forgiving those who trespass against us, and about the nature of the hereafter.

## 1. The Authority of the Scriptures

To take Jesus seriously means that we will accept His views about the Scriptures. One of the most convincing aspects of the Bible’s trustworthiness is found in the testimony of Jesus. The Sadducees (Matthew 22:23-32) tried to trap Jesus and referred to Deuteronomy 25:5. They did not believe in the resurrection, and they made up a hypothetical story about a widow who had seven husbands. All seven of the men died, and so they asked whose wife she will be in the resurrection? (Matthew 22:28). Jesus quoted Exodus 3:6, where Scripture says, “I am the God . . .

of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” and said that those words were “spoken unto you by God” (Matthew 22:31b).

Furthermore, Jesus spoke about the creation of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4), the Flood that destroyed the world in Noah’s time (Luke 17:27), and the miracles performed by Elijah (Luke 4:25)—and gave no hint that those events *may not have been true happenings.* Jesus referred to the *fish* that swallowed Jonah (Matthew 12:40), the *life* of David (Matthew 12:3), the *glory* of Solomon (Matthew 6:29), the *destruction* of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:28-30), and the *provision of manna from heaven* in the wilderness (John 6:31)—and in all this record of Jesus’ words there is not even the slightest hint (at any time) that the Scriptures may be inaccurate at any point.

Also, Jesus pre-authenticated the *New Testament.* In John 16:12, Jesus expressly declared that He was leaving many things unrevealed, but in the next verse He promised that this revelation would be completed after the Spirit came. It is true that the apostles might forget what Jesus had said, but Jesus assured them that they would not be left to their own fallible memories, but that the Holy Spirit would bring to mind all that He had said to them (John 14:26).

The attitude of Jesus toward the Scriptures was that they were without error. And when we discover what Jesus thought about the Scriptures—that is what we are to think about them. There are many convincing lines of proof for the absolute accuracy of the Bible, but the crowning proof of all the evidences, is the testimony of Jesus Himself.

To Jesus Christ, the Scriptures were the infallible Word of God, of which not one

word could be broken (John 10:35)—and thus the Bible is the *final court* beyond which there is no appeal. To “take Jesus seriously” is to believe in the absolute accuracy of the Bible, and to use the Scriptures as a weapon when meeting the temptations of the devil (Matthew 4:1-11).

## **2. The Way of Salvation Through Jesus Alone**

Another concept related to “taking Jesus seriously” centers on our concept of salvation. Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “This day is salvation come to this house” (Luke 19:9), and by those words, He implied that Zacchaeus was a sinner in deep need of being rescued. The word *salvation* refers to the entire work by which God delivers us from our sinful state, and transforms us into new creatures with new goals in life.

One of the most widely rejected teachings of the Bible relates to the total depravity of every human being (Mark 7:21-23). Jesus declares that from within, out of the heart of each human being, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, deceit, covetousness, wickedness, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within the human heart.

There are loathsome things within the unregenerate human heart, all deeply ingrained on the inside, ever since the Fall in Genesis 3. In spite of all the twenty-first-century statements about the goodness of mankind, the fact is, that we have all been born with a bias toward sin, which was transmitted from our parents at conception (Psalm 51:5). And because sin is universal (Romans 3:23), salvation is the supreme need of every human soul. Nothing but genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ is the solution.

Many people react negatively to the words of Acts 4:12 where the apostles said that there is no other name than that of Jesus to call upon for salvation. Yet that is the specific teaching of Jesus Himself, when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by

me” (John 14:6). There are some ethical values in the great world religions. We admire the *Muslim’s* faithfulness in prayer, the *Hindu’s* dedication to meditation, and the *Jew’s* strictness in keeping the Sabbath—but none of these ethical standards has any saving value, because all promote salvation through human self-effort.

No other religious teacher could atone for the sins of the whole human race, for no other teacher lived a perfect life, and died and arose from the dead, and then returned to God to prepare a heavenly home for His followers. God offered Jesus as the only channel by which we can have an eternal relationship with Him. To “take Jesus seriously” is to believe that receiving Him into the human heart is the only way of salvation.

## **3. The Concept of Separation From the World**

The New Testament speaks of Jesus as an eternal high priest who is “separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26). Jesus walked a path of separation from the world. He passed through the world and lived in the world, but He did not partake of its illicit affairs. Jesus associated with sinful people for the purpose of reaching them and winning them for the kingdom of God, but He did not partake of their evil ways. And Jesus prayed for us, when He prayed, “The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14).

The doctrine of separation from the world is scoffed at in many churches today, but the Bible from beginning to end stresses the importance of “coming out from” the world system. See Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 6:17; and James 4:4. From beginning to end every writer seems to strike the same note. Jesus and the apostles all say essentially the same thing. We are to be separate, and not to conform to the *greed, pride, vanity, immodesty, and self-centeredness* of those who follow *the world’s* human-centered way of life.

The “world” from which we are to separate, is the whole value-system which dominates society and is contrary to the ways of God. The world which we are not to love

basically ignores God and operates by ungodly standards. As the hymn writer implies—“This vile world” is not a “friend to grace, to help us on to God.” It seeks to *dominate* our personalities, and to *mold* our thoughts, and to *get us* to try and find happiness apart from God.

The lives of many professing Christians are not very much different from the world about us. We hang around church buildings a little more. We abstain from a few things. But many simply are not that different! One of the reasons we tend to be ineffective in winning others to Christ, is that *we are so much like the people around us* that we have very little *to which* we can call them! Most churches would have to admit *that what they have* is not that much different from what outsiders already have.

Believers must refuse to be guided by the world’s standards of right and wrong. It is not our task to swim with the tide, or to follow the crowd. Our model is Jesus—who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

#### **4. The Necessity of Forgiveness**

The word *forgive* means to dismiss, to acquit, and to loose another from a debt or an injustice. Forgiveness also implies *giving up* a feeling of resentment and anger—and *restoring* a feeling of favor and affection.

Jesus insists (in Matthew 6:14, 15; Luke 6:37) that the human being who will not forgive his fellowman, will not be forgiven of God! In essence, Jesus says, “*How dare you ask God to forgive your sins, when you refuse forgiveness to a brother who may have offended you?*” We owe God a debt of gratitude for the forgiveness of *our* sins, and thus we must show great mercy to those who sin against us. Jesus laid great stress on the importance of forgiveness.

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives instructions about the steps to be taken in securing reconciliation when personal injuries occur. It *begins with* a private session to talk things over; *it is to be followed* by taking one or two others along if reconciliation could not be accomplished in the private session; if the

matter still cannot be settled, then *it is to be shared with* the church (with the local body). In the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples, we pray, “*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*” We ask God to forgive us only to the extent that we are willing to forgive others. A man once said to John Wesley, “*You know, Mr. Wesley, I never forgive.*” To which Mr. Wesley said, “Then, sir, I hope that you never sin.”

Some will say, “But no one knows how much I have been wronged and how deeply I have been hurt.” But has anyone wronged us *more* than we have wronged God? Just as there is no limit to God’s forgiveness of *our* sins, so there should be no limit to our willingness to forgive those who have wronged us. And just as God blots out our sins like a thick cloud (Isaiah 44:22), so, when we have accepted the apology of another, and have said, “I forgive you,” then the matter should be laid aside, and must not be brought up again. Forgiveness should be extended to those who hurt us even if they don’t ask forgiveness. Jesus set the example in Luke 23:34.

Christians who seek to “take Jesus seriously” will be quick to forgive, and slow to get offended toward those who trespass against them.

#### **5. The Need to Treat Others Fairly**

One genuine mark of Christian concern is to be aware that the gospel of Christ crosses social barriers. When the “woman of Samaria” (John 4:9) approached Jesus when He was sitting at Jacob’s Well—and He asked her for a drink of water—she was greatly surprised. She said in essence, “I thought Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” The Jews considered the Samaritans to be heathen and unclean. They did not want to defile themselves by even touching the soil of their country. But in this case, not only did the Samaritan woman’s *nationality* pose a problem; her *gender* did as well.

The Jewish custom forbade a rabbi to greet a women in public, but Jesus had no such prejudices. He was not a respecter of persons. He knows what is in the hearts of

people—and He knew that the woman at the well was an immoral person. Jesus treated the woman with respect and compassion, but He did not support her false ideas. She had a multiple number of “husbands” in her life—and as a Samaritan, she idolized the place where the people worshiped.

Some people think that to be *free from prejudice*, means that we must accept all points of view as being valid. We note that *Jesus did not affirm* the woman’s wrong ideas about her style of living, and her concepts of worship. Jesus flatly says that *the Jews were right and the Samaritans were wrong!* Jesus said to the woman, “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

It is easy to hold prejudices, almost without being aware of it. One does not have to spend much time around a school playground until he hears names like “fatty,” or “slowpoke”—or name-calling that is much more caustic than that. Using derogatory names about Jews, blacks, homosexuals, Muslims, Italians, etc., is altogether unacceptable for God’s people. Yet, like Jesus, believers must be careful *not to affirm the sinful conduct* of liars, extortioners, adulterers, homosexuals, wife-beaters, idolaters, child-molesters, et cetera.

Like Jesus, Christians need to be willing to accept people from backgrounds other than their own, and to do so with kindness and genuine humility. We should ask the Lord to help us substitute *love and compassion*, for what may have been *suspicion and pride* in our hearts. Jesus has the power to transform our lives, and break down barriers of prejudice—if we will submit to doing His bidding.

### **6. The Nature of the Hereafter**

Jesus believed in existence beyond this life, both for believers and unbelievers. He spoke of the blessedness of the redeemed, and of the unhappy fate of those who die in a lost condition.

Some believe that death will “end it all.” They don’t care to investigate options about life hereafter. But Jesus says that an hour

is coming *when all in their graves* will hear His voice and come forth—some to the resurrection of life, and others to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28, 29).

Some people have wondered whether Heaven and Hell should be thought of as literal places. The various descriptions of Hell (a lake of fire, outer darkness, a garbage dump) suggest to some minds that these are figures of something unpleasant, but are not necessarily descriptions of a real place. There are several descriptions of Heaven which lead some to believe that Heaven is not a literal place. Yet Jesus spoke of Heaven as a “place.” He said, “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). He also spoke of Hell as a “place.” He told about the man in Hell who wanted his brothers warned “lest they also come into this place of torment” (Luke 16:28).

Jesus had a lot to say about Heaven. To those who suffer on earth for righteousness’ sake, He said, “Your reward is great in heaven” (Luke 6:23). Whatever else is true about Heaven, it is a place where God’s people will be immensely rewarded. When Jesus said that He is going to prepare a place for us, He promised to come back and take us with Him “that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

Jesus also taught much about the grim reality of Hell. He described it as a place of fire. At the end of the age, angels will “*sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 13:49, 50).

Jesus also described Hell as a place of darkness. There will be those who will be bound hand and foot and cast into “*outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 22:13).

Jesus also spoke of Hell as a loathsome place. Jesus said it would be better for us to enter life crippled (without a hand or an eye), than to be thrown into Hell where the “*worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*” (Mark 9:44). These sayings of Jesus do not require any comment. Those are fearful words. *(continued on page 7)*

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

### Claiming Christ's Inheritance

by Arlin Weaver

Jesus told of a lord who entrusted his vineyard to stewards, only to have them reject his servants and kill his only son in order to claim the vineyard as their own. "Let us kill him," they said of the son, "that the inheritance may be ours."

The Russian author, Dostoevsky, wrote the famous story of the Grand Inquisitor, who represents the Spanish Catholic church. In the story this inquisitor tells Jesus, in essence, "We've gotten along very well without You in Your absence. The one thing we can't afford to do is let You come back and ruin all our successes."

This attitude toward Christ has entered into many churches that give lip service to the Lordship of Christ. These churches, like the vineyard keepers, have excluded Christ so that they can manage the vineyard inheritance themselves. Preoccupied with growth strategies and church politics, tolerant of sin and completely compromising in areas of obedience, their church doors are closed to Christ because He has become an interference to their "ten-point plan for church growth."

But instead of focusing only on our neighbors' churches, we need to be honest with our own hearts to ensure that Christ is absolutely welcome in His vineyard. What are the marks of individuals and churches who have allowed Christ control of His vineyard?

1. *Surrender to Jesus' Lordship.* As believers, we accept Christ as the absolute, unquestioned Lord of our lives. Broken, we desire His direction and lovingly do what He has commanded. His vineyard is no place for those who profess to be His stewards but resist His Lordship; Christ *must* reign.

2. *Sensitivity to the Spirit of Christ.* In an age of superficial spirituality, much of it attributed to the Spirit, it is imperative that true believers are open to the Spirit's work of conviction. We cannot learn how to live—how to deal with anger, how to think about ourselves, how to handle our possessions—from the society and churches around us. Only Christ can give us the direction we need for real-life issues. And only sensitivity to Christ's

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voice will ensure His Lordship over the vineyard.

3. *Actively Seeking the Will of Jesus.* When Christ controls His vineyard, we ask Him for direction on how to best keep His vineyard. In the church this means that the real issue in decision making is the will of the Head of the Church. The questions of what other churches are doing or “how we have always done it” pale beside this ultimate question—Is it the will of Jesus? The body of believers who can truly bow before the Word and His will, completely open to His direction, is a brotherhood where Christ still keeps His vineyard.

Have we allowed Christ into our hearts to rule in His vineyard? Or do we, like the vineyard workers—or the Grand Inquisitor—feel more comfortable with Christ at a distance?

If so, “*What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others.*” ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Ontario Informer*, April 2010.



### GEORGE M. HOSTETLER . . . cont'd.

God's truth. He taught a life of simplicity and nonconformity but he also lived what he believed and taught others. He loved his people and was burdened for them when they experienced problems or differences between brothers. He spent many nights in prayer asking for restoration of relationships and peace in the brotherhood.

By 1951 his physical strength was waning but the Lord answered his prayer by giving him strength to preach at Communion on November 4, 1951.

Just over a month later Brother George M. Hostetler went home to be with his Lord on December 22, 1951, at Peninsula General Hospital in Salisbury, Maryland. At the time of his death Brother Hostetler was 68 years old. — *Gail L. Emerson*

### TAKING JESUS SERIOUSLY . . . cont'd.

Even if Jesus was using figurative language in these passages—still the description of Hell as a place where the fire never goes out needs a great deal of serious reflection. To believe in Jesus as our sin-bearing Substitute is the only way to be saved for eternity. But Jesus is not only our Redeemer and Saviour; He is also our Model in life and our Pattern for daily living. The instruction in 1 John 2:6 is very clear: “*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*”

The girl who operated the telephone switchboard in an office building, occasionally got a call from a man who asked her what time it was. She answered and he quickly hung up.

This went on for a number of months, and finally the girl asked the man *who* he was, and *why* he called so often to ask for the correct time. He said that he was the man responsible to blow the whistle at the nearby factory, and he wanted to sound the whistle at the correct time.

“It's a funny thing,” the girl said. “I always set my clock by your whistle.”

That is what happens many times among Christians. We set our standards by what we see in the lives of other people, or by what seems reasonable to the human mind—and it gradually leads us farther away from God's perfect standard. We need to “set our lives” by the example which Jesus set—and make Him our model for daily conduct. We must accept His truth, and walk in His way. The theme, “Taking Jesus Seriously,” should challenge all believers to demonstrate the same attitudes that Jesus manifested when He walked here on earth.

We should pray like the brother in one of our African churches: “*Dear Lord, You be the needle and I'll be the thread. You go first and I'll follow wherever You lead!*” That's the kind of commitment the Lord Jesus is looking for. ■

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# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## *A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**JULY 4, 2010**

### *The Hope of Eternal Life*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, 23, 24

July's lessons focus on The Foundation of Christian Commitment (see Introduction to Quarter's Lessons). We have one lesson from 1 Thessalonians 5, and three from 2 Thessalonians, one from each chapter. Today's lesson follows close on the heels of last Sunday's, and addresses one of the issues prominent in the Thessalonian church. There was some apparent concern regarding the sequence of events surrounding the second coming of Christ (see 4:13-18). Here in Chapter 5 Paul emphasizes the need for faithful and holy living in light of Christ's promised return—whenever it should happen.

The day of Jesus' return is a secret known only to our heavenly Father (see Mark 13:32). What is known is that it will be a sudden event at an unexpected time. Paul likens the event to the stealthy and unanticipated coming of a thief in the night. The implication is that one should be prepared for such an event, with possessions and soul safely secured. The one who adequately prepares need fear neither thief nor the Lord's return. As Barclay says in commenting on this passage: "The man who has lived all his life with Christ is never unprepared to enter His nearer presence."

Paul contrasts the need for continual preparedness with the careless attitude of unbelievers, those walking in the darkness of unbelief. That day will take them by surprise. Then it will be too late to

make amends. They will not escape God's wrath.

But, Paul says to these Thessalonian believers, you are the children of light, you are not walking in darkness. You are walking in awareness of God's requirements for holy living. That day will not take you by surprise. Nevertheless, do not become complacent; be discreet, sober, alert, and do not fail to admonish and encourage one another.

Their defense, Paul says, will be the breastplate of faith, the active outworking of love, and the secure hope of salvation (see 1:3). Eerdman says, "That hope is the safeguard against carelessness or despair." It is God's will that all men be saved (2 Peter 3:9). He has not appointed men to wrath but to obtain salvation which He has so graciously provided through the sacrifice of His Son. Man opens himself to God's judgment when he fails to avail himself of God's provision. The choice is man's.

Paul says that confidence in the saving grace of Christ should override any concerns as to the sequence of events as they unfold at Christ's coming, or any anxiety over the timing of His coming. He is coming and the time and sequence are in God's control. Instead of anxiety, believers should rather expend their energies in exhorting and encouraging one another as they await that day (see Hebrews 10:25).

In the closing verses of this passage Paul commends them to the God of peace who is able to completely sanctify and preserve them in anticipation of Christ's coming. God is faithful. He will do all He can to preserve us blameless until the day

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of Christ's coming. That security is the foundation of our hope.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. Why are we so intent on knowing when Christ will return? Does that indicate something about our lives or attitudes? Discuss.
2. Constant preparedness is the key to the security of Heaven. What are some steps we can take as individuals and as a body of believers to be sure of that goal? Discuss.
3. What are some things that can lull us into spiritual sleep? How do you combat those tendencies in your life?
4. How can we best help those walking in the darkness of sin to realize the peril of coming judgment?
5. Should Christ return today, do you have your affairs in order?

*Lesson emphasis:* Preparedness for the imminent return of our Lord.

*Key verse:* 23

## **JULY 11, 2010**

### ***Bringing Glory to Christ***

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

This second Thessalonian epistle was most certainly written shortly after the first, likely within weeks or months. While the first urges alertness, diligence, and preparedness for Christ's return, this second one attempts to clear up misconceptions about the second coming. Paul explains here that certain signs will precede Christ's return. To those waiting in idle anticipation, he also urges a return to diligent and productive labor.

Here in the first chapter Paul gives thanks again for their steadfast faith, abounding love, and patience under persecution. The "we" in verse 3 includes Silas and Timothy in his greeting and commendation (see v. 1). Both of these men were instrumental in assisting Paul in the establishing of the church at Thessalonica

(see Acts 16 and 17). (You will note that Paul uses plural pronouns throughout this short epistle.)

As part of his commendation to the Thessalonian believers, Paul indicates that he has used their steadfast faith as an example to other churches. He also reiterates to them that the persecution they are experiencing is to be expected of those who faithfully follow Christ. And, he reminds them, God will eventually "recompense tribulation to them that trouble you."

They are to rest secure in the fact that their faith will preserve them until the coming of Christ and that at His return He will execute vengeance on those who have rejected Him. There is coming a day of great separation when the saints will be vindicated for their faithful living, and unbelievers will be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." Paul uses this great contrast to encourage their continued faithfulness.

That will be a terrible day, when God's wrath is poured out in judgment upon those who have rejected Him and persecuted His followers. Though given opportunity to accept Him, through the preaching of the word and the example of godly living by those who have placed faith in Him, their rejection will result in the punishment of everlasting banishment from God and His mercy.

Conversely, on that day Christ will be glorified by the victory of His saints, and they will be glorified in Him because of their faithfulness. Paul, and his companions, pray constantly that God will count the Thessalonian believers worthy of this honor, that He will give them His full blessing and thus honor and reward their faithful living.

Regardless of outward circumstances, testings, disrespect, persecution, the highlight of Christian living is to so live that Christ will be glorified and His saving grace magnified through the lives of faithful believers. That is Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers, as well as for saints of all time.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. Paul often mentions his prayer for his friends. Think about, and discuss, the benefits of prayer, for the one praying and the ones prayed for.
2. Paul commends the faith of the Thessalonian believers to other churches. Think seriously about whether or not your faith, or the faith of your church, could stand such publicity.
3. Persecution can affect individuals or churches in different ways. Discuss the negative and positive aspects of persecution and ways we can fortify ourselves against it should it come in our day.
4. The horrors of God's wrath on unbelievers should challenge us to faithful witness. How can we be most effective in presenting the gospel to the unsaved? Discuss.
5. Something to consider from this lesson: Is my life bringing glory to Christ?

*Lesson emphasis:* Bringing glory to Christ through a life of consistent faithful witness, even under persecution.

*Key verse:* 12

## **JULY 18, 2010**

### ***Faithful to the End***

2 Thessalonians 2:7-17

The Thessalonian believers had received false information related to the second coming of Christ, which was somehow attributed to Paul. In this chapter (read it all for context), he attempts to set the record straight and assure them that certain events will need to happen before the Parousia. The fact that the second coming had not yet taken place was evidenced by the fact that iniquity was still prevalent. When Christ returns He will destroy all wickedness (v. 8).

Also, the return of Christ will be preceded by a great apostasy which will usher in the "man of sin" (v. 3). This man of sin will be in total opposition to God, attempting even to replace God as the One to be worshiped. However, Paul says, that individual is currently being restrained from the full development of his plan and program. His restraint is under God's control. Paul reminds them that he had warned them about this antichrist when he was with them (v. 5).

Paul recognizes (v. 7) that wickedness was currently rampant, but nothing to be compared to what would happen when God's restraint was removed from the man of sin (see 1 John 2:18). When restraint is removed, the man of sin will vent his full fury upon all righteousness. However, the implication is clear in these epistles that the righteous ones will have been removed from earth prior to the unleashing of the full fury of the wicked one.

This antichrist will wield extreme power, given to him by Satan. He will perform miracles. He will delude those already given over to unrighteousness, those who have rejected the truth and given heed to the lie. By their rejection of the gospel of salvation they have opened themselves to untruth and delusion. Their ultimate end is damnation by God for their refusal to hear and accept truth. They condemn themselves by their actions.

But, Paul says to these Thessalonian believers, and to us by extension, there is a day coming when the saints will be vindicated and the man of sin destroyed. God, in His eternal counsel, has chosen all men for salvation and for those who accept the proclaimed gospel message He promises eternal glory. This acceptance of the gospel opens one to the sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit. The glory that awaits the redeemed stands in sharp contrast to the fiery judgment upon the man of sin and those who follow in His deception.

However, Paul warns, the potential for slipping is ever present. Therefore they

are to stand fast and hold firmly to what they have been taught, either by the spoken word or the written word. The forces of the evil one work hard to destroy the work of God in men's hearts. Paul encourages steadfastness and alertness, essentials for achieving victory over the threats and manipulation of the evil one.

Paul concludes by commending these believers to God, the One who so loved them He provided the means to escape the error of evil and to look forward to a blissful eternity with Him. May He comfort your hearts and preserve you blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. Throughout history many false prophets have set dates for Christ's return. What is the fallacy of this and how can we avoid the detrimental influence this engenders?
2. The Scriptures, here and elsewhere, speak of signs that will precede Christ's coming. Look up the various passages and correlate them to our time. Where are we on God's time clock?
3. Spiritual deception is rampant in our day. Have some class discussion on various deceptive philosophies and how we can best fortify ourselves against them.
4. Look hard at the tremendous contrast for eternity between those who have believed and accepted the truth, and those who have rejected it. Then fall on your knees in thanksgiving to God for your salvation.
5. Regardless of one's eschatological viewpoint, we all agree that one day Christ will return to take His redeemed ones home to glory and wreak judgment on all evil. Our concern should mirror Paul's in verses 15-17.

*Lesson emphasis:* The importance of living in continual spiritual preparedness for the return of our Lord.

*Key verse:* 13

**JULY 25, 2010**

### ***A Disciplined Brotherhood***

2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

As Paul comes to the close of this short epistle he requests prayer for himself and gives further instructions to the church at Thessalonica. One of Paul's major concerns was for the unhindered spread of the gospel. However, he was keenly aware that "not all men have faith." As he wrote this he may well have been referring to the opposition he had faced at Corinth (Acts 18), or there at Thessalonica. He wished the gospel to have free course and be glorified by exemplary living as evidenced by these believers at Thessalonica. This is in contrast to the obstruction caused by "unreasonable and wicked men."

Paul reminds his readers that the Lord will be faithful to His promise to preserve them "blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24; see also last Sunday's lesson). He also expresses confidence that they will follow the teaching he has given. He then commends them to God's keeping power as they patiently await the coming of Christ.

However, there were those at Thessalonica, believers nonetheless, who were walking disorderly, not following the teachings of the gospel as presented by Paul and his companions in labor. Due to misunderstandings relative to the timing of the return of Christ, there were those who saw no necessity to continue their daily labor. They were making a nuisance of themselves by meddling in other people's affairs, and also possibly becoming a financial burden on the church.

To counter this damaging philosophy, Paul reminds his readers how he and his helpers "labored night and day that we might not be chargeable to any of you," even though he taught elsewhere that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14).

Honest toil was a far better testimony than fevered idleness while awaiting the Parousia. Paul says further that the true believers should distance themselves from those who walked disorderly among them. However, they were to admonish them to return to work in order to provide for their own necessities. Busybodyness was not acceptable, and those who refused to work should just be allowed to go hungry. For the purity of the church Paul urges redemptive discipline for those who disobey the teachings of his message.

In his closing admonition, Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers to keep up their good work and not to become weary in so doing. Jesus will return and, if not in their lifetime, their faithful living will assure a secure eternity with Him. They were to go about their normal daily activities, but always with an eye to the future. And that admonition remains for us today.

#### For thought and discussion

1. Paul prayed for his friends at Thessalonica (1:3), and asked them to pray for him (3:1). We should practice his example, both as leaders and laypeople.
2. How can we handle wicked and unreasonable men—outside and within the church? Discuss. Note what Paul says in this passage.
3. Discuss the virtue of working to provide one's own needs vs. accepting support from the church or others for spiritual ministry. Advantages? Disadvantages? Dangers?
4. Explain and discuss redemptive discipline.
5. As we reflect on the teachings of this epistle, what encouragements do we see for faithful living and patient waiting for our Lord's return? Discuss.

*Lesson emphasis:* The call to disciplined living as we await Christ's return.

*Key verse:* 13

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# Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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## Texas City Revives Paddling

“TEMPLE, TEX. — In an era when students talk back to teachers, skip class and wear ever-more-risque clothing to school, one central Texas city has hit upon a deceptively simple solution: Bring back the paddle.

“Most school districts across the country banned paddling of students long ago. Texas sat that trend out. Nearly a quarter of the estimated 225,000 students who received corporal punishment nationwide in 2006 (the latest figures available) were from the Lone Star State.

“But even by Texas standards, Temple is unusual. The city, a compact railroad hub of 60,000 people, banned the practice and then revived it at the demand of parents who longed for the orderly schools of yesteryear. Without paddling, ‘there were no consequences for kids,’ said Steve Wright, who runs a construction business and is Temple’s school board president.

“Since paddling was brought back to the city’s 14 schools by a unanimous board vote in May, behavior at Temple’s single high school has changed dramatically, Wright said, even though only one student in the school system has been paddled.

“Corporal punishment remains legal in 20 states, mostly in the South, but its use is diminishing. Ohio ended it last year, and a movement for a federal ban is afoot. A House subcommittee held a hearing on the practice Thursday, and its chairman, Rep.

Carolyn McCarthy (D-N.Y.), is gearing up for a push to end the practice once and for all. She plans to introduce legislation within weeks.”

—Excerpt from “Texas city revives paddling as it takes a swat at misbehavior” (<http://j.mp/a5kHVu>) in *The Washington Post*

\* \* \* \* \*

## Goofing Sailors Crash Sub for \$92 Million

“A US nuclear sub rammed another ship causing nearly £60MILLION damage—while its navigator was listening to his iPod.

“Sailors aboard the *USS Hartford* had also rigged up loudspeakers so they could play music on duty, an official report found last night.

“Sonar operators and radio men were missing from their posts. Others drove the attack sub while ‘with one hand on the controls and their shoes off,’ it said.

“The report slammed the navigator, who was listening to his iPod in his cabin while reviewing for an exam at the time.”

—Excerpt from “iPranged a submarine” (<http://j.mp/c1dCEm>) in *The Sun* (UK)

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## Pope Washes Feet

“Pope Benedict XVI said Catholics are called to a ‘constant examination of conscience’ but made no mention of the scandals rocking his church before he washed

the feet of twelve priests in a ceremony marking Holy Thursday.

“The feet-washing ceremony in St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome symbolizes humility and commemorates Jesus’ last supper with His twelve apostles on the evening before His crucifixion.

“Wearing a white apron, Benedict poured water from a golden pitcher over one bare foot of each of the priests, who were seated in a row. With the water dripping on a golden basin, the pope dried the feet with a white cloth.”

I’m guessing Jesus didn’t use a golden pitcher and basin, which seems to illustrate ceremonial pomp rather than humble servanthood. Nonetheless, it’s interesting to see Catholics outdoing mainstream Protestants in this area of Biblical adherence.

—Excerpt from “Holy Thursday: Pope washes feet, Vatican slams media amid scandal” (<http://j.mp/dv0bGt>) in *USA Today*

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### **High Fructose Corn Syrup Causes Greater Weight Gain**

“A Princeton University research team has demonstrated that all sweeteners are not equal when it comes to weight gain: rats with access to high-fructose corn syrup gained significantly more weight than those with access to table sugar, even when their overall caloric intake was the same.

“In addition to causing significant weight gain in lab animals, long-term consumption of high-fructose corn syrup also led to abnormal increases in body fat, especially in the abdomen, and a rise in circulating blood fats called triglycerides. The researchers say the work sheds light on the factors contributing to obesity trends in the United States.

“‘Some people have claimed that high-fructose corn syrup is no different than other sweeteners when it comes to weight gain and obesity, but our results make it clear that this just isn’t true, at least under the conditions of our tests,’ said psychology professor Bart Hoebel, who specializes in the neuroscience of appetite, weight,

and sugar addiction. ‘When rats are drinking high-fructose corn syrup at levels well below those in soda pop, they’re becoming obese—every single one, across the board. Even when rats are fed a high-fat diet, you don’t see this; they don’t all gain extra weight.’ ”

High fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is cheaper than cane sugar (sucrose), so it has replaced sucrose as a sweetener in most foods. Check ingredient labels—it’s everywhere. Avoid.

—Excerpt from “A sweet problem: Princeton researchers find that high-fructose corn syrup prompts considerably more weight gain” (<http://j.mp/9bzHM7>) in *News at Princeton*

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### **Computer Glitch Causes Raids**

Since 2002, the New York City police department (NYPD) conducted more than 50 raids on an older couple’s home, sometimes as often as three times per week, in search of murderers, robbers, and rapists. In each case the raid was a mistake, but the NYPD only managed to figure out the problem after the *NY Daily News* carried a story detailing the couple’s woes. The raids came because the couple’s address was used as a test address for the dispatch system back in 2002. —Source: *The New York Daily News*

\* \* \* \* \*

### **British Street Preacher Arrested for Calling Homosexuality Sin**

“Dale McAlpine was charged with causing ‘harassment, alarm or distress’ after a homosexual police community support officer (PCSO) overheard him reciting a number of ‘sins’ referred to in the Bible, including blasphemy, drunkenness, and same-sex relationships.

“The 42-year-old Baptist, who has preached Christianity in Workington, Cumbria [Britain] for years, said he did not mention homosexuality while delivering a sermon from the top of a stepladder, but admitted telling a passing shopper that he

believed it went against the word of God.

“Police officers are alleging that he made the remark in a voice loud enough to be overheard by others and have charged him with using abusive or insulting language, contrary to the Public Order Act.

“Christian campaigners have expressed alarm that the Public Order Act, introduced in 1986 to tackle violent rioters and football hooligans, is being used to curb religious free speech.

“Sam Webster, a solicitor-advocate for the Christian Institute, which is supporting Mr McAlpine, said it is not a crime to express the belief that homosexual conduct is a sin.

“He was later interviewed, charged under Sections 5 (1) and (6) of the Public Order Act and released on bail on the condition that he did not preach in public.”

—Excerpt from “Christian preacher arrested for saying homosexuality is a sin” (<http://j.mp/95az1D>) in *The Daily Telegraph* (UK)

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### Washington Racks Up Late Fees

“If George Washington were alive today, he might face a hefty overdue library fine.

“New York City’s oldest library says one of its ledgers shows that the president has racked up 220 years’ worth of late fees on two books he borrowed, but never returned.

“Both books were due on Nov. 2, 1789.

“The ledger also lists books being taken out by other founding fathers, including Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, and John Jay.

“The entry on Washington simply lists the borrower as ‘president.’ ”

—Excerpt from “George Washington racks up late fees at NY library” (<http://j.mp/c8SYQq>) in *The Hutchinson News/AP*

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### Iceland Volcano Curtails Air Traffic

Most transatlantic flights were shut down for eight days between April 15 and 23. Eyjafjallajökull, a volcano in Iceland, erupted, covering Europe in ash. As the

hot magma erupted through the ice of the glacier covering the volcano, the hot lava instantly cooled into glass/rock dust which rose eight miles into the air along with the ash. When this volcanic glass entered jet engines, it melted into a glass slag. This was not so healthy for jet engines; thus most of Europe’s airspace was closed. Since most flights to Africa and many flights to Asia go through Europe, this affected hundreds of thousands of people. —Source: *Wikipedia*

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### Polish President Perishes in Crash

“A plane carrying the Polish president and dozens of the country’s top political and military leaders to the site of a Soviet massacre of Polish officers in World War II crashed in western Russia on Saturday, killing everyone on board.

“President Lech Kaczynski’s plane tried to land in a thick fog, missing the runway and snagging treetops about half a mile from the airport in Smolensk, scattering chunks of fuselage across a bare forest.

“The crash came as a stunning blow to Poland, wiping out a large portion of the country’s leadership in one fiery explosion. And in a chilling twist, it happened at the moment that Russia and Poland were beginning to come to terms with the killing of more than 20,000 members of Poland’s elite officer corps in the same place 70 years ago.

“A top Russian military official said air traffic controllers at the Smolensk airport had several times ordered the crew of the plane not to land, warned that it was descending below the glide path, and recommended it reroute to another airport.

“‘Nevertheless, the crew continued the descent,’ said Lt. Gen. Aleksandr Alyoshin, the first deputy chief of the Russian Air Force Staff. ‘Unfortunately, the result was tragic.’ ”

—Excerpt from “Polish President Dies in Jet Crash in Russia” (<http://j.mp/bZYBHZ>) in *The New York Times*

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# The Value of Voluntary Service

by Dale R. Eby

Voluntary service can be defined as assisting in a capacity willingly and without constraint or guarantee of reward. The nature of Christ is to give. Upon choosing His disciples, Jesus said, "Go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." How am I giving to others since I have freely received?

The Scriptures have many references about a giving spirit. Deuteronomy 15:7-11 says, "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. . . . For this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

Giving of finances is an important discipline for the Christian, but we dare not forget giving of our time as well. It is not that all of us must serve beyond our community, but rather that we practice serving when and wherever we have opportunity. Abram rescued Lot when the need arose, not because of a reward, but because someone was in need. He was offered reimbursement for his deeds and the use of all his men but responded in Genesis 14:22, 23, "I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God,

the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine."

In the Biblical account of leprous Naaman (2 Kings 5), we find a request for healing made to the king of Israel. The king said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?" Prophet Elisha volunteers his services and counsels Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times. After serious hesitation, Naaman dipped himself and "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." What we note in this account is Elisha's refusal to take a gift from Naaman for the assistance he gave. In 2 Kings 5:16 Elisha said, "As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none."

In Acts 3, Peter and John were going up to the temple in the hour of prayer. When they noticed a lame man, Peter and John told him, "Look on us." The man expected to receive something from them, and he did, though it was not the silver and gold he expected. Peter and John stopped by this man to voluntarily assist by saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Peter took him by the right hand and lifted him up and his lameness left him. Abram, Elisha, Peter, and John freely gave of themselves to the service of mankind.

Acts 20:35 says to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Are we demonstrating the spirit of voluntary service as adults? We have opportunity after opportunity to volunteer our services to

people around us. Our mindset must be to give without benefit, whether in payment or otherwise.

We need to encourage youth to consider times of voluntary service. We have schools that need teachers, Christian publishing organizations that need volunteers, disaster programs that need energetic workers, and mission organizations that rarely have enough help. There is work for all to do for the furtherance of God's kingdom.

As I see it, involvement in voluntary service has some significant benefits for the giver. The first that comes to mind is **the impact on our priorities**. V. S. promotes the thought that life consists of more than just gathering for myself. V. S. can impact one's level of contentment. When we have a job, and see that the bills exceed our income, we consider what more can be earned to meet our spending. We may start looking for side jobs or better paying, longer hours of employment. Under such pressures, priorities can easily make a dangerous shift. When one is in V. S., there is nothing one can do to alter what income there is. Contentment and living within one's means are forced on the volunteer. These are valuable lessons that impact the future. V. S. promotes seeking God's will over our own.

Secondly, **V. S. helps us separate time from finances**. Often we put time together with the dollar figure. We can find ourselves calculating how so many hours equals so many dollars. Valuing our contribution to mankind instead of our financial achievements puts a different light on time. V. S. gives opportunity to give and give for another without any change in one's financial status. Hopefully this opportunity contributes to the establishment of better life patterns.

Thirdly, **V. S. helps us in new and often uncomfortable ways**. Getting out of our comfort zone gives a healthy addition to our perspective. Life requires growth, and to do so requires experiences we never had before. VSers may need to

give "the reason of the hope that lies within them" to the atheist, agnostic, or nominal Christian. This challenges one's own convictions. I found that V. S. helped clarify personal convictions. V. S. will also stretch the volunteer in interpersonal relationships because of the variety of people and the frequent changes that come to the V. S. unit. There are personalities and quirks that call for considerable patience and kindness. Others see our rough edges more closely than anyone outside our family ever saw. All the bad habits we have may test the patience of one's co-workers. They may not appreciate clothes left strewn on the floor or the struggle to get up in time in the morning. Another way V. S. stretches us is with fitting into another culture, especially if we feel our culture is superior. When we give of ourselves in V. S., we will be stretched in new and often uncomfortable ways but hopefully it will sharpen our relationship skills and produce growth in additional areas.

We know that the government has not reinstated a draft, but if it would, our youth would be asked to give two years in alternate service somewhere. Can we encourage the serving of others without the force of government? As parents and adults, we can model a serving spirit. Whether by serving with a disaster project or helping a neighbor in need, we reveal a practical Christianity which our youth can embrace.

Some years ago there was an article in the *Informer* about V. S. evasion. In that article, Rachel Graybill, who was serving in Guatemala, gave three reasons people evade V. S. She spoke out strongly against the arguments: "I have a job." "I will be away from family and friends." "I could never live in another culture without the modern conveniences." Rachel was right in doing so. The Bible says we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice, and it is our reasonable service. It says, "Freely ye have received, freely give." ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Mid-Atlantic Informer*, April 2010.

# Why Do Sunday School?

by Mark Avery

Christian education has long been a part of the ministry of the Church. Sunday school began as an attempt to offer education to children and young people (even adults) who could not afford to educate themselves.

With Sunday being the only day off work, children and young people who had been brought together by work often met in alleys and on wharfs to play. Sunday school provided an alternative to Sunday rowdiness.

Sunday school students were taught to read and copy the Bible. The biblical teaching also helped to establish or reinforce soundness of character in the students.

One need not look far to see that some things have not changed. While the rowdiness has certainly been refined and educational institutions have been effective in teaching people to read and write, the challenge of instilling Christian character remains.

Children, young people, and adults still need a doctrinally secure place to receive instruction in Christian character building. Biblical training can best be accomplished by godly teachers using a systematic, age-appropriate approach that leads students into deeper understanding and application of the Word of God.

## *Christian Outreach*

The Sunday school class offers a small group setting where class members should feel comfortable introducing their non-church friends. A pleasant setting can entice established believers to bring their friends into a safe, inspirational, and spiritually challenging discussion.

Every congregation faces the challenge of making Sunday school a place where unchurched and new believers can benefit from the love and learning of others who have known Jesus for longer times. If new believers or unbelievers attend your class, would they be challenged by your passion

for God and His Word? Or would they go away impressed with how well members of the class can argue their point of view on many less significant issues?

## *Christian Fellowship*

Christians can develop close fellowship and friendships in Sunday school. Generally, Sunday school classes are smaller, more personal settings. Sharing concerns, burdens, and hurts, and taking time to pray about them, builds a sense of camaraderie and love that promotes genuine Christian fellowship. Spending time together outside of the Sunday school class promotes a depth of relationship and fellowship.

## *Evangelistic Teaching*

The effective Sunday school class can also develop an evangelistic nature. Inviting unsaved people to a comfortable setting for Bible study can break down barriers and open the way for them to hear the Gospel message.

## *Nourishing Teaching*

More than simply imparting information or knowledge, an effective Sunday school class will strengthen its students in their Christian lives. The best of Christians struggle in various areas. Sunday school can be a place where loads are shared. Teachers and fellow students alike can offer encouragement, comfort, and compassion for those who are in difficult circumstances.

Not every Sunday school class meets all these ideals. That is no reason to give up. Instead, begin working and praying to see a change in your class. Maybe your class will set the example, inspiring other classes to follow. Your class may lead your church to growth. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Church Herald & Holiness Banner*, 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).

### *Rahab – Converting Faith*

by J. Otis Yoder

When Jericho was about to be overcome, a Gentile woman, who converted to Judaism, was used of God to aid the Israelites. She is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31 and Joshua 2:1-24.

This woman demonstrates five **attributes** of noble character we all should seek to copy.

**Rahab demonstrates teachableness.** She had an open mind. She was not a Jew. She was a Canaanite woman. She heard how the God of Israel led His people, and she believed it. So when the spies came, she was willing to house them. She did it with reverence. It is clear from the record that Rahab believed what she had heard. She was teachable. She protected those spies from being caught. We may question her procedure, but it shows her position. It shows that she was teachable.

**Rahab demonstrates decisiveness.** In the first part of Joshua 2, we learn that the spies came to her house, and she took them in. She apparently knew they were Israelite men. She took them in, and when the king sent for her to bring them out, she refused to do it.

She was guilty of treason to the king, because she refused his orders. She knew as well as he what these men had come for. She believed the God of Israel. She obeyed the higher law. She was available to carry out

God’s intent. It was a decisive moment for her. She made the decision of the moment which affected the rest of her life and the life of her family. That’s decisiveness.

That day became the first day of the rest of her life. From that day on, life for Rahab would be different. She came to the fork in the road, and she chose the right way even though she accomplished it by some questionable means. She demonstrated decisiveness.

**Rahab demonstrates changeableness.** Joshua 2:1 reports that the spies came to the house of the harlot Rahab, and lodged there. She had been living in prostitution. Her house was always open to male guests. They came and went as they pleased. So these two men could enter her house without suspicion. These men were different, however. They did not come for the same reason that other male guests came to her house. They did not use her body; they came to spy out the city.

That day was a turning point in Rahab’s lifestyle. We do not know how she may have advertised her “trade.” Was there a sign on her house? We do not know, but obviously she was due for a change.

Her house was on the wall, and she testified to the effect of the reports that they had heard. Rahab demonstrates changeableness.

***Rahab demonstrates devotedness.***

She made an appeal for her life and the lives of her family members. Return my kindness to you by saving my family. This is admirable. She was not selfish; she was concerned about those people close to her, her extended family.

The spies promised her that they would deal kindly with her. There was to be a red rope in the window. It was her guarantee. They promised her their lives for her life, if they did not deal truly and kindly with her. So she let them down through the window of her house that they might escape.

The agreement was made, and it was carried out. In Joshua 6:22, 23, Joshua sent the two men back into the city. They found her, her father, her mother, her brothers and all that she had, and they brought out all her things, and the Bible says they left them outside the camp of Israel. Rahab demonstrates devotedness.

***Rahab demonstrates faithfulness.***

The men made an agreement with her. They had said if you'll do this, we'll do this. It was a very definite agreement, and she consented to it. The woman was faithful.

She did what they asked her to do, and they did what she asked them to do. Rahab's family became part of the people of Israel.

That is not the end of Rahab's life. God rewarded her faithfulness. She did what she knew she had to do, and God honored her. In Matthew's list of persons in the genealogy of Jesus, Rahab is included in Matthew 1:1-6.

Our walk of faith will be strengthened by reviewing the attributes Rahab demonstrates. Rahab demonstrates teachableness—she was open to the truth. Rahab demonstrates decisiveness—she obeyed the higher law. Rahab demonstrates changeableness—she changed her lifestyle. Rahab demonstrates devotedness—she cared for her family. Rahab demonstrates faithfulness—she became the great-great-grandmother of King David.

Since God used a woman like that, then surely He can use you if you cultivate these same attributes. God can come to you as surely as He came to Rahab and nurture in you a noble character. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Hope Horizons*, September 2006.

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**From Cablegrams to Computers . . . cont'd from page 25**

work there," he says. "People today don't really leave in the same way we did."

"That's right," my mother, Sara Jane, agrees. "When we left on that first voyage, we didn't know if we'd ever come back."

"I wonder if all this modern communication feeds into shorter stays on the field," Chester muses.

So is that bad?

Certainly the rise in shorter mission assignments can be linked directly to improved communication and transportation, as well as the growth of churches in the global South. Has this led to improved relationships globally, and increased the effectiveness of mission from the West?

We haven't mandated only two calls home a year (on Mothers' Day and Christmas) and one e-mail a week—as Mormons do for their missionaries. But are there

dangers that technological advances will distract us from our mission task, mute our effectiveness?

Sometimes I almost long for simpler, slower days—when I didn't feel pressed to make my own flight reservations, take courses online, or respond immediately to a missionary's budget question.

But then I find a cheap air ticket, ring into a stimulating teleconference, and get a digital picture of my grandson tasting chicken kabobs at a night market in China.

Technology is here. And until this fragile, global civilization of ours crumbles, and I'm reduced to scratching pictures on the walls of a cave, I'll have to keep learning how to use a **PDA** and post clips on **YouTube**. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Missionary Messenger*, April 2007.

# Jewish Evangelism

by Floyd Stoltzfus

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).*

Go with me from a peaceful farming community in southeastern Pennsylvania to a metropolis of fast-moving traffic, high bridges, tall apartment buildings, clustered business sections, and a hodgepodge of people: New York City. Our interest is Jewish people. Jews first arrived in “New Amsterdam” in 1654. From 1886 to 1914, there was an influx of Jews immigrating to America, specifically to New York City, onto Ellis Island with its Statue of Liberty.

These people were mainly from Europe and were generally poor. They toiled hard and climbed the social ladder, becoming prosperous and influential. They spoke Yiddish, a German dialect. Yiddish is still the mother tongue in some Orthodox Jewish communities. Many of the words are similar to Pennsylvania German and this has been something of a connecting link with these folks for visitors from Lancaster County.

We as a group of Beachy Amish Mennonites met at Followers of Jesus Mennonite Church several years ago with Allen Roth, former pastor there. The occasion was scheduled at the time of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. We had planned a three-day outreach endeavor called Jewish Outreach Team (JOT). In the forenoon we heard several topics presented related to Jewish evangelism: “Why Anabaptists Should (and Don’t) Witness to Jews,” “Pointers in Witnessing to Jews,” “Answering Objections,” “Understanding the Jewish Heart,” “The Biblical Meaning of the Jewish Feasts” and more. We prayed together and organ-

ized into groups of 15-18 people and sent them to five Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn, NY. We were out on the streets for about three hours. What a stretching experience! We faced some rejections. However, the discussions, the openness, the joy and deep peace, and the blessings that came from sharing the wonders of the Messiah *who has come* far outweigh the rebuffs we got.

The next two mornings we again met at the church to share our experiences with each other and to hear more topics presented on how to relate to Jewish people.

On the streets we passed out literature. Much of the ministry is simply being personal witnesses to a people group who never heard the true Gospel of the promised Messiah. Oh, yes, they heard the name of Jesus. But many do not know the Jesus of the Scriptures. Jewish people, like anyone else, need friends. Much of the world is turning against them. Building friendships takes time and energy. One bridge we often use in connecting with these people is to tell them we come from the Amish community. That strikes a warm chord in their hearts. Many have visited Lancaster County. They asked us, “Why do you visit our community?” We told them it is because we love them.

The Jewish people gave us the Bible and many values in everyday life. As the Holy Spirit directs, we tell them we love the Jewish Mushiach (meaning “the anointed one,” English: Messiah). Some things we say are things like: “We are here to help you find the Mushiach. Could it be that the Jewish people have missed Him? We

believe He has already come. How would *you* recognize Mushiach if He came?" If the conversation easily lends itself to something more personal, it is good to ask, "Do you mind if I read something from the Bible?" Do not mention the reference, nor use the term "Old Testament." If they accept this invitation, read Isaiah 53, then ask, "Who is this speaking about?" If they are willing to listen, share with them how Jesus Christ perfectly fits this prophecy by using New Testament Scriptures.

Here is a testimony of a brother who was along with a Jewish Outreach Team during the Feast of Tabernacles: "Saturday afternoon went better than I expected. I spent some time outside a synagogue talking to a young man. I asked permission to enter the synagogue. It was interesting to be inside yet it burdened me to see the blindness of their hearts. When talking to a few men, I acted very interested in the Jews. I talked about prophecies concerning Israel and so on. Then I asked them how their sins were covered with blood if they no longer have any blood sacrifices, all the while making it clear that I am not a Jew and that I believe in Jesus. I was non-confrontational during the dialogue and no one got upset at me. I even talked about Jesus Christ and explained the plan of salvation. I shared with them how I saw Jesus in light of the Scriptures. (Using the Old Testament, of course) I expressed concern that they do not claim any blood to have their sins forgiven and encouraged them to study the Scriptures when they don't know the answers."

These Jewish men, like so many others, rely heavily on what their rabbis teach them from the Talmud (rabbinical commentaries) instead of the Scriptures. Modern Judaism is a religion of works emphasizing giving and praying. There is no blood atonement today unless they believe in Jesus, the true Messiah (see Hosea 3:4, 5).

In previous years, some of our people from PA had been witnessing and passing

out literature in southern Brooklyn (Coney Island) where there are thousands of Russian Jews. Hundreds of Russian Jews came to New York after communism collapsed in the former Soviet Union. These are typically more open to the Gospel than American Jews.

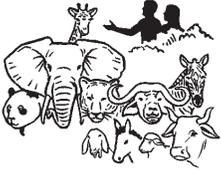
We passed out Scripture booklets in Russian from World Missionary Press (Wings Over Zion) especially arranged for Jewish people. Often these were received with a hearty "Thank you!"

This past October (2009) was the third time we organized a Jewish Outreach Team. Volunteers can come for one, two, or three days. In one section of the city, two men of our team were passing out Scripture booklets to a group of Jewish boys. They gladly received these booklets. More showed up to take some. A bit later, a Jewish man came back and tore up these precious booklets and demanded that they get down and pick up this "garbage," then leave, or he would call the police. Meekly the men submitted and picked up the shreds of paper. Our prayers have often ascended to God's throne for these boys and this angry man.

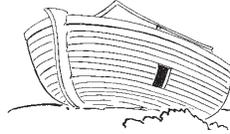
Later in the day, these same team members had several very encouraging contacts. One was with an elderly Russian Jewish couple, Leonid and Fira and their son Alex. Fira expressed her deep longing for peace in her heart and how for years she could not sleep well at night. They shared literature with them, but she was not ready to receive the Lord at that time. Pray for them and pray that we or some other Christian soul winner would be able to meet them again.

The Lord willing, we plan for another Jewish Outreach Team to witness to Jews in New York City during the Feast of Tabernacles in late September 2010. If you have interest in joining us, call me at 717-314-9987 or write an e-mail: [floyd.stoltzfus@emypeople.net](mailto:floyd.stoltzfus@emypeople.net). ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Calvary Messenger*, January 2010.



## Beginning Issues



# Are Chimps Your Relatives?

by John Mullett

With the advancement in recent years in genetics and decoding DNA it has become common to see claims of similarity between human and chimp DNA as evidence that the two are related. Some reports claimed as high as 98.5-99%, but since then those numbers have been reduced to around 96%. So how accurate are those claims and what are the implications?

At face value these numbers seem to send a powerful message simply by what they imply. Really, only 4% or less difference? Wow, that doesn't sound like much! However, when we take a closer look, the data takes on a different hue.

First, it gives no indication of the overall size (quantity) of the data being compared. For example, Dr. David DeWitt has shown that, "... even a 1.23% difference in DNA requires ~35 million mutations."<sup>1</sup> Two-four percent represents millions and millions of bases.<sup>2</sup> A small percentage can (and in this case does) account for significant differences by sheer volume alone. Other significant differences include facts such as: The amount of Chimp DNA is 12% larger than what is in humans,<sup>3</sup> there are areas of significant "rearrangement,"<sup>4</sup> significant difference in the size of telomeres (strings of repeating DNA sequences) at the end of each chromosome,<sup>5</sup> and the number of chromosomes in humans and chimps differs. In studies with claims of a higher percentage of similarity the numbers usually only represent differences where one base is substituted for another and when insertions or deletions are included the numbers drop by 3-4%.<sup>6</sup> Quoting Dr. David DeWitt again, "In

one of the most extensive studies comparing human and chimp DNA,<sup>7</sup> the researchers compared >19.8 million bases. While this sounds like a lot, it still represents slightly less than 1% of the genome."<sup>8</sup>

We've only scratched the surface, and while it gets far more complicated than this, I hope I've been able to reveal that seeing convincingly high percentage numbers in places such as your local zoo's chimp exhibit do not mitigate significant and real differences. From a biblical perspective we should expect to see similarities in design of living things and throughout creation as they testify of a common designer. Our Creator alone is worthy to be praised as such! ■

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# From Cablegrams to Computers

by Jewel Showalter

In 1949, I was a one-year-old baby when my parents carried me aboard a Norwegian freighter in the New York City harbor, bound for Ethiopia as pioneer EMM church planting missionaries.

During our first five years in Ethiopia when two new siblings joined the family, grandparents had to rely on sporadic airmail letters to learn of the births. The most rapid form of communication—terse eight-word cablegrams—were expensive and reserved for death notices or sudden changes in plans.

During the next six-year term when two more siblings arrived, we may have sent grainy black and white photos back to the U. S., but we usually relied on “air forms”—light blue sheets of thin paper that folded into mailers and did not allow for enclosures. For longer letters, and to enclose cards, checks, or pictures, we wrote on “onion skin” inside airmail envelopes—but that cost 50 cents for postage, and air forms cost only 11.

I still remember the joy of receiving birthday cards each May from Grandma Weaver and Aunt Barbara Oberholtzer, and the thrill of seeing strange-looking dollar bills tucked inside. There were also birthday cards from Sunday school classes at East Petersburg and Morris Run Mennonite Churches—two churches which had “adopted” me. Their sewing circles sent me homemade nylon dresses and contributed to my support.

Once Grandma Weaver sent us a package by freighter, and included two of my mother’s favorite delicacies—Lebanon bologna and chocolate chips. These substances from Lancaster County were entirely outside my worldview. Sadly,

somewhere near Saudi Arabia, the chocolate chips melted into an amorphous blob. And the Lebanon bologna, packed inside a bag of sweaters, reeked of moth balls.

When we returned to the U.S. from Ethiopia in 1962, we flew for the first time. In fewer than 12 hours, the turbo prop whisked us from London to New York. No more month-long voyages across the Atlantic, through the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea.

During my last two years of high school and my freshman year of college, my parents and five younger siblings returned to Ethiopia for another three-year term of service. Before their departure I promised my parents I would write a weekly air form. This became a Sunday afternoon ritual. I remember once musing on air form about a certain young man in my life, only to have a response back from my mother—a month later—showing her total misunderstanding of the situation.

Then in the 1980s my husband Richard and I set off for Kenya and Turkey with our three children. Again we relied on airmail to connect back home. We lived without a phone—which was available, but expensive and difficult to procure. Only after a team member’s mother was fatally injured in a traffic accident did we finally get a phone.

During those years in Turkey, I missed my grandmother’s funeral and my brother’s wedding. Travel overland to the nearest airport was 18 hours by bus.

But I faithfully wrote letters to my parents. One Mother’s Day I decided to call for ten minutes: hearing my mother’s voice cost \$50, so it was back to letters.

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

Then came the computer.

In 1999 our daughter and her husband headed to China—with a laptop computer. Instantly from their distant location, we snatched up news of their first home in the university dorm. Over Christmas we connected via **BigZoo**, swapping news and Christmas cookie recipes.

Our son and his wife left for Turkey in 2001. Again we relied on e-mail, and when a grandchild was born there, we got to see digital pictures of his birth—even though we didn't meet him in person until nine months later.

Information technologies continue to boom. This year with **Skype** and a newly installed **webcam**, suddenly we saw our nine-month-old grandson smile from China. We saw him eat his lunch of cooked carrots, and we met his Chinese roommates.

So does this mean I'm closer to my overseas children and grandchildren than my grandma was to hers? Has the quality of relationships improved with jets, e-mail, and Skype? Does it ease the pain of parting?

No and yes.

I have no desire to go back to airmail forms and stale conflicts, to miss significant family events like funerals and weddings. I love the ability to Skype distant family members into the middle of a family Christmas, and to jet them home for weddings and vacations. But communication still takes time and commitment.

With the Internet, we all have access to the same information, the same news, the same resources from most locations around the globe. While this is helpful, it also raises expectations. Instead of enjoying what we can find locally, we order Moroccan rugs in Indiana, or Skippy peanut butter and the *New York Times* in Istanbul.

My father, Chester Wenger, recalls a story from Ethiopia in the late 1950s: he had already purchased building supplies and hired employees for a project, when he received an urgent letter from the mission board. "Don't spend any more money," they told him, because program funds were low. He was stuck. Without being able to

#### GLOSSARY OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

**BigZoo** – A (now defunct) web company that offered inexpensive prepaid calling cards.

**Blogs** – Short for "web logs," are websites that people make themselves and that function as online journals. You can post pictures, write articles, and include links to other sites. Visitors can comment on the articles and photos you post.

**Free calling programs** – Allow the user to have phone conversations with other members at no cost.

**Instant messaging** – A way to "chat" through typing back and forth with someone on another computer, generally also with the option of speaking and using a video camera.

**PDA** – Personal digital assistant (PDA) is a term for any small mobile handheld device that provides computing and information storage retrieval capabilities for personal or business use, often for keeping schedule calendars and address book information handy.

**Picture sharing programs** – Allow you to share a large number of photos with other online members, instead of sending just a few attached to e-mails.

**Skype** – (pronounced to rhyme with ripe) is a peer-to-peer internet telephony (VoIP) network founded in 2003. With a free desktop software application, Skype users can speak to other Skype users for free, call traditional telephone numbers for a fee, receive calls from traditional phones, and receive voicemail messages.

**Webcam** – A webcam is a digital camera connected to a computer and broadcasting to the Internet.

**YouTube** – Founded in February 2005, YouTube is a website where people watch and share original videos.

consult further with the board, he decided to move ahead with the building project and pay for it from his own pocket. (The mission board later apologized and offered to reimburse him.)

"I think the lack of ability to communicate with North America helped us really bond with the Ethiopians and focus on the  
*(continued on page 20)*



## Counseling From the Word

# Pastoring Includes Counseling

by Paul A. Miller

I shall read from recent local (Ohio) newspaper headlines: "Slayings Shock Holmes. According to County Sheriff, the death of a husband and wife and an adult son Tuesday at a residence near Millersburg appeared to be a double murder and suicide. He said it appears the shootings took place some time over night. Two victims, Mary Edna Mullet, 57, and her son, Wayne A. Mullet, 29, were found in separate upstairs bedrooms and had died as a result of gunshot wounds to the head. Dennis J. Mullet, 56, husband and father of the other victims, was found a short time later in the basement where he died of an apparent gunshot wound to the head. The Mullets are members of an Old Order Amish church and a joint funeral service will be held."

For those of you who do not know the Mullett and Hershberger families, this is an event that can cause us to shake the head and wag the finger and the tongue with passing interest, soon to be forgotten. But for those of us who know the families and shared in their shock and grief, we are left to cope with these mind-numbing circumstances, and are groping with the burning question, "How could an event such as this happen within the context of Christian brotherhood?" No

one should have to depart this life in so shocking a manner, while in the pastoral care of brethren and sisters.

I do not mean to be melodramatic, but to note the weight that descends upon the pastoral heart when an event so unsuspected occurs within a congregation. I read these headlines to illustrate how apparent tranquility can camouflage turmoil in the heart. Furthermore, I read these headlines to show what can happen when distant relationships exist among brethren and sisters.

When I was first ordained, I felt that effectiveness in ministry would surely turn on the axis of pulpit preaching. But I remember as well that in the months that followed, I began to realize that the impact of a pastor's ministry may be measured more by what takes place outside the pulpit than what is spoken behind it. If you are a member of a ministerial team of four or more, you will have 10 to 12 times a year to address for 30-40 minutes your congregation from behind the pulpit. That is very limited, brethren. It speaks to how very carefully we should choose our words. The effectiveness of our ministry is determined as much by what we do outside the pulpit, however, as by what happens behind the pulpit.

Let us consider pastoring and preaching from *the safety of the pulpit* versus *the risk of the pew*. What is the safety of the pulpit? Preachers are able to maintain distance between themselves and their congregation by preaching from behind the pulpit. The late Ronald Reagan (known as the great communicator) once said that he preferred eight to ten feet from the front row to the podium when he delivered a speech. The distance we are talking about this morning is not a distance measured in feet and inches.

We are talking about relationships that are cool, strained, or even nonexistent—relationships that are limited to a mere handshake from time to time after a service on Sunday morning. “How are ya?” “Fine, great!” “See ya!” That distance is measured by the blissful unawareness of pastors to what is actually going on in the hearts of the flock they are charged to pastor.

When a catastrophic event takes place we feel that we must resort to damage control from the pulpit. By then, the time for preventive measures is way past. We think, *Had we only been in tune with our members, we could have prevented this*. All the while, preachers and pastors preach from the safety of the pulpit.

What is the risk of the pew? It happens when the safety of the pulpit is foregone, when the pastor ventures from behind the pulpit and goes down and sits in the pew in the midst of the congregation. He learns to rub elbows with them and to know those in the flock to whom he is called to minister. They will feel comfortable communicating with him, because they know him and he knows them.

Brethren, if you are going to take the risk of the pew, you will find out some things you wish you did not know. We complain sometimes that we pastors are the last to know something. Everyone else knows, we complain, and finally the word comes to the pastor. But if we will

take the risk of the pew and interact and engage in the lives of our members, we will learn early on that the waters are not so placid when everyone comes into the sanctuary and “we’re all in our places with sunshiny faces” with white shirts and dark suits, primly and properly dressed, with not a trouble in sight. The pastor who takes the risk of the pew may know from where he sits that there is turmoil in the heart of a brother, threatening to spew out in toxic sludge over the whole sanctuary.

The pastor who takes the risk of the pew may know of things that are largely unknown by others in the congregation. When the heart has been shattered by something, the pastor who takes the risk of the pew knows better how to come alongside and help set that broken, shattered leg so that it grows straight again. He knows how to make crutches so there is support for the one who is unable to walk while healing takes place. He also has a better idea when to take the crutches away again.

How do pastors know such things? By taking the risk of the pew. The choice is thrust upon us to pastor merely from the safety of the pulpit or to pastor also from the risk of the pew with all its messiness, discomfort, and inconvenience. The problems in the lives of our members do not schedule themselves in convenient little time slots. They tend to come at inconvenient times. To the extent that we are willing to leave the insulation of the pulpit and open our lives to needs and to sacrifice personal preferences, God can bring healing to hurting hearts in our congregations.

Most products we buy these days come with disclaimers. This sermon comes with a few, as well. This is not a comprehensive statement on the Beachy Amish constituency’s position on counseling. This is merely a 40-minute address to put forward some thoughts around which we might organize our thinking. It is also not a comprehensive statement

regarding the effectiveness or validity of the various counseling places and methods that are currently available to conservative Anabaptists.

Our bishop committee has, from time to time, sounded alarm about certain kinds and methods of counseling. I wholly endorse and support their statements in that regard. This sermon is also not a criticism of these various counseling centers and their programs. Brethren, I would suggest that our negligence in pastoral counseling is adding to the ever-lengthening lines of those who are waiting to enter such counseling centers for treatment.

This is rather a reminder of the New Testament pattern for pastoring, which includes counseling. The all-sufficient Word of God is the remedy for the human predicament. Men and women find themselves estranged from God by their sin and are not able by their own efforts to do what will bring them into communion and peace with their God. The Scriptures offer that potential. When we hold the Bible in our hands, we are holding the power of God in the world today and in the lives of His people.

The Scripture cuts to the heart. When Peter indicated what the Scriptures said in his first sermon after the coming of the Holy Spirit, he applied them to their current circumstances, and the listeners found that it cut to the heart. They asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Stories can also cut to the heart. If stories are told only to make people weep and to manipulate emotions, there is no lasting benefit. But when the Word of God is brought to bear upon the circumstances through the medium of a pastor who understands the Word of God, and applies it to his own life, people will be cut to (pricked in) the heart to where they ask, "What shall we do?"

The Word of God is useful for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction. It is for teaching. It pro-

gresses further for reproof. Somewhere there is something that needs correction. The Word of God brings that correction. Some of us are very good at reproving and rebuking. But that, of itself, should only lead to the next step: correction. Some of us find it easier to thunder about sin in the lives of some in the church, but the Word of God not only shows us the crooked path we must avoid, but also the straight path we must walk. The purpose of rebuke is only to lead us to correction.

My wife and family spent a winter in Ukraine serving with Masters International Ministries. While there, the mission rightly asked that we take language study. My 16-year-old son and I studied under a Russian language tutor. Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet. So, it seemed that we had to unlearn what we knew, then relearn the same sounds but with different characters.

Soon the instructor said that he noted that not everyone in the class was advancing at the same rate. It was not the 16-year-old that was falling behind. What if the instructor had said, "Paul, your Russian is much too limited. Your pronunciation is pretty bad. Your grammar is even worse. If I were you, I would not open my mouth when I am among Russian-speaking people. Here is my bill: \$50. Please pay me and I will be on my way." Is not the purpose of teaching to learn the proper pronunciation and grammar? I remember making a sound 20 times over, suddenly to be told that I had it right and I didn't know I had done anything different from the first time I tried. As the role of the instructor is to bring proper speech, so the role of the preacher is encouragement and instruction.

Pastoring includes counseling. What actually happened at the time of our conversion? Assuming that the child has been instructed in biblical truth, what happens when he is born again? Does

*(continued on page 31)*

# Vindicating Ishmael

## *God's Heart for Arabs*

by Tony Maalouf

The name *Mavia* does not strike a chord with many of us. Yet it is the name of a once-famous fourth-century woman who, as the Saracen queen, defeated the Arian Roman emperor Valens. The emperor was notorious for persecuting Christians who adhered to the Nicene Creed.

Mavia, having dealt deadly blows to the Roman armies in Phoenicia and Palestine, refused to stop the war until the emperor met one extraordinary condition: the installation of Moses, a pious Saracen desert monk, as bishop over her own people.

According to a fourth-century historian, Moses—when led before the Arian bishop Lucius for ordination—refused the hands “filled with blood” to be laid on him. He considered Lucius guilty of “barbarous savagery” against the saints. Moses then went to the Saracens and “led many to the knowledge of the truth, through his apostolic doctrines” accompanied by miracles.

It refreshes us to read stories of bravery that brighten dark periods of church history. Yet what makes this account more intriguing is that while historians called the Saracen Ishmaelites “barbarians,” biblical and extra-biblical accounts abound in examples of God’s grace at work among them. Sadly the name *Ishmael* does not flash bright pictures in the minds of most people today. Biased readings of the Bible’s Ishmael narratives have reinforced prejudice in that regard. Only a careful examination of such texts can surface elements that help the church better fulfill the Gospel

mandate among Arabs and the larger Muslim bloc, associated in some form with Ishmael.

### *God's Intervention With Sarah*

A close look at Sarah’s circumstances makes the reader of Genesis 16 sympathize with the patriarchal couple. Sarah’s divinely caused barrenness (Genesis 16:1, 2) left her and Abraham wrestling with the choice to resort to cultural alternatives for securing a child (v. 2). Sarah, lacking a Bible, had to interpret her circumstances according to her understanding of God’s sovereignty. And since the Lord until then did not specify that Abraham’s promised seed would be from Sarah (as He did later—see 17:15), Sarah said to Abraham, “Behold now, the LORD [Yahweh] hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her” (16:2).

Sarah’s old age (v. 16; 17:17), and possibly dead womb, may have compelled her to give Hagar to Abraham as a surrogate wife (16:3). Though risky, this controversial cultural practice spread over two millennia. Four of Israel’s twelve tribes were born through maidservants (30:6, 17, 18).

Interestingly the God who closed Sarah’s womb blessed Hagar directly with pregnancy. Hagar boasted in her new role as mother of Abraham’s first-born and (secondary) wife of the patriarch (16:4). And Hagar’s elevated status automatically diminished the social distance separating her from her mistress.

This weighed heavily on Sarah. Finally she burst into anger, blaming Abraham for his role in the matter (v. 5). Unfortunately Abraham handed Hagar over to her mistress, and Sarah “afflicted” Hagar, causing her to flee to the wilderness (v. 6).

### ***God’s Intervention With Hagar***

The Angel of Yahweh “found” the fugitive Hagar by a well in the wilderness and directed her to return to Abraham’s house (vv. 7-9), because Ishmael was to be nurtured under Abraham’s care and teaching (18:19). Yet Hagar’s affliction under slavery was intolerable. Thus the Lord compensated Hagar by making her the recipient of great promises (16:10-12).

God promised to multiply Hagar’s seed exceedingly (v. 10), making her the only woman recipient of such a promise in the Bible. Whether God’s pledge is part of the initial covenant with Abraham (13:16; 15:5) or an independent promise, Hagar became the beneficiary of a blessing bestowed only on those who find favor in God’s eyes. God then added particular statements related to her baby (vv. 11, 12).

Hagar was to name her newborn *Ishmael*, which means “God listens.” This is a reminder that hearing the cries of the afflicted is a beautiful trait of God (v. 11). God promised Hagar that He would listen to her and her descendants in their unfavored social status.

While the angel said, “[Yahweh] hath heard thy affliction” (16:11), we see further development of God’s “hearing” in the verse that follows. Abraham’s firstborn was predicted to be “a wild donkey of a man” (v. 12). Many have mistaken this prediction as a negative description. But we must harmonize its correct meaning in the context of God’s comfort and listening. Names of animals are not, by themselves, insults. Five of Jacob’s children bore such descriptions (Genesis 49). The animal used in the

imagery determines whether the context is negative. That the “wild donkey” is envied as a freely roaming animal in the desert is clarified in Bedouin literature and in the Bible (cf. Job 39:5-8; Jeremiah 2:24; Hosea 8:9). Thus the prediction describes the nomadism that characterized Ishmael and his line in history.

Yet Ishmael’s love of freedom would result in perpetual struggle (Genesis 16:12). Constant roaming of Bedouin tribes, having no established legal system, would put them in a state of conflict with each other and against outsiders. Thus an *enslaved* and *helpless* Hagar, fleeing from the harsh subjection of her mistress, receives the promise of a son who will be *free* and *strong* as a nomad in the desert. Such free living has resulted throughout history in the survival until today of nomadic Arabs related to Abraham.

The third oracle in the Hagar narrative is also often misunderstood. The text says that Hagar’s son “shall dwell *al-pené* all his brethren” (v. 12). Contextual evidence favors a geographical rendering of the expression *al-pené* against negative renderings (cf. the NIV and NRSV). Ishmael shall dwell “in the presence of all his brethren.” (The KJV is preferable here.) This oracle plays on the motif of “presence.” Having been pushed away from “the presence” of Sarah (v. 8), Hagar finds her condition is reversed in the promise of a son who will always be inside the Abrahamic circle and will dwell “in the presence” of all his brethren. The prediction was that Ishmael would not inherit Abraham’s estate reserved for Isaac (17:19), yet he would continue under the Abrahamic blessings as a circumcised child of Abraham and inherit land from God (vv. 20-23). The proximity serves a double purpose. *First*, it would be a challenge before Isaac’s descendants, reminding them that faith and not mere blood relationship is the way to enjoy

the Abrahamic promised blessings. *Second* and most importantly, the proximity would present a potential within the line of Ishmael for conversion through the testimony of Israel (Jeremiah 12:16).

### ***God's Plan for Ishmael's Offspring***

This latter purpose—Ishmael's conversion through the testimony of "his brother"—is more in tune with the heart of God who is eager to bless His children. In fact biblical figures related to Ishmael surface on and off in Scripture as believers in the God of Abraham. Job, Agur, Lemuel, and probably "the magi" are just a few examples of His grace working among Ishmael's children in biblical history (Job 1:3; Proverbs 30–31; Matthew 2).

Thousands of Arabs who lived and died for Christ in early church history were recipients of God's grace. Still today, thousands are coming to the Saviour in the Arab and Muslim world. The same texts that present evidence for a restoration of a Jewish remnant (Isaiah 60:1-5) predict the restoration of a larger remnant among the Arabian children of Abraham (vv. 6, 7).

The desert has the inherent propensity to yield two extremes. It can produce the toughest elements, but it may also yield spiritual giants. In a post-9/11 world preoccupied mostly with "the tough," the church must not forget that there are saints in the making, living "in the presence" of people to whom God entrusted the sanctifying message of the Gospel. ■

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### **Pastoring Includes Counseling . . . cont'd.**

that mean that everything he learned before is instantly forgotten? Is sanctification a process or an event? It is both. At the point of conversion, we are regenerated, set aside, born again, are given the Spirit of God in our hearts, and now have new power to overcome the patterns of sinful behavior that we practiced in our unconverted state.

Thus sanctification is the process by which we learn to overcome these patterns of sinful behavior. Those sinful patterns are not limited to little boys and girls. To the end of our days, we are striving to overcome the natural impulses of our flesh. Is it not therefore only logical that there will be a need within our congregation for repentance and confession? This is the need to confess failure, sin, and shortcomings. We must provide a safe haven within which to fail, make confession, and to restore spirituality. We must provide a safe place for our people to encounter God.

The Word of God is sufficient to transform human lives. God places His newborn children in the church. Words fail us to describe the irresponsibility of parents who place a newborn infant in a dumpster or on a hospital doorstep. I do not want to characterize God as being irresponsible, but when God has children who are newly born of the Spirit, He places them in His family.

How are men and women to be nurtured today so that we might be adequately furnished (equipped) unto all good works? By immersing ourselves in the Word of God. It is the Word of God that makes men and women of God.

I leave you with three quotes from men of three different centuries. James I. Packer: "If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folk from digging into the Bible." John Bunyan: "Sin will keep you from this book or this book will keep you from sin." Vance Havner: "The Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not." ■

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# Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

“... singing with understanding!”

## Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove



Browne/Bradbury

**Lyrics:** “Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove” is a prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit. Its simple yet powerful text speaks eloquently of the various aspects of ministry this member of the Trinity seeks to fulfill in our lives. In addition to helping us acknowledge our needs before God, this type of written prayer also serves to remind us what some of our specific needs really are. We can pray with the poet, the page guiding our thoughts as we collectively express our needs to God.

What are the needs spoken of in this hymn that the Holy Spirit can address? As fallen humans, we are incapable of making the right decisions on our own, so the first thing this hymn requests is light and guidance. We need Divine guidance for “every thought and step.” As the second verse mentions, part of that guidance involves revealing truth to us in ways that we can understand. This can include helping us to understand the truth in God’s word, as well as the little daily issues we face. Furthermore, because of our fallenness, we also need Him to give us the power to choose the right way. Left to ourselves, we would not always make the right choices, even when we know beyond the shadow of a doubt which is the best decision. A

lifestyle that focuses on making the right choices under the blessing and direction of the Holy Spirit will put us on the road of holiness, “which we must take to dwell with God.” The final result will be the “fullness of joy” that results from knowing God perfectly in Heaven.

**Music:** The most notable single feature of this hymn tune is the four-note rhythmic motif that makes up almost the entire hymn. The three quarter notes followed by a dotted half provide a lilting little bit of syncopation that gives the tune a sense of forward motion. For the very last phrase, the composer stops the motion from rolling on any further, and brings the hymn to a close with a more conventional rhythmic sequence.

Because the phrases neither begin nor end on an accented syllable, it can be a bit challenging for the director to lead in such a way as to keep the congregation together. The important thing for the leader is to be aware of where the beats actually fall, and keep his direction firmly on the beats, letting the notes fall where they belong in relation to the pulse. Trying to direct notes instead of beats can be disastrous, not only for the togetherness of the singers, but also for the character of the hymn. ■

# Come, Gracious Spirit, Heavenly Dove

*He will guide you into all truth.* – John 16:13, 14

S. BROWNE, 1680-1732

BACA. L.M.

WILLIAM B. BRADBURY

1. Come, gra-cious Spir - it, heav'n ly Dove, With light and com - fort  
 2. The light of truth to us dis - play, And make us know and  
 3. Lead us to ho - li - ness—the road Which we must take to  
 4. Lead us to God, our fi - nal rest, To be with Him for-

from a - bove; Be Thou our guard-ian, Thou our guide, O'er ev - 'ry  
 choose Thy way; Plant ho - ly fear in ev - 'ry heart, That we from  
 dwell with God; Lead us to Christ, the liv - ing way, Nor let us  
 ev - er blest; Lead us to heav'n, its bliss to share—Full-ness of

thought and step pre - side, O'er ev - 'ry thought and step pre - side.  
 God may ne'er de - part, That we from God may ne'er de - part.  
 from His pas-tures stray, Nor let us from His pas-tures stray.  
 joy for - ev - er there, Full-ness of joy for - ev - er there.



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# *Discipleship Is Crucial, Fundamental for Believers*

by Robby Gallaty

November 22, 1999, is the day my life radically changed. While I was driving home from work, an 18-wheeler rear-ended me at sixty-five miles an hour.

Two discs in my neck and two in my back were herniated as a result of the accident. Consequently, the doctors prescribed pharmaceutical drugs to help me deal with the pain; within three months, I was addicted to pain medicine. After a three-year battle with drugs and two rehabilitation treatments, I cried out to the Lord Jesus for help. On November 12, 2002, I surrendered my life completely to Christ.

Without a mentor in the faith, I had no direction or specific plan for how to grow closer to God. No one instructed me in the importance and value of reading the Bible or spending time alone with God. Yes, I had heard sermons about these disciplines from the pastor of the church I was attending, but no one ever gave me a plan or instructions on how to deliberately and specifically do this. David Platt, a church member, approached me after church about meeting with him once a week to study the Word and pray. Over the next five months, David worked with me and taught me how to foster an intimate relationship with Christ.

As I grew in my faith and knowledge of the Word, I became aware that very few believers—old or new—have a mentor in their lives who would instruct them in foundational doctrines, principles, and practices of the faith through discipleship.

I have been a pastor for some time now, and I have come to realize that new

believers are not the only “undisciplined” disciples. In fact, it seems that most church members have not experienced the benefits of discipleship. There seems to be a disconnect between evangelism and discipleship, but in actuality, the two go hand in hand.

The statistics reveal that the percentages of those attending church are declining in staggering numbers. Having surveyed churches for the past eighteen years, David Olson, Director of the American Church Research Projects, reported eye-opening results in an article titled “29 Interesting Facts About the Church.” He found that “on any given weekend in 1990, 20.4 percent of the American population attended an orthodox Christian church. On any given weekend in 2000, 18.7 percent of the American population attended an orthodox Christian church. In 2003 the Christian church attendance percentage was 17.8 percent. If the present rate of decline continues, in 2050 11.7 percent of the population will be in a Christian church on any given weekend.” If the church continues to trek down this road, the future looks bleak.

T-NET International conducted a survey entitled “Spiritual Journey Evaluation” to determine if churches were producing disciples. The team polled over four thousand churchgoers from thirty-five churches representing different denominations. Aubrey Malphurs, quoting Bob Gilliam, co-founder and president of T-NET International, says in *Strategic Disciple Making*, “Many people in these churches are not growing spiritually. Of those taking this survey,

24 percent indicated that their behavior was sliding backward and 41 percent said they were 'static' in their spiritual growth." Over six out of ten church attendees admitted that their spiritual lives were stagnant. Should the Christian life be stagnant? Are disciples static?

Five years after writing about mobilizing, inspiring, and leading others, Bill Hybels, Senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, publicly apologized to his congregation for failing to produce disciples through his church. After investing thirty years of ministry and millions of dollars in programs and promotions, they were not making disciples. Hybels hired a company to evaluate Willow Creek's effectiveness, and the results caused Hybels to experience what he called in *Christianity Today* "the wake-up call" of his adult life.

Hybels went on to express his frustration, "We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and became Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people how to read their Bible between services, and how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own." Resources were expended to attract visitors, but a plan for assimilation was nonexistent.

In the Southern Baptist Convention, Mark Kelly of LifeWay Research created an online study entitled, "Critical Ministries and Their Leadership," which questioned 801 Southern Baptist pastors representing churches of various sizes about the most critical ministries in their churches. Pastors listed ministries in the order of importance: Evangelism/Outreach (24%); Sunday School/Bible Study/Small Groups (17%); Worship/Specific Worship Services (13%); Preaching/Proclamation/Teaching (10%); Children/Youth (9%); Discipleship/Spiritual Growth/Mentoring/ Coun-

seling (7%); Prayer/Prayer Ministry/Prayer Groups (5%). These pastors sadly rank discipleship near the bottom of their priority list.

Sadly, everyone who talks about discipleship does not practice it. The reason for this may be the ambiguity in the terminology. A. Boyd Luter, Jr. addresses the misconceptions associated with the term *discipleship*: "Many Christian workers view discipleship as an activity that is to take place apart from the local church and that has little relationship to the church's major purpose." Discipleship should not be another program offered, but the product of relationships built throughout the church.

The term *Christian* is used just three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and 1 Peter 4:16). Only much later did the label *Christian* carry a positive meaning. According to *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, "Some have argued that the designation was at first a term of derision; others, that it simply denoted a group loyal to 'Christ.'" It was a term given to followers of Christ by unbelievers. Jesus was not interested in making just "converts"; He was committed to making disciples. Interestingly, the word *disciple* is used 269 times in the New Testament and 238 times in the Gospels alone. Jesus, before ascending to Heaven, commanded His followers to "make disciples" (see Matthew 28:18-20). This was not an option; it was an imperative.

A disciple is a learner, an apprentice, or a student. Clearly, Jesus is interested in producing disciples, not just "Christians." How many followers of Christ are disciples in the sense that Jesus intended? If a disciple is defined as a student or as a learner, can someone fall short in being a disciple if he or she stops learning? Can a person be a disciple without graduating from a seminary? Can a person who has been the pastor of a church for fifty years not be a disciple? Is that possible? The answer to all of the questions is **Yes!** A life without learning

is a life devoid of discipleship.

Although the term *discipleship* is non-existent in the Scriptures, the concept is everywhere. Discipleship is not a product but a process. Michael Wilkins in his book, *Following the Master: Biblical Theology of Discipleship*, believes that “conversion marks the beginning point of discipleship, not a later point of commitment or a process of spiritual growth. Degrees of maturity will be realized as one traverses the discipleship path, but all true believers are disciples on that path.” It is the job of the leader to assist the new believer as he or she traverses the road of discipleship. This can be done through a number of disciplines: Scripture reading, Scripture memorization, prayer, etc.

Bill Hull, a leading author in the area of discipleship, states in *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, “I find it particularly puzzling that we struggle to put disciple-making at the center of ministry even though Jesus left us with the clear imperative to ‘make disciples.’” Before a church can disciple its people, the leadership must understand the need for discipleship and become disciples themselves.

Words without action discount integrity. New Testament professor Dr. Scot McKnight says in *The Shape of Faith to Come*, “If one understands discipleship as ‘daily routine,’ then one will produce those who have daily routines. If one understands discipleship as ‘evangelistic ministry,’ then one will produce evangelists. If one understands discipleship as ‘Bible study,’ then one will produce biblical scholars. If one understands discipleship as ‘effective operations,’ then one will produce administrative geniuses.” A clear vision is imperative for leading others in Christlikeness. Hull suggests in *The Disciple-Making Pastor* that to understand “what a disciple is and what a disciple does are top priorities for the church,” and that churches run into the problem

of throwing “the word *disciple* around freely, but too often with no definition.”

### ***Practical Discipleship Practices***

How is discipleship accomplished? In order to make disciples, it is important to be a disciple. What is the next step after leading someone to the Lord? Most pastors would instruct the new believer to begin reading one chapter in the Book of John, foster closeness with the Lord through prayer, and return to church on Sunday. The new believer leaves the office as clueless about nurturing a relationship with God as he or she was upon entering. Sadly, this situation is repeated throughout evangelical churches every day. Most believers desire a deeper relationship with the Lord, but they are unaware of what steps they need to take to cultivate that intimacy with their Saviour.

A simple book outlining the fundamentals for growth in the Christian life would have helped me immensely in the early years of my Christian life. A manual teaching the basics of Scripture reading, Scripture memorization, prayer, and obedience could have eliminated countless days of my wandering aimlessly as a Christian. Many believers, if not most, do not know the need or understand how to study the Bible, memorize Scripture, pray, and obey God’s Word. Many of those who do know these disciplines rarely practice them. This was the motivation for my writing *Creating an Atmosphere to HEAR God Speak*.

This book is a primer for anyone seeking a deeper relationship with the Lord. The practices outlined in the book have been implemented through various discipleship groups over the past six years. After only a month of meeting together, one of the men attending my discipleship group said these words to me over lunch, “I didn’t know that I could be discipled.” He went on to say, “I thought the Christian life was coming to church on Sunday and putting up with life all week in