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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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Come, Ye Disconsolate

CONSOLATOR 11.10.11.10.

THOMAS MOORE AND THOMAS HASTINGS, 1824 and 1832

SAMUEL WEBBE, 1792

1 Come, ye dis - con - so - late, wher - e'er ye lan - guish;
2 Joy of the des - o - late, light of the stray - ing,
3 Here see the bread of life, see wa - ters flow - ing

Come to the mer - cy - seat, fer - vent - ly kneel;
Hope of the pen - i - tent, fade - less and pure,
Forth from the throne of God, pure from a - bove;

Here bring your wound - ed hearts, here tell your an - guish;
Here speaks the Com - fort - er, ten - der - ly say - ing,
Come to the feast of love, come, ev - er know - ing,

Earth has no sor - row that heav'n can - not heal.
"Earth has no sor - row that heav'n can - not cure."
Earth has no sor - row but heav'n can re - move.

Person of the Month:

Billy Bray
(1794-1868)



“If I were to go down to Hell I would shout, ‘Glory! Glory! unto my blessed Jesus’ until I made the bottomless pit ring again, and that miserable old Satan would say, ‘Billy, Billy, this is no place for thee; get thee back.’ Then up to Heaven I would go, shouting, ‘Glory, glory, praise the Lord!’ ”

Billy Bray was born into a rough mining town in Cornwall, England, in 1794. Although his family was saved, Billy showed no interest in the things of God.

At 17 he ran away to Devonshire. He lived a drunken and debauched life, far from God. He married a Christian girl, but it did not slow his sinful ways.

Twice he was nearly killed, once in a mine accident and again as he drunkenly rode a stolen horse. Finally, a copy of John Bunyan’s “Visions of Heaven and Hell” came into his hands. Convicted and miserable, he woke one morning about 3:00 and knelt by his bedside, asking God to save his soul. Mr. Bray’s whole life was changed. He came home from work the next payday sober, having skipped his weekly trip to the bar. He gave up smoking and drinking forever when he was saved. His friends thought he would soon return to his old worldly ways, but he never did.

Billy Bray became a fervent soul winner. It is said that he never met a person without inquiring as to the condition of his soul. He became a frequent speaker at meetings, urging his fellow miners and neighbors to come to Christ. Bray had a shouting religion. He said, “I lift up one foot and it says, ‘Glory!’ and I lift the other foot and it says, ‘Amen!’ and so they keep on like that all the time I’m walking.”

He was sometimes criticized for his fervor, but his love for God was very real. When his wife died, he still praised the Lord. “Bless the Lord! My dear Joey is gone up with the shining angels!” he shouted. The goodness of God made him glad even in times of sorrow. On his deathbed he asked the doctor who had just told him he was dying, “When I get up there, shall I tell them you will be coming too?”

Billy Bray died at 74 years of age, still praising the Lord.

—Taken from “Preacher Biographies” copyright 2008 *Sword of the Lord Publishers*

Breathing God in an Ocean of Amorality: *Spiritual CPR for Today's Church*

by Ray G. Mummert

Does anyone doubt we are swimming in a sea of decadence and depravity? Corporate greed, political dishonesty, corruption, hatred, envy, bitterness, cheating on taxes—many people feel it is okay to lie if no one gets hurt. Some people feel it is all right to look if you do not touch. It is fine to have an affair if you are not caught. The marriages end in divorce. The divorce rate is high; the teen pregnancy rate has skyrocketed. Forty percent of all 13-17-year-olds have watched a pornographic movie. It is a morally upside-down world.

Proverbs 28:2 refers to *moral rot within a nation*. We have witnessed this moral rot. We have witnessed the “new morality.” Isaiah 5:20 says, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” What *at one time* was viewed as evil (darkness, bitter), is *now* viewed as good (light, sweet). What *at one time* was viewed as good (light, sweet), is *now* viewed as evil (darkness, bitter). To understand the sea we are swimming in, there are three words we should know.

a. *Modernism*. In the 1700s, society started viewing truth through the lens we now call *modernism*. Remember Pilate said, “What is truth?” The larger culture decided that truth is truth if it can be proven with scientific methods. “Yes, there is truth! But, we’ll only believe it if it can be proven!”—was the thinking. This system began the thoughts of doubting the Bible, mainly by doubting miracles really happened. It spurred the “higher criticism” movement. *Modernism* cast doubts on the deity of Christ and led to the social gospel movement. The Bible-believing church rejected this idea. The

age of modernism prevailed until recently. Then, from this snake there spawned a far worse serpent, called *postmodernism*.

b. *Postmodernism*. This viewpoint about truth may be summarized as follows: First, we cannot be sure *if there is truth*. Secondly, if there is indeed a right and wrong, there is *no way of knowing* what is right and what is wrong. *Postmodernism* has no foundation for truth. It rejects absolutes. There is a high tolerance *for any belief* except a belief that is certain it is right. *Postmodernism rejects* any expression of certainty. *Postmodernism* has *no way of measuring* what is right and what is wrong.

c. *Amorality*. It is a fact that we now live in an *amoral* society, as contrasted to an *immoral* society. What one time was an *immoral* society is now becoming an *amoral* society. When you say society is *immoral*, what you mean is that it permits many behaviors that are not morally acceptable. It allows things that are positively wrong compared to its own professed standards.

A society that is *amoral*, however, *does not know the difference* between right and wrong and does not really care *whether what it does* is morally right or wrong. The people are not concerned with morals. They are outside the sphere of morality. Fifty years ago, our society transgressed laws based on God’s Word and committed immorality, from its own viewpoint. Now, our *amoral* society sees only the grossest crimes as being “immoral.” Even these are seen as diseases or sicknesses, not sins. There is no *foundation of truth!* The foundation has crumbled.

In this sea of amorality (which we view as *immorality*)—how can we breathe God? We are supposed to be in the world, but not of the world. It seems so impossible. We feel

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the sea compressing our spiritual chests. We feel the oxygen being sucked out of our lungs. We gasp for breath. We want to breathe God. We want to be out of the sea of depravity. How can we survive?

A person who is drowning is treated with CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). There are three steps. First, you call for help. Second, you blow air into the lungs. Third, you compress the chest. What steps, spiritually, should we take in order to breathe God in today's ocean of amorality? Listed below are four spiritual CPR steps to help us breathe God today:

1. IDENTIFY POSTMODERNISM IN YOUR CHURCH, HOME, AND LIFE.

You say, "Not in the church." (By "the church" we are referring to any individual, congregation, or denomination that believes in the inspiration and authority of Scripture.) It is not merely in the liberal churches. The believing church did well against modernism. We rejected those who wanted to "prove" truth. We rejected those who wanted to apply human reason. We rejected those who wanted to bring a social gospel. Yet, when it comes to postmodernism, we have held the doors wide open. Remember, we said postmodernism rejected truth, there was no right or wrong, and it had no foundations by which it measured truth. We have done the same thing, just in a more *subtle* way. Instead of rejecting doctrine (truth), we have *de-emphasized* doctrine (truth). Instead of saying, "we cannot know truth," we instead just ignore focusing on doctrine. Instead of saying there is no foundation, we have simply *ignored* foundational issues.

When our children were younger, they had "I Spy" books. They had to try to spy a certain animal or object. It was hard to find; it blended in. Let us play "I Spy" with postmodernism in our lives and our church.

—*I spy "3D worship."* 3D worship is "Doctrinal Dumbing Down worship." Your church has "3D worship" if the sermons emphasize lots of motivational talk and put very little emphasis on the doctrines of God and His attributes, man, sin, salvation, atonement through the blood of Jesus, eter-

nal destinies, and other basic Bible teachings. There may be much emphasis on extra-Biblical information, but little focus on core truths of the Bible.

Your church has "3D worship" if the songs lack deep doctrinal content. They are full of praise for God, but they lack depth about God and His Word. We must praise God, but God is praised most when we desire to learn about truth—about doctrine—because Jesus Christ is truth. To ignore doctrine in churches and to focus on praise, fun, psychology, and service is to ignore Jesus Christ Himself because He is the *Truth*.

Your church has "3D worship" if your Sunday school sessions focus on books written by men instead of the truths of God's Word. Do you discuss ideas in a best-selling book and let the truths of the all-time best-seller sit unused on your laps? The church needs to focus on family issues, on a purpose-driven life, on being promise-keepers, and on Christian service. Yet we must not neglect basic Bible doctrines, considering them boring, unimportant, and divisive.

—*I spy the loss of the perspicuity of Scripture.* You have heard of the *inspiration* of Scripture and the *authority* of Scripture. The church has always believed in the perspicuity of Scripture, but now this is under attack. Perspicuity means "to be clear." In reading Scripture, we can *clearly know and understand* what God is saying. The perspicuity of Scripture is under attack, led by the "emerging church" movement. Men like Brian McLaren, John Armstrong, and others believe "you cannot really understand Scripture." They say, "Since we cannot understand it, we should not focus on doctrine. We cannot let any issue divide us." This teaching attacks the inspiration of Scripture without denying the Scriptures. It does not matter how much you believe in the inspiration of Scripture, if you feel it cannot be understood and therefore it does not need to be applied, then it has *no authority* over you. I spy lack of the perspicuity of Scripture.

—*I spy subjective morality.* This is how the idea goes. Check if you heard this phrase before: "What is this Scripture saying to

me?” This Scripture is saying “certain acts are right or wrong *for me*.” However, if what the Scripture says “is fine *for you*,” then it is all right. *Scripture becomes subjective*. What is right and wrong becomes known through feelings. The thinking is, “If *you* feel it is okay, it is okay *for you*. If *I* feel something is wrong, then it is wrong *for me* and not necessarily for you!” But the proper understanding is not “What does this Scripture mean *to me*?” It is “What did the Bible mean *before I existed*?” By subjective morality, we have clothed the postmodern dogma in Christian attire while retaining its ultimate goal of diminishing truth.

The Christian pollster George Barna has shown that 59% of “born again” Christian teens believe two people can define truth in conflicting ways, *and both* could still be correct. He also asked the teens if what is right for one person in a given situation, might not be right for another person in a similar situation. The results showed 92% felt that was correct! Can you see the foundation crumbling? Note the lack of restraints and guidelines. See the lack of judgment and discernment. The church is to be the pillar and ground of truth. Why have we taken truth from being the pillar, and made it a weather vane moving only the way the wind is blowing. If we want to breathe God, if we want spiritual CPR, we need to breathe truth. There is no other way.

2. INSPECT YOUR DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION.

You decide to build a house. You invite the contractor to come and talk about how it will be built. You ask what the foundation will be like. You listen in dismay as he explains that the foundation is only one-fourth the thickness of most foundations and it could be made of less expensive cement. You ask him how he could consider using such an approach. The contractor says, “We try not to put too much focus on the foundation. *It is not* something we emphasize. It is a divisive issue among contractors. We try to emphasize having “good 50-year shingles on the roof.” However, what good are 50-year shingles when the foundation will collapse in thirty years?

Everything will shift out of line in ten years. You realize the foundation affects everything that is part of a house. Do we realize that in the Christian life, our spiritual foundation influences our morality? What we do, our moral actions, are a result of who we are, and what our foundation is like. Read Psalm 11:3.

A. W. Tozer writes that all wrong doctrine is a result of not knowing correctly the greatest doctrine—the doctrine of God. All immorality (all sin) is rooted in a lack of understanding of the doctrinal issue of Scripture and a lack of the fear of God. That is why the early church leaders focused on building up and tearing down. The New Testament epistles are full of building truth within congregations, and tearing down false doctrine. Our doctrine affects our morality.

Inspect for substitute gospels. Is your church putting more emphasis on the gospel of psychology than on the cross of Christ? Psychology cannot save lives nor can it transform hearts. Christian psychology has some value, but there are times when the church has substituted psychology for foundational doctrinal teachings, and the church is paying a high moral price for doing that. First Corinthians 3:10, 11 says, “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:6-9 says, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

What about the ***political activism gospel?*** This is the idea that we can save society through changing our laws. How wrong! Only in the cross is there power,

only in the cross is there hope. The government can *reform* people, but only the “new birth” can *transform* lives. As churches focus on reformation through politics, they *de-emphasize and ignore solid Biblical doctrine* and bring about moral chaos in their church.

Many churches are caught up in what is sometimes called the ***Sustained Moral Crises Cycle***. It goes like this: First, the church ignores foundational issues, and this causes moral collapse within the church. Then, in response, the church gives sermons, special classes, seminars, etc., about these moral issues. This, in turn, takes the church farther from the foundation, which brings even more moral chaos. And so it continues on.

We currently, in the church, probably have one hundred times the information on marriage and family matters than the church did one hundred years ago. Yet today the divorce rate among members of the church is just as high as it is among unbelievers. We should all inspect the foundation we have laid. We want to breathe God in the ocean of amorality. Take this CPR step.

3. INITIATE RESTORATION OF THE FOUNDATION.

Dads, Moms, leaders, youth, if you want to breathe God, if you do not want to drown in the sea of amorality, there are three words to remember: ***Repent, Remove, Raise***.

Repent of the postmodernism ideas which we may have embraced. We must repent of our tolerance for most anything. Repent of our lack of discernment and judgment. Repent of our 3D worship (in our homes and in our churches). Repent for substituting the glorious Gospel of Christ with fake and cheap substitutes. ***Remove*** what needs removed. Get rid of anything that has taken you from the core. Eliminate anything that has taken you from the foundation. Treat with shame hurtful things in your life. Examine your worship style, your books, your music. No matter how popular those things are in the church, if they do not bring you into a close and more obedient walk with Christ—get rid of them.

Focus on the Foundation, on Jesus Christ, on the Truth. Repent, and then remove.

Then, ***raise up*** “old” theology. Old theology is the only thing that will defeat the New Morality. Isaiah 58:12 says, “And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.” As you look at Scripture, repeatedly, it emphasizes two aspects of foundation building that in turn helps us breathe God in our world. It emphasizes being “in the Word” and “in the Spirit.”

We must use the Word. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness . . .” (2 Timothy 3:16). See also Hebrews 4:12, 13. Remember how Christ resisted the temptation of Satan—He quoted Scripture.

We must abide in the Spirit. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:10b that “the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.” The Spirit helps us interpret the Word. The Word shows us what the Spirit is telling us. We cannot have one without the other. To breathe God in the ocean of depravity we must have both.

Imagine a boat being cut in half from the front to the back, right down the middle. Would you try to use half of the boat? Would you try to use the other half if you were asked to use it? Many Christians try to float in today’s ocean with half a boat. Some are just into the Spirit and try to depend on “impressions” by the Spirit, or feelings by the Spirit. “*The Spirit told me it’s okay, so I must obey this feeling.*” *Mysticism* has swept over the church in such cases. There is a neglect of the Word. They are using half of a boat. The Spirit *never speaks contrary* to the Word. God never contradicts Himself.

Others try to focus on the Word without the Spirit. They focus on the black and white. The life of the Spirit is not given room to take the Word and convict, enlighten, and produce fruit. The Word without the Spirit is dead; it is just half a boat. Are you building on this kind of foundation? Are you of those that shall raise up

the foundations of many generations? Are you the repairer of the breach and the restorer of paths to dwell in?

Have you raised up a good foundation in your family and your church? The early Brethren had a heavy emphasis on the *inner word* and the *outward word*. The inner word of the Spirit shows and enlightens the outer word of Scripture. Do we emphasize both? Are we sailing in half a boat in the ocean of depravity? We must have the fear of God *and* the power of the Spirit. We must have the Word hidden in our hearts to make moral choices. What is your boat like?

4. INSIST ON HAVING A CARBON MONOXIDE (CO₂) ALARM.

CO₂ looks like oxygen, it smells like oxygen (no odor), yet it is not oxygen. One day my aunt and her daughter and a friend were home and felt sick so they all took an aspirin and lay down. There was no carbon monoxide alarm in the house, but they did not realize it. They would have died if my other aunt had not found them. The fact is, physical carbon monoxide is a deadly imitator of physical oxygen. Satan knows we are created moral beings, created with a void that desires morality. Satan provides false moral imitations of true spiritual morality.

Consider how the morality of environmentalism has swept the church. Scripture does teach stewardship of this earth, but not from the environmentalist perspective and not with that focus. Think how much the morality of patriotism has swept the church. Where in the Bible is patriotism a moral virtue? It is not. It is a false morality. Where in Scripture does it say, "Support our troops"? Satan has provided *other* moral obsessions, such as the current moral crisis with the waistline; the church getting more involved in foreign affairs; and the anti-smoking campaign of the last 30 years. As a Spirit-led church we are against smoking and we want to care about our environment. We do not want people to be obese and unhealthy. The problem is, we cannot allow Satan to substitute these issues for deeper moral issues. Where is the crusade against pornography in society and church?

Where is the movement against divorce and remarriage in society and church? Where is the struggle against lying, pride, and cheating? There are not many such campaigns. Have we accepted this substitute or false morality? We are to the point where a Christian man will drive up to a car dealership to trade in his SUV because of its carbon footprint, and he will drive off with his second wife, who according to Scripture is not his wife, feeling *good morally*. We are to the point where we see a car with a bumper sticker that says, "Abortion is murder," and right beside it one that says, "Support our troops." Have you been breathing spiritual carbon monoxide?

The Word separates true morality from false morality. Brothers and sisters, build the foundation! Get into the Word. Abide in the Spirit. Know truth. Understand what is to be our focus. Breathe God. Inhale. Breathe God in this ocean of depravity.

In my first ministry class, I was asked to write a paper on "What It Means to Be Brethren." One of the sentences was, "To be Brethren, we will feel like ducks in a desert." When I received the paper back, the teacher had the word *dessert* underlined and a question mark beside it. It seems that I used the word *dessert*. I said that to be Brethren is like being a duck in a dessert!

Are you willing to be that different? Different as we reject postmodernist thought within the church? Different as we reject the false morality, reject the psychology, reject the political activism, and other false gospels. To take a stand against divorce and remarriage will make us look like a duck in tapioca. To reject the world's immodesty and lust for things and power, we will look strange indeed. Let us be different as we *refuse to build* on any foundation but Jesus Christ. Again, hear Paul's conviction in 1 Corinthians 3:10, 11, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." ■

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

Editor's Note: The book reviewed below has broken on the American church scene creating massive confusion. The S&T editors believe the readers deserve a "heads up" about this hurtful volume.

Love Wins – A Review of Rob Bell's New Book

by Tim Challies and Aaron Armstrong

Questions matter. They can help you to grow deeper in your knowledge of the truth and your love for God—especially when you're dealing with the harder doctrines of the Christian faith. But questions can also be used to obscure the truth. They can be used to lead *away* just as easily as they can be used to lead *toward*. Ask Eve.

Enter Rob Bell, a man who has spent much of the last seven years asking questions in his sometimes thought-provoking and often frustrating fashion. And when he's done asking, no matter what answers he puts forward, it seems we're only left with more questions. This trend continues in his new book, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, where Bell poses what might be his most controversial question yet: *Does a loving God really send people to hell for all eternity?*

The questions you probably want answers to as you read this review are these: Is it true that Rob Bell teaches that Hell doesn't exist? Is it true that Rob Bell believes that no one goes to Hell? You'll just need to keep reading because, frankly, the answers aren't that easy to come by.

How he asks the question is just as important as the question itself. "Has God created billions of people over thousands of years only to select a few to go to Heaven and everyone else to suffer forever in Hell? Is this acceptable to God? How is this 'good news'?" They say that the person who frames the debate is going to win the debate. That is especially true when the debate is framed in this way, through these particular questions. You're damned if you do and damned if you don't. No offense, and no pun intended.

The Toxic Subversion of Jesus' Message

Bell begins the book with surprising forthrightness: Jesus' story has been hijacked by a number of different stories that Jesus has no interest in telling. "The plot has been lost, and it's time to reclaim it" (Preface, vi).

A staggering number of people have been taught that a select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better. . . . This is misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus' message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world desperately needs to hear. (ibid)

You may want to read that again.

It really says that. And it really means what you think it means. Though it takes time for that to become clear.

Heaven Is a Place on Earth—and We Are Making It

Bell frames much of the book around time and place, around what the Bible means when it speaks of the when and where of Heaven and Hell. He points to Revelation 21, citing that the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, is coming down to the new earth. He also affirms that Heaven is a real place where God's will alone is done and that at present, Heaven and earth are not yet one (pp. 42, 43). These are points that few Christians could seriously question.

His argument progresses to this: Because Heaven will eventually come to earth, if we're to take Heaven seriously, we must take the suffering that exists in the world seriously now. Therefore, we are called to participate "now in the life to come. That's what happens when the future is dragged into the present" (p. 45). In light of this, humanity's role within creation is redefined so that we are not so much stewards as we are God's partners, "participating in the ongoing

creation and joy of the world" (p. 180), and engaging in creating a new social order with Jesus (p. 77). This language of partnering and participating is frequently applied by Bell to causes of social justice.

But what about Hell? Is Hell a future reality or a present one? Is it an earthly reality or one that exists elsewhere?

Hell appears to be more about what we do to each other than what we've done to God. Bell reads Jesus' warnings of divine punishment as addressing only the temporal, rather than both the temporal *and* the eternal. These warnings were for the religious leaders of the day, and had very little to do with some other reality or some other time, he argues (pp. 82, 83). Instead, Hell is "a word that refers to the big, wide, terrible evil that comes from the secrets hidden deep without our hearts all the way to the massive, society-wide collapse and chaos that comes when we fail to live in God's world God's way" (p. 95). There's no fire and no wrath, at least, none that is extrinsic to us.

Does Rob Bell deny the existence of Hell? He would say no. We would say yes. He affirms, but only after redefining. And that's just a clever form of denial.

Exegetical Gymnastics

Understanding what Bell truly believes and what he is truly seeking to teach can be a battle. The reader will find himself following many rabbit trails and arriving at several dead ends. It seems that where Bell's arguments begin to break down, he simply walks away instead of pursuing consistency and logic. This book could not stand the rigors of cross-examination. It has little cohesion, little internal strength.

The reader will also find broad statements offered as fact. "At the center of the Christian tradition since the first church has been the insistence that history is not tragic, hell is not forever, and love, in the end, wins." Is that true? It is easy to say, but can it be proven? Again and again Bell turns to the original lan-

guages but he quotes no commentaries, points to no sources. He says things like “‘forever’ is not really a category the biblical writers used.” But he offers no proof. Again, it is easy to say, but can it be proven? Can it be proven from a legitimate source?

Throughout the book he engages in what can best be described as exegetical gymnastics, particularly in dealing with the Greek word *aion*, a small word that is crucial to his arguments.

While this word is commonly translated as “eternal” or “everlasting,” Bell argues that it can also mean “age” or “period of time,” or even “intensity of experience.” Using this approach, he briefly argues from the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) that eternal punishment isn’t eternal, but rather an intense period of pruning.

Now here’s the thing: *aion* and *aionos* definitely can mean “age” or “period of time,” they also mean “eternal.” The word’s context helps us to determine its meaning. So if we assume that these words primarily mean “age” or “period of time”; what happens when we apply that definition to John 3:16 where *aionos* is used?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life [for a period of time].

Not as encouraging, is it? While Bell might argue here that “life abundant” might be a better fit (playing on the “intensity of experience” angle and tying it to John 10:10), at the end of the day, we’re left with an approach that gives more credence to living your best life now than it does to worshipping Jesus.

The Good News Is Better Than This

Throughout the book, there are a number of points where we would agree with Bell, particularly when he identifies some of the goofy things that people have concocted to make God’s absolute sover-

eignty palpable. But his answers are equally unsatisfying. Even his good critiques are simply a bridge to bad conclusions.

As he makes his case, Bell seems to delight in being obtuse, creating caricatures of opposing views that lack logic and compassion. He paints himself as the victim of the hateful, toxic, venomous denizens of certain corners of the Internet that believe “the highest form of allegiance to their God is to attack, defame, and slander others who don’t articulate matters of faith as they do” (p. 185).

Thus, Rob Bell appoints himself a martyr for his cause, and anyone who disagrees with him is preemptively silenced. It’s a useful technique, that, but hardly a fair one. Meanwhile he acts as if those who hold to the belief that, in Bell’s words, “we get this life and only this life to believe in Jesus,” a view passionately held to by the vast majority of Christians throughout history, are blowing smoke rather than dealing honestly with the Scriptures. He subtly redefines the questions and answers, and in doing so, also shifts the battle lines.

As he moves those lines, he moves closer and closer to outright blasphemy. Turning on 1 Timothy 2 (where Paul states that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth) Bell reflects on a traditional (orthodox) view of Hell and asks:

How great is God?
Great enough to achieve what God sets
out to do,
or kind of great,
medium great,
great most of the time,
but in this,
the fate of billions of people,
not totally great,
sort of great,
a little great.

A God who would allow people to go to Hell is not a great God, according to Bell, and the traditional belief that He would be “devastating . . . psychologically crushing . . . terrifying and traumatizing and

unbearable” (pp. 136-7).

God is at best sort of great, a little great—great for saving some, but evil for allowing others to perish. Dangerous words, those. It is a fearful thing to ascribe evil to God.

So what of the Gospel? Where is the Gospel and what is the Gospel? Ultimately, what Bell offers in this book is a Gospel with no purpose. In his understanding of the Bible, people are essentially good, although we certainly do sin, and are completely free to choose or not choose to love God on our own terms. Even then he seems to believe that most people, given enough time and opportunity, will turn to God.

In This Is Love

If *Love Wins* accurately represents Bell’s views on Heaven and Hell (at least if our understanding of the book accurately represents his views on Heaven and Hell), it reveals him as a proponent of a kind of Christian Universalism. He would deny the label as he tends to deny any label. But if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, well, you know how it goes.

As soon as the door is opened to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Baptists from Cleveland, many Christians become very uneasy, saying that then Jesus doesn’t matter anymore, the cross is irrelevant, it doesn’t matter what you believe, and so forth.

Not true.

Absolutely, unequivocally, unalterably not true.

What Jesus does is declare that he, and he alone, is saving everybody.

And then he leaves the door way, way open. Creating all sorts of possibilities. He is as narrow as himself and as wide as the universe.

People come to Jesus in all sorts of ways.

Sometimes people use his name; other times they don’t.

Some people have so much baggage with regard to the name “Jesus” that when they encounter the mystery present in all of creation—grace, peace, love, acceptance, healing, forgiveness—the last thing they are inclined to name it is “Jesus.”

What we see Jesus doing again and again—in the midst of constant reminders about the seriousness of following him, living like him, and trusting him—is widening the scope and expanse of his saving work.

That is what we know as universalism. And it is cause for mourning.

Christians do not need more confusion. They need clarity. They need teachers who are willing to deal honestly with what the Bible says, no matter how hard that truth is. And let’s be honest—many truths are very, very hard to swallow.

Love does win, but not the kind of love that Bell talks about in this book. The love he describes is one that is founded solely on the idea that the primary object of God’s love is man; indeed, the whole story, he writes, can be summed up in these words: “For God so loved the world.” But this doesn’t hold a candle to the altogether amazing love of God as actually shown in the Bible. The God who “commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8), who acts on our behalf not so much because His love for us is great, but because *He* is great (Isaiah 48:9; Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:22; John 17:1-5).

That’s the kind of love that wins. *That’s* the kind of love that motivates us to love our neighbors enough to compel them to flee from the wrath to come. And our love for people means nothing if we do not first and foremost love God enough to be honest about Him. ■

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

JULY 3, 2011

God Judges Disobedience

Joshua 7:1, 10-12, 22-26

Today's lesson follows on the heels of last Sunday's and has its origin in the experience of the conquest of the city of Jericho. You recall that God had placed certain requirements on the destruction of the city. All living beings were to be destroyed and no spoil was to be taken for personal use. The gold, silver, brass, and iron vessels were to be devoted to the Lord's service. But one man failed. He allowed covetousness to overtake his sense of loyalty to God's commands.

However, Achan's sin was not immediately apparent. It was not discovered until Israel suffered humiliating defeat when attempting to conquer Ai. Ai was the next city-state in Israel's path, smaller and yet no less important to Israel's overall success than Jericho. The men Joshua sent to reconnoiter Ai reported (v. 3) it was a weak city and a large contingent of soldiers was not needed to overcome it.

So they sent only three thousand men against Ai, but they were roundly defeated, suffering thirty-six casualties. (Read all of Chapters 7 and 8 for the full story.) This defeat dismayed Joshua and he and the elders of Israel fell on their faces in supplication before the Lord. We note from verse 9 that Joshua was not concerned only with Israel's fate, but what this defeat would do to the reputation and name of the Lord.

God told Joshua to get up and instead of wallowing in defeat and despair to take

action. God's law had been transgressed and until that breach was rectified Israel could not expect to experience success. There was sin in the camp, and God's presence could not dwell where there was sin. God explained to Joshua what had happened and outlined the procedure for uncovering the sin and restoring Israel to His graces.

Early the next morning Joshua called the people together and began the process of elimination by use of the lot. He began with the tribes and worked downward through families to households to individuals. When Achan was finally singled out he confessed his act of disobedience. Messengers retrieved the stolen goods from his tent as evidence of Achan's misdeed and laid them out before the Lord (see 6:19).

Punishment must follow sin, and while the judgment upon Achan may seem to be harsh, God was using this experience to teach His people the awfulness of sin and the consequences of disobedience. One man had sinned, but the entire community suffered as a result. There are mixed opinions on whether or not Achan's family was also destroyed as a result of his sin. However, the likelihood of their complicity with the stolen items in the family tent, certainly would suggest some knowledge on their part (see Deuteronomy 24:16).

Achan and his possessions were stoned and burned and buried beneath a heap of stones. This act of expiation appeased God and He turned from His fierce anger and again placed His blessing upon Israel. As an ongoing reminder to Israel that place was called The Valley of Trouble.

JULY 2011

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For thought and discussion

1. Achan's sin was multifaceted. Be sure you understand the full scope of his trespass. Perhaps discuss with your class.
2. Why was God so strict in dealing with Achan's sin? Discuss.
3. Of course we don't know, but if Achan had voluntarily confessed at the start of the process of identification instead of being forced to confess when he was singled out, could things have turned out differently? What lesson does that teach us?
4. If indeed Achan's family was also destroyed, what does that teach us about the far-reaching effects of personal sin?
5. Notice the downward progression of Achan's sin in verse 21. Note how that compares with Adam and Eve's experience in the Garden and how it defines many sins yet today.

Lesson emphasis: That disobedience to God's commands brings severe retribution.

Key verses: 1 and 26

JULY 10, 2011

God's People Provoke Him to Anger

Judges 2:11-19

From last Sunday's lesson we skip over a number of years of Israel's history in the land of Canaan. Many battles had been fought and many of the inhabitants of the land had been destroyed, although not all had been totally eliminated. These remnants continued to be a thorn in Israel's side, as we note from the Book of Judges. After Joshua's death there arose no strong leader over the nation but as the people of land gained supremacy God raised up judges who led Israel in defeat of their enemies. The period of the judges ran from Joshua's death to the call of Saul as Israel's first king, a period of approximately 300 years.

We note from the latter part of Judges

Chapter 1 the conflict between the people of the land and Israel. It was this intermingling coupled with the lack of strong leadership that led Israel into idolatry, even though they had pledged to Israel to "serve the Lord God and obey his voice." The pressure of surrounding society was too great and they broke their vow and served Baalim, the gods of the Canaanites.

God was not pleased. He had brought them out of Egypt, carried them through the wilderness and given them a land flowing with milk and honey. He had blessed them with many blessings and then they turned away from Him. In retribution He allowed their enemies, the ungodly people of the land, to persecute and spoil them (see Deuteronomy 28 and Joshua 23).

However, God was not unfeeling, and when they cried to Him for deliverance He raised up judges to deliver them from their oppressors. These judges were military leaders, men of action endowed by God with wisdom and power to fight against their oppressors.

But Israel was fickle and they soon turned back to the idols of the Canaanites. For several hundred years Israel went through the cycle of sin, slavery, salvation. They could not stay away from the idols, yet they chafed under the oppression God brought on them for their sin. God, ever merciful, heard their cry and brought deliverance. However, these judges were only temporary leaders and when they died there was no succession of leadership to keep the people in line. So they fell again into sin and the cycle began all over.

Human nature has not changed over the centuries. It is easy to serve God when things are going well and we bask under God's blessings. However, it still seems it takes so little to draw us away from His blessings to the fleeting pleasures of sin. But the God of Israel is still faithful and when we cry for help He is always there and ready to deliver.

As we move through the Book of Judges in our next lessons we will see examples of how the men and women God called were

able to deliver Israel and bring peace during their lifetimes. Let's not miss the lessons for us as we see God's faithfulness and provisions in spite of the unfaithfulness of His people. (Read to the end of Chapter 2.)

For thought and discussion

1. What was the appeal of "other gods" that drew Israel away from the true God?
2. Think about the problem of ingratitude. How should it be handled? Discuss.
3. There is a lesson here about God's mercy. What is the danger of willfully imposing upon it?
4. Look at verse 19. What does this tell us about the necessity of continuity of strong leadership?
5. What are the "Baalim" in our day that draw us away from loyalty to God?
6. God does not tempt man to sin. But He does test His people to prove their loyalty. What are some methods He uses to test us? What are the resources for our assistance? Discuss.

Lesson emphases: Unfaithfulness to God brings judgment. God responds to the cry of His people for mercy.

Key verses: 11, 12, and 18

JULY 17, 2011

God Delivers His People

Judges 3:15-25, 29, 30

Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, was the first judge God called to deliver Israel. (Read the first 14 verses of Judges 3.) The people then had rest 40 years, but after Othniel's death they once again "did evil in the sight of the Lord" and He allowed Eglon, king of Moab and his alliance, to distress them. For 18 years they suffered under his hand. Be sure to get a geographical and historical understanding of the relationship of Moab to Israel.

It seems as though it always took a number of years of oppression before Israel humbled themselves and called upon the Lord for deliverance. This time He raised

up Ehud of the tribe of Benjamin, a left-handed man (see Chapter 20:15, 16). These lefthanded men from Benjamin were skillful and, as we note here, treacherous.

Ehud and his entourage were likely delivering the tribute money to King Eglon and Ehud saw this as a perfect opportunity to do away with their oppressor. He had obviously planned ahead. He had fashioned a two-sided 18-inch sword and hidden it under his garments on his right side where it would be easily accessible by his left hand. After delivering the tribute, Ehud started home with his men but turned back at the idols near Gilgal to ostensibly deliver a secret message to King Eglon.

Ehud was a shrewd man. He proposed that his message was for the ears of King Eglon only, so his attendants were sent out of the room. When King Eglon rose from his seat to receive the message, Ehud, in one swift motion, pulled his sword and ran him through. The action was so swift and deadly that Eglon apparently had no time to even cry out, but rather perished almost instantly.

Ehud, again very shrewdly, left the room, locking the door behind him, and made his way to the mountain of Ephraim (verse 27) where he rallied Israel to fight their enemies. While Eglon's men likely milled about in confusion, Ehud placed his men at the fords of Jordan to prevent the Moabites from crossing back into their home territory. The delay of Eglon's men to discover what had happened allowed time for Israel to prepare their strategy.

The Moabites without a leader were vulnerable to the furor of the Israelites who were bent on throwing off their yoke of bondage. We note in verse 29 that Israel slew ten thousand valiant men that day, thus destroying Eglon's army and freeing themselves from oppression.

"So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest fourscore years." Note carefully that this was God's doing. He raised up Ehud and He gave Israel the victory and the peace which followed. The ensuing 80 years of peace was the longest period of peace under the judges. The

defeat of Moab was complete and the people's hearts were turned back to God. However, as we read on we discover that it didn't last. Several more cycles of sin, suffering, and salvation were experienced until we come to Gideon, our next lesson. (Read the intervening chapters for background.)

For thought and discussion

1. Find some key verses that portray the longsuffering mercy of God.
2. Be sure to do a study of the personalities of the various judges God called to deliver His people. What conclusions do you come to regarding them? And us? Discuss.
3. Why did God use the methods He did to rid the land of Israel's enemies? What was His particular complaint against Moab?
4. What was significant about the landmark where Ehud turned back to deliver his "message" to King Eglon?
5. Have you noticed thus far in our studies how the influence of one man, under God's direction, can move others in the right direction?

Lesson emphases: That one person dedicated to God can accomplish much. Also, that sin has its consequences.

Key verse: 30

JULY 24, 2011

God Delivers by Gideon

Judges 7:2-4, 13-15; 8:22-25

The focus of our lesson today is Gideon, whom the angel of the Lord called a "mighty man of valour." Chapters 6, 7, and 8 tell the dramatic story of Gideon and how he defeated the Midianites and brought rest to Israel for 40 years. Sadly, however, again we read the tragic tale that after Gideon died the people turned again to the idols of the Canaanites. The lack of continuity of strong leadership again led to their downfall.

When Gideon came into focus the Midianites were troubling Israel. They destroyed

their crops, impoverishing them and driving them into hiding in the caves of the mountains. We note (6:11) that when Gideon was called he was threshing grain in a winepress to hide it from the marauding Midianites. Again, God's call of Gideon was in response to Israel's cry for deliverance. Israel was fickle, but God was always faithful.

After Gideon accepted God's call he gathered men from the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, a total of 32,000 men to fight against the Midianites. However, God told him that he didn't need that many men and that he should let those go who were afraid. Twenty-two thousand men left. Then God had Gideon take the remaining men to a stream for a test. Only 300 passed the test and God told Gideon that He would deliver Israel by those 300 men so the credit and glory would go to Him and not the people.

To encourage Gideon God had him sneak to the outskirts of the enemy camp at night where he heard two soldiers of Midian discussing a dream. They were convinced that the God of Israel had given Midian into the hand of Gideon. Thus encouraged, Gideon first worshiped, then called his 300 men together and strategically placed them around the camp of the Midianites.

At a signal from Gideon, the men blew their trumpets, broke the pitchers shielding their torches, and shouted "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." The ensuing confusion resulted in a complete rout of the Midianites who turned their swords on each other and fled in mass retreat. Then again, as Ehud had done, Gideon placed men at the crossings of the Jordan to cut off the Midianites' retreat.

After this great victory the men of Israel approached Gideon and proposed making him king and establishing his family as a dynasty to rule over them. But Gideon refused their request and reminded them that the Lord was to be their Ruler. It was God who gave the victory, not Gideon.

However, Gideon did make a request of his warriors, that they would give him the golden earrings they had taken as spoil from

the defeated enemy. Of this Gideon made an ephod, or sacerdotal garment, likely as an emblem of their victory over Midian. However right Gideon's motives may have been, it did become an item of idolatrous worship which led Israel astray. Israel needed a strong leader, but failed to keep covenant with their Almighty God. And so the cycle was bound to repeat.

For thought and discussion

1. As you study Gideon's call, subsequent leadership and refusal to establish himself and his family as a ruling dynasty, what characteristics stand out defining the man? Discuss.
2. What lessons was God attempting to teach Israel by whittling Gideon's army down to 300 men?
3. Gideon used a "fleece" to determine God's will. Is that a legitimate procedure for us today? Why, or why not? Discuss.
4. God used the dream of a Midianite soldier to encourage Gideon. How has God used others, or circumstances, to affirm His call in your life? Perhaps class sharing would be in order.
5. Why did Gideon refuse the call to become their king and to establish a family dynasty?

Lesson emphasis: That obedience, trust, and faithfulness opens the way for God to use us to bless others.

Key verse: 15

JULY 31, 2011

Jephthah Delivers Israel

Judges 10:10-18; 11:4-6, 32, 33

Today's lesson focuses on Jephthah, the ninth judge of Israel. For the complete story of Jephthah, read from 10:6 through 12:7. It will also be helpful to read the section between last Sunday's lesson and today's. The cycle of sin and suffering continued in Israel following the death of each judge. The setting for today's lesson begins in verse 6

of Chapter 10 where we note that "Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth . . . and forsook the LORD, and served not him."

In response to their unfaithfulness, God, in His anger, "sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and the children of Ammon" who sorely oppressed Israel 18 years. Once again, in their desperation, they cried to the Lord for mercy, acknowledging their sin and their waywardness.

However, this time God was not quick to respond to their cry. He reminded them how He had brought them out of Egypt and delivered them from others who had oppressed them, but in spite of what He had done for them they had forsaken Him and served other gods. Therefore, God said, cry to "the gods which ye have chosen: let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation." He was done with them. He was fed up with their perfidy. He was turning them over to the gods they served.

Israel, however, had not lost all sense of respect for God. They knew deep down that He alone was able to deliver them from their enemies. They acknowledged their sin, cast themselves upon His mercy, and pled for deliverance. They also affirmed their commitment by putting away the strange gods they had been worshiping. At this point they were sincere. And God responded (see 2 Chronicles 7:14).

Then, as the children of Ammon gathered to attack, Israel gathered at Mizpeh to plan their strategy. First of all they needed a leader, one who could rally the children of Israel and lead them in defeating the Ammonites. In the first verses of Chapter 11 we are introduced to Jephthah, "a mighty man of valour." Jephthah, however, was an illegitimate child and for that reason had been exiled from his family. However, due to his prowess he was singled out as the best prospect for their leader in the campaign against the Ammonites.

After some back-and-forth negotiating, Jephthah agreed to return home to lead the fight against the Ammonites. We note that he first attempted a peaceful resolution to

Ammon's demands. However, when that failed he gathered an army and (endowed by the Spirit of the Lord) passed over Jordan and attacked the Ammonites.

The Lord delivered Ammon into their hands and they smote a great number of men and captured 20 cities, thus freeing Israel from their threat. The victory was complete. However, Jephthah's success was severely marred by the rash vow he had made prior to the battle. We leave Jephthah and his decision in the capable and merciful hands of God.

For thought and discussion

1. Discuss the danger of presuming upon God's mercy. What might happen, as we note in today's text?

2. Why do people turn away from the God who has blessed and provided for them? Discuss.
3. Look again at the necessity for strong leadership in the struggle against the inroads of sin.
4. Discuss again the identifying qualities of strong leaders.
5. When sin overtakes, what are some necessary steps to reconciliation with God?

Lesson emphases: The necessity of true repentance to be restored to God's favor. And the need for strong leadership in the struggle against sin.

Key verse: 15

Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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

Homosexual Rights Embroil Amish-Mennonites

A lesbian couple—Lisa Miller and Janet Jenkins—were united in a civil union in Vermont. Miller then had a child via a sperm donor. Miller and Jenkins got “divorced” after the child—Isabella—was born. Miller then moved back to Virginia where she became a Christian in 2003 (while hearing a sermon on sin and repentance in her brother's church) and turned her back on the lesbian lifestyle which she now understands to be sin. However, Jenkins sued for parental rights. At first Miller granted visits when a Vermont court instructed her to, but after an unsupervised seven-day visit with Jenkins, six-year-old Isabella began threatening suicide and doing obscene things in public. This caused Miller to file a molestation com-

plaint with Child Protective Services, but they dismissed her complaint as “baseless.” Thus Miller finally put her foot down and refused any further visits for conscience sake; she couldn't allow her child to be polluted like that, especially by someone who had zero biological connection to Isabella and no claim on her. Isabella had not even been adopted by Jenkins, which is often done in those cases.

Virginia's Governor Bob McDonnell and Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli are at the forefront of the conservative movement and got a law passed that forbade Virginia from recognizing other states' homosexual civil unions or marriages. As soon as that law passed, Miller asked a Virginia court to grant her exclusive parental rights based upon that law and based upon the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which gives states the right to not recognize

homosexual unions made in other states. The court granted her exclusive parental rights. Jenkins appealed and the Virginia Supreme Court reversed lower courts by ruling that the Federal interstate kidnapping law overruled DOMA and Virginia's law about homosexual unions. (That seems a bit bizarre; the logical person would suppose that matters of parentage/custody would determine whether kidnapping happened, not the other way around.) Miller appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court twice and they declined to hear her appeal both times. During these appeals, Miller was sidestepping visitation arrangements with Jenkins, refusing to leave her child unsupervised with Jenkins.

For Miller's continued contempt of court in refusing unsupervised visits, the Vermont court granted primary custody of Isabella to Jenkins. At that, Miller fled to Canada. Timothy Miller from Crossville, TN, who is a pastor in Managua, Nicaragua, with Christian Aid Ministries (CAM) allegedly purchased tickets from Golden Rule Travel for Lisa Miller and Isabella to fly from Canada to Mexico and thence to Nicaragua. Little is publicly known about Tim's level of knowledge of events at the time he purchased the tickets. Tim and his family recently came back to the U. S. for a wedding in Pennsylvania. He was arrested as he went through passport control because, unbeknownst to him, there was a federal warrant out for his arrest for his alleged role in helping Miller escape the U. S., making him an accessory to parental kidnapping. The criminal complaint the FBI filed in U. S. District Courts charges him with "aiding in the removing of a child from the United States and retaining a child . . . with intent to obstruct the lawful exercise of parental rights." He has been released (and confined to Pennsylvania and Vermont) on a \$25K bond pending a May 10 hearing.

Over the past several years, I've grown tired of the homosexual marriage debate. I've started to pay heed to those that said the conservatives were just cynically using

the issue to garner Christian votes. However, this case is a visceral reminder that granting "marriage rights" to homosexuals can bring persecution and imprisonment to Christians for living their conscience. It allows people with zero biological or moral connection to a child to claim the child as their own.

There are differing opinions among conservative Mennonites about whether Tim did the right thing in (allegedly) assisting Miller to defy the laws of the United States. Many of us have become very comfortable in the United States where most of us go through life never having to make a choice between obeying God or the government. Thus we reflexively obey the government because we've come to trust them to do the right thing according to God. That trust has been well-earned, but it's rapidly becoming apparent that this pattern will not continue. I submit that if the facts of this case are as reported, this is a huge wake-up call to the Conservative Mennonite world that we can no longer automatically obey the U. S. government assuming that we can do so while still obeying God. Any Christian in the position of having his or her child being influenced in a lewd manner by a lesbian is obligated by Biblical principles to not leave that child unsupervised with that person. Any believer asked to assist another believer in that situation is obligated to help—do you think Anabaptists in Europe did not help each other escape *because it was against the law*? This is a grave wake-up call to conservative Anabaptists everywhere. Persecution is coming to a "safe" little American town near you.

Before I go further, I would like to acknowledge several things. First, I realize that Lisa Miller is reaping (and Tim Miller by extension) the consequences of her sin. I don't think that modifies our responsibilities going forward. (Would the former mistress of a Swiss magistrate be denied help because her sinful relationship with him caused him to hunt her harder?) Second, I realize that I do not have first-hand knowl-

edge of the situation. Tim is only a friend of a friend and I don't know Lisa Miller at all. So maybe she was lying about the lewd behavior exhibited by Isabella after being with Jenkins. All of what I say hinges upon the truthfulness of the news accounts as published.

In any case, the way forward is through the power of prayer. Pray that the U. S. Supreme Court would take this case and overturn the lower courts' rulings. Pray that Congress would modify laws so that DOMA takes precedence over interstate kidnapping laws. Pray that people would see the glory of God through the believers involved. Pray that Janet Jenkins would come to Christ. Pray that we would have wisdom and discernment to know what God is calling us to do if we are involved in similar cases. Pray that we would have the attendant courage to "obey God rather than man."

There are positive aspects to persecution. Historically, persecution has made us more aware of the temporal nature of our sojourn on earth and causes us to place a higher priority on eternal matters—which is better, to make \$50K at 50 hours a week or to make \$35K at 40 hours a week, spending the extra 10 hours spreading the Gospel? If one person per year enters the kingdom through your evangelistic efforts, which is the better scenario? Persecution makes us examine these questions more clearly.

This renewed focus on the eternal brought through persecution and suffering also causes us to renounce sin. First Peter 4:1 says, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin."

Pray then that this persecution would draw the church into a passionate and vibrant pursuit of building the kingdom of heaven in every aspect.

—Sources: *Newsweek*, *AP*, *New York Times*, "United States of America vs. Timothy David Miller" criminal complaint filed in U. S. District Court (of Vermont)

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News Snippets

A new Israeli-invented system that intercepts the unguided rockets fired by Hamas at Israeli cities has gone operational and shot down its first rockets. —*ynet News*

A study that analyzes documents has found that 27% of press releases by U. S. Congressmen between 2005 and 2007 were taunting in nature. —*Washington Post*

A proposed U. N. treaty would give "Mother Earth" the same rights as humans. —*Canadian National Post*

John Thompson writes a moving op-ed in the *New York Times* entitled "The Prosecution Rests, but I Can't" (<http://j.mp/UnjustDeathRow>) in which he details how he spent "18 years in prison for robbery and murder, 14 of them on death row." His conviction was overturned after evidence—which showed his innocence—came to light that had been hidden by the prosecution. The prosecutors are not being held liable for this unlawful action. —*New York Times*

New Jersey spent \$3 million this last year on clothing allowances for workers that don't wear uniforms. —*NBC New York*

"Japanese authorities may be exaggerating the scope of the country's nuclear disaster to reduce the liabilities of insurance companies, Russia's nuclear chief said on Wednesday (13 Apr)." —*Reuters*

A high-schooler volunteering in a 3rd grade public classroom in Seattle wanted to have an Easter egg hunt with the students, but school officials forced her to rename it a "spring sphere hunt." —*KIRO Radio*

A Canadian comedian has been ordered to pay a lesbian \$15K CAD after "insulting" her during his live performance. —*FOX New York*

Over the past few years, the Obama White House has (as has been traditional for the President) issued a statement heralding every major holiday, including all the Muslim holidays and Earth Day, but decided to skip Easter. —*Fox News*

As always, I welcome your feedback to hansmast@hansmast.com.

SET APART TO SAVE: MODESTY

by R. Kent Hughes

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14).

While the subject of sexual conduct concerns more men, the focus of this article on modesty has more to say to women (especially younger women). Of course women would not dress immodestly if men did not create an ethos that encourages them in that direction.

My wife records her dismay at our current situation with these words:

If you are blind or from another planet, you may conceivably have missed the fact that modesty has disappeared. It is dead and buried! If you don't think so, go shopping with a teenager. The fashion gurus have made sure that every item of clothing today's teen girl might need was designed to provoke thoughts that are other than virginal. It calls to mind the prophet Jeremiah's exclamation: "Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush" (Jeremiah 6:15).¹

My wife is not alone in her frustration. This is the sentiment of most mothers (especially Christian mothers) in regard to their daughters. Even someone as "out of it" as I am gets slapped with the realization of where our culture has gone in regard to immodesty. I recently took a shortcut through an Abercrombie & Fitch store, where I saw mural-sized photos of young men and women that were evocative of the frescoes of Pompeii. Presumably the murals were meant to sell clothing, though the models were wearing little of it.

One of my colleagues' wives tuned in to the Victoria's Secret Christmas special to give me the flavor of the much-promoted event. What she saw were top models in underwear and angel wings striding across

the stage to the backdrop and music of a swaying gospel choir—a choreographed erotic desecration of Christianity and Christmas. Let's see: erotic underwear, angel wings for Christmas angels, and a gospel choir ostensibly singing about the Good News of Christ. What a laugh the secular Hollywood establishment must have had at the juxtapositioning. But Heaven isn't laughing. Someday, apart from God's grace, there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

Immodesty has invaded everyday conversation. As my wife notes,

We all have had the experience of pouring ourselves a cup of coffee and sitting down in front of the TV for a little diversion, clicking to a talk show, and hearing the host question a woman about her sex life. The exchange is degrading and frankly embarrassing. So we flip to another channel, and there to our amazement we hear couples revealing painful family secrets. We change the channel only to view a discussion with young girls and their mothers. The mothers are defending their daughters' rights to dress indecently!²

In disgust, we turn off the smorgasbord of sexual swill. Today girls are sometimes as profane and sexually frank as stereotypical males. Both freely use expletive-laced language and filthy vocabulary to describe body parts—degrading what a holy, good God has made. It all seems very hip and liberated. Actually, it's the vocabulary of slavery.

Modern dance moves imitate sexual intercourse. But they are as old as Babylon. Even workouts become sensual events—males and females together pumping iron, sweating together in the cloying aroma of estrogen and testosterone—effecting a

1. Barbara Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 92, 93.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

casual hands-on intimacy proper only for husbands and wives. The mystery is gone.

WHAT FUELS IMMODESTY

As to what fuels immodesty, there are several factors, most of which require the designation “business” or “industry.”

The fashion industry. Early on, Calvin Klein led the way in promoting a drugged-out cocaine chic as pale, skinny adolescent men and women posed in jeans (some with flies unzipped) in various postures of strung-out languor. Today Abercrombie & Fitch is the leader in marketing lewdness. At the heart of their marketing strategy is their quarterly catalog, for which the company charges customers and requires proof that the buyers are at least eighteen—a sure way to make younger customers want to find a way to get it. Catalogs like “Naughty and Nice” are light on the nice, with suggestive poses, provocative group photos, and interviews with porn stars. Of course, the catalog sells out.³

Abercrombie & Fitch is at the extreme of an ever-increasing sensual curve for which the dollar is the bottom line. And many labels are feeling the degenerating pull of its sexual gravity. It’s particularly hard for young women to find clothing that is stylish and not degrading. Even sizing has become pernicious—so that what is now labeled “large” is equivalent to what was once “small.” No one wants to be large. So guess what?

The body industry. If anything trumps the fashion industry in promoting immodesty, it’s the body industry. The body business lives on the promotion of the myth that you cannot be happy without the body you desire, and you can have the body you want through diet and exercise. Never mind the realities of genetics—that you were born with a God-given body type as a mesomorph, ectomorph, or endomorph—because you can be “morphed.” Never mind, because disciplined diet and exercise will change you into a god in your own image. The industry pours untold billions into perpetuating the myth.

Professional model Owen McKibben puts the phone down slowly. He is facing a daunting mission. McKibben has just learned that he has less than three months to prepare for a cover shoot for *Men’s Health* magazine. Although he is already in Olympic-grade condition, he’s not buff enough! His abdominals must be perfected. So for three grueling months he eats almost all protein, ingests virtually no sugar, and “goes for it”—punishing his abs, pumping weights, running “stadiums,” and doing incessant pull-ups and leg raises—until finally his body fat is less than 7 percent and every muscle and vein bulges under his professionally tanned skin. He’s ready.

As the sun rises over Miami’s Biscayne Bay, he’s striding across the sand toward the shoot, followed by a gaggle of twenty-four editors, extra models, a camera crew, stylists, photographers, assistant photographers, drivers, and a pair of Miami police officers. The focus is on McKibben and especially his abs as he kneels in the surf throwing handfuls of water in the air and laughing silently for the camera. After multiple poses in various locations, after twelve hours of waiting for the right wave and sunlight to dramatize his physique, the shoot is over. From some six thousand photos, one will be singled out—and Mr. McKibben’s abs will be divine.

After this, the editor-in-chief of *Men’s Health* will spend a full week obsessing about the cover, choosing from over thirty mock-up versions. “Readers have to want to be the guy on the cover,” he says.⁴ The magazine’s cover carries a variation of “Incredible abs in just three weeks.” All you need to do is buy *Men’s Health* and follow the directions. And with those abs you’ll have a rich, full life.

Of course the same thing has been going on for years with big-budget women’s magazines like *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Harper’s Bazaar*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Mademoiselle*. But the effect upon women has become even more oppressive than upon men—especially Gen X women. According to Barbara Dafeo Whitehead, the reason for this lies in feminism’s so-called girlhood project and its dec-

3. Christi Parsons, “Catalogue War Puts Wood in Spotlight,” *Chicago Tribune*, July 22, 2001.

4. Alex Kuczynski, cover story, “Oh, How Far a Magazine Will Go to Stimulate Newsstand Sales,” *New York Times*, Monday, June 18, 2001.

laration of war on what feminists viewed as Victorian double standards for boys and girls. They demanded that boys and girls be raised in a unified manner modeled on traditional boyhood. So in play and pursuits girls were encouraged to imitate boys. The copy-the-boys approach led to increased participation in sports, in itself an involvement with many benefits. But the downside has become females' discontent and unhappiness about their bodies. The tomboy ideal is impossibly demanding. Some girls are naturally lithe and wiry, but most are not. The praises sung to tiny Olympic gymnasts and skaters instills inferiority and body hatred. And the fashion magazines that girls begin to read at ages nine or ten, and read into their twenties, enhance body shame. Dr. Whitehead concludes:

Girls respond to body shame with rigid technocratic monitoring of their bodies. Again, the strenuous pursuit of feminine virtue has not disappeared but shifted location. The virtue of staying sexually pure has been replaced by the virtue of staying physically fit. . . . It does not take a degree in cultural anthropology to figure out that more is going on here than mere exercise. In girl culture today, "working out" is the new self-purification ritual, deeply invested with positive moral meaning. Good girls work out. Bad girls let themselves go. In the same way, eating has become a means of self-purification, and food itself has been moralized.⁵

So today high school and college students are in the midst of an epidemic of anorexia and other sorts of modesty-related disorders.

The beauty industry. Immodesty is fueled by an inordinate emphasis on the body and on the myth that you can't be happy in a less than perfect body—which you can have through disciplined diet and exercise. This culturally induced delusion and frustration is further fueled by the fashion industry's peddling of fashions for skinny models who epitomize the ideal. Fashion's impossible, immodest clothes leave most young women intimidated—confused and helpless prey for the beauty industry.

The beauty industry feeds on these insecurities, selling implants, liposuction, plastic surgeries, collagen injections, drugs, and

every kind of lipstick, eye shadow, shampoo, dye, emollient, cream, soap, cleanser, enhancer, perfume, conditioner, and exfoliant that the commercial mind can imagine.

Sin's industry. And then there is sin's industry—that is, our own sin's industriousness in dragging us down into immodesty. At the heart of our sin is self-love. We are naturally lovers of self rather than lovers of God. We are naturally self-focused rather than other-focused. We readily succumb to sinful pride. Pride fuels immodesty.

The combined influences of the body industry, the clothing industry, the beauty industry, and sin's industry produce an emphasis on external appearance alone. These immense pressures serve to marginalize modesty, until finally it is viewed as a quaint sentiment of a bygone day.

EFFECTS OF IMMODESTY

Immodesty in effect chips away the protective wall around a woman's life that is meant to make her a pleasurable garden, as in the Song of Songs. Instead of being "a garden locked," "a spring locked" (Song 4:12), she is not private, and her pleasures are diminished.

Immodesty demystifies. Immodesty diminishes the mystery of sexuality. Peggy Noonan convincingly argues that the modesty of the 1950s made sex sexier.⁶ Wendy Shalit, in her best-selling book *A Return to Modesty*, writes, "Certainly sexual modesty may damp down superficial allure, the kind of allure that inspires a one-night stand. But the kind of allure that lasts—that is what modesty protects and inspires. Modesty damps down crudeness; it doesn't damp down Eros. In fact, it is more likely to enkindle it."⁷ "Modesty is Cupid's faithful bodyguard" (Ariel Swartly). Modesty perpetuates the delicious mystery.

Immodesty devalues. Every culture protects and fences in what it most values. Immodesty removes the protection and promotes a devaluation of sexuality and marriage. When a woman's worth is determined by her visual appeal, she is reduced to an object. Her value is determined in a way akin to livestock at the county fair. Immod-

5. "The Girls of Gen X," *The American Enterprise*, January/February 1998, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 55, 56.

esty is demeaning both to the onlooker and the one looked upon.

Immodesty breeds shallowness. Immodesty communicates that “this is all there is to me.” It suggests a superficial, flat-dimensional soul. It invites shallow exchange. It promotes temporary relationship.

Immodesty tempts. Immodesty is proverbially associated with temptation. Within the Christian community, immodesty regularly causes others (especially brothers) to stumble. Most adolescent girls don’t have a clue about how the mind of a young man works! Sisters in Christ, especially younger ones, should take care not to dress in a way that leads their brothers to engage in lustful thinking leading to improper behavior. There should be a mutual concern for one another’s souls.

Immodesty confuses. Our culture’s immodesty places huge stress on young women. No one wants to be “out of it” or thought weird. So some young Christians simply refuse to face the problem and instead conform to provocative styles. Others work it through and dress modestly without compromise. And still others react to the pressure by dressing down in unbecoming lumberjack style rather than thinking through what is feminine and unprovocative.

These are tough days for everyone, especially young women who desire to lead a modest, chaste life. The pressures toward immodesty are pervasive and complex. Foremost is an immodest culture with its immodest dress pushed by its powerful purveyors from Victoria’s Secret to Abercrombie & Fitch and their unprincipled drive for the bottom line. All this is served with the swill of immodest language in smutty street talk and urbane vulgarities and is acted out in basely immodest behavior consonant with the orgiastic culture of darkness.

Thus the cultural engines that fuel

immodesty are immense: the fashion industry, the body industry, the beauty industry, and sin’s industry—all living off each other in dark symbiosis, promoting an immodesty that at once demystifies, devalues, makes superficial, tempts, and confuses. These are indeed tough times for the modest.

THE BIBLE ON MODESTY

The Christian’s only hope is in Christ and His Holy Word. And for the man or woman who has been victimized by the propaganda of the body industry, the answer is that you have been created in the image of God, and as such you are a beautiful and unique creation by God—whether tall or short, skinny or unskinny, well-endowed or less endowed, muscular or muscle-less. You must come to see this like Carla Barnhill did during her high school years. As she tells it:

One night, when I was in one of my usual “I hate me” funks, I rode my bike around town for an hour or so hoping the night air would cheer me up a little. I ended up at the playground of my elementary school. I got off my bike and sat on a swing.

It was a clear spring night with no clouds, a full moon and a sky bursting with stars. As I sat on the swing, I looked up at the spectacular sky and thought about how amazing God’s creation is. And it hit me. *Yes, the sky is beautiful. Yes, the trees are beautiful and the mountains and the oceans and all of God’s earth. But in God’s eyes, I am more precious, more valuable, more beautiful than any of it.*

For the first time in years, I thought about myself from God’s perspective. In my mind, I imagined God in His little workshop crafting me by hand—choosing just the right shade of brown for my eyes, the right shape for my hands, the perfect amount of curl for my hair. And then I imagined Him watching me day after day as I looked in the mirror and criticized how He had made me.

God had put me together with love and pride. His love for me was more enormous

6. Peggy Noonan, “You’d Cry Too If It Happened to You,” *Forbes*, September 14, 1992, p. 68: You know what else I bet he thought, though he didn’t say it. It was a more human world in that it was a sexier world, because sex was still a story. Each high school senior class had exactly one girl who got pregnant and one guy who was the father, and it was the town’s annual scandal. Either she went somewhere and had the baby and put it up for adoption, or she brought it home as a new baby sister, or the couple got married and the town topic changed. It was a stricter, tougher society, but its bruising sanctions came from ancient wisdom.

7. Wendy Shalit, *A Return to Modesty* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), pp. 172, 173.

than I could possibly grasp. And in spite of all that, I had the nerve to think He'd messed up.

I ran to my bike, rushed home and scrambled up to my room. I flipped to the Psalms for a chapter I remembered that spoke of the glory of nature. There it was, Psalm 104, a psalm celebrating God's incredible creation. As I read it, I kept thinking, *Look at how amazing creation is. Look at how much care God took in making this world, and He's sharing it with you, Carla.*

As I fell asleep that night, I felt something I hadn't felt in a very long time. I felt peace and contentment with myself. I knew that I was one of God's most amazing creations and that to doubt it, even for a second, was an insult to God.⁸

Having understood our identity and eternal worth before God just as He made us, there is an especially elevating directive to women: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9, 10). "With shamefacedness and sobriety" is synonymous with the word *chaste*. To be chaste primarily means to refrain from acts or desires that are not virginal or not sanctioned by marriage vows. Dressing modestly means wearing clothes that do not arouse thoughts or actions that promote sensuality. This is God's will for all women.

God's women must begin with their hearts, allowing God's Word to search out the thoughts and intentions that influence how they dress. They must turn their attention to the beauties God values most—beauties that have little to do with clothing.

The Apostle Peter points the way to this beauty, saying, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:3, 4). Such beauty does not rely on external helps; it is deeply rooted in

faith and trust in God. It is a beauty that grows as our hearts respond in ongoing surrender to God's will for us. Each time we act in obedience to God's Word and will for us, we experience an amazing renewal: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).

The Bible likens the application of God's Word to our lives to the act of dressing. So as we follow God's directive, it is good to visualize ourselves "putting on" the good things of God.

And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. —Ephesians 4:24

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. —Ephesians 6:11

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. —Colossians 3:10

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

—Romans 13:12

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

—Colossians 3:12-14

Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem.

—Isaiah 52:1

Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility. —1 Peter 5:5

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. —Romans 13:14

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves . . . (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

—1 Timothy 2:9, 10

When such are our garments, we will all be clothed in modesty. A great "yes" to God here is the answer for a godly, chaste life.

Modesty is the entire church's responsibility. We together must create a culture in which modesty flourishes. There must be a

8. Carla Barnhill, "Ugly Me." *Camp Life*, July/August 1999, Vol. 58, No. 1, pp. 34-37.

place where women are safe and accepted for who they are rather than for what they look like. It must also be a place that encourages and models feminine modesty. It must be a place where all learn to clothe themselves with the character of Christ.

Parents must take back the responsibility for modesty. You can't expect someone who has lived only fourteen or fifteen years on this earth to know when and where to draw the line. Certainly some of your daughters can do it, but most will need your help.

Fathers, you are essential to how your daughters regard themselves. Years ago I knew a father of several daughters who had an eye for women other than his wife. He verbally admired other women in front of his wife and daughters, freely commenting on their beauties. Thus he sowed bitter seeds of immodesty in his daughters. They knew what their father valued. And they lived it out.

Men and young men, guard your eyes and your hearts. Job's wisdom will stand you well: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?" (Job 31:1). You may not be able to avoid the first look, but you can avoid the second. Develop the discipline of never taking that second look. Women will know if you do. They know where your eyes go. Develop modest eyes.

The culture of modesty—the culture of respect. Holy eyes and holy hearts. These are the souls that God is pleased to use to spread the Good News.

FOR REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

- What are some attitudes or behaviors that point to an excessive self-focus on the body?
- What are the leading causes of these attitudes or behaviors?
- What is the impact of immodesty on healthy sexuality and intimacy?
- According to the following Scripture passages, with what kind of clothing is God most concerned?

—Ephesians 4:24 —Romans 13:12, 14
—Ephesians 6:11 —1 Peter 3:3, 4; 5:5
—Colossians 3:10, 12-14 —Isaiah 52:1 ■

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HOW TO GET ASSURANCE . . . cont'd.

and thought dangerous in their same denominations if they had lived 100 years ago and promoted the same ideas.

Please don't misquote me; I am not advocating disloyalty to your church or spiritual leaders. Neither should we discount the guidance coming from sincere men of God, but we should never turn over our convictions and assurance of salvation for other men to decide for us. We need a more accurate and unchanging anchor for our souls. I am happy to report that we have something better and something that is unchangeable upon which to rely. The Bible is God's eternal Word and what He means He says. If we have met the conditions upon which God tells us He will save us, then we must believe by faith that He has done it. God's Word is truth and utterly dependable.

Does it not seem right and reasonable to you that God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, who exists in spirit form, invisible to the human eye, would have a method whereby He informs us of Himself? Should we not expect God to have a method of communication that would explain the purpose and goal of man and the universe? That is as reasonable as that there is a God. The Lord has not left Himself without a witness. He has given and preserved for man the Bible, His Word. It tells us about creation, man, and his destiny, about the goal of the universe, and many other mysteries that natural man inquires about. How I appreciate the Bible, God's Word, and man's sure guide to eternity!

Yes, the Bible is trustworthy because it is truth and it is truth because it is God's message for man. The Apostle Peter says, "No prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20, 21). The Bible didn't come by the will of men, but holy men of God spoke or wrote as they were moved by God's Spirit.

The Apostle Paul gives us the same testimony. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16). A more literal meaning is, "All scriptures are God-breathed." God delivered his message to man, using men as

SWORD AND TRUMPET



Counseling From the Word

Properly Dealing With Sin

by Lester Coblenz

The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This teaches us that all people are in the same boat, or we could conclude that all are on a level playing field. In this article we will consider various ways people deal with sins they've committed.

Many people treat sin like the common cold. In some cases they think that a little time (3-5 days) and extra care (a batch of Aunt Martha's chicken soup and a few of Grandma's vitamin pills) will make the sin go away. In other cases, they tell themselves (it's just a small sin) not to worry about it. The combination of time, extra care, and a few vitamins will cure this problem in a

HOW TO GET ASSURANCE . . . cont'd.

His human instruments to write it down. By His Spirit, He kept men from error and guided the writing so that we would have one unchanging certainty upon which we could rely for guidance to the everlasting kingdom. The unchanging, indestructible, practical Bible, which is the Word of God, is God's revelation of eternal truth. The quicker we anchor our faith and practice to this certainty, the sooner we will have assurance of salvation.

If we have met God's conditions for salvation as found in the Bible—namely, vital faith and repentance—then we know we are saved, not because we say so, but because God, who does not lie, says so. Naturally the Lord gets the glory because it has only been by His grace and mercy that we are saved. The Bible says, "But as many as received him [Jesus], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

To be continued in next issue

short time. Then life will be back to normal and they will all feel better.

When we sin, we must deal with it properly. If we sin and don't take care of it, we may suffer greatly for it. How should we treat sin in our life? What should we do with sin or sins we have committed? The Scriptures are clear what we need to do with committed sins, but first we will look at a few ways *we* try to take care of sin. Consider a few of the ways people attempt to deal with the issue of sin.

TIME: Often, the moment we commit a sin, the sharpness of conviction really punishes us. We are prodded by the Holy Spirit to do something about it. For varying reasons we don't do anything about the sin and the sharpness seems to leave us. As a result of feeling better, we conclude that time takes care of sin.

DENIAL: When we deny our sin, we persuade ourselves that we really didn't commit a sin. We may call sin by another name, like a small misdemeanor, or we may be emboldened to override the Bible and redefine sin.

BLAME SHIFTING: This wrong tactic of dealing with sin has been around for almost as long as humans. When we commit a sin we may blame circumstances, environment, or people around us. Some of us are even brash enough to blame our forefathers for the sins we commit.

LABELING: Today we have labels for many patterns of sinful behavior. I decide that since I am labeled "ADHD" (pick one that fits your situation), I am special. The labels give reasons for my behavior and help me justify my weaknesses or tendencies. Therefore, when I do those things, I am not accountable or responsible, even if what I do is sin. Counselors can reinforce this by

saying, "I understand why you did what you did, and if I were in your situation I would do the same thing."

COMPENSATE: When we sin, we may do an extra amount of good deeds to tip the scales in our favor. We may attempt various methods to merit God's favor, our church's praise, or our friends' esteem. We can act pious in speech and conduct, but our motive may be to balance the scales. We may perform and criticize people that don't come up to our elite standards.

Years ago I was living in a foreign country in a remote jungle village when I got hepatitis. I went a two-day journey to the city to a doctor. To me the sickness was not very serious. I assumed an injection and some medication and I'd soon be back among the people of the village when I lived. The doctor, sensing that I felt my sickness was marginal and not serious, told me something that shook me up. He said, "If you don't take care of this sickness you will die." Now he had my attention! When I saw the seriousness of my sickness, I actually committed to bed rest for awhile.

"If you don't deal with sin you will die" may be an effective way of grasping the seriousness of properly dealing with sin. I believe that one of the greatest hindrances to spiritual maturity is the failure to deal effectively with the problem of sin in our lives. We treat sin lightly and minimize its effect in our lives.

We can attempt to deal with sin by letting time go by, denying, shifting the blame, labeling, or compensating, but that does not deal with sin adequately and it will not go away! Tragically, we may become desensitized or hardened to sin and its devastating effects.

So what does the Bible say about how people should deal with their sin? What is the proper way of dealing with it? The Bible teaches that known sin should be confessed and repented of (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). This means that what God calls sin we call sin, and turn away from it. If we follow the instructions in the Bible, we can properly deal with the problem of sin, and live a life that is productive and glorifies God. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Deeper Life Ministries* newsletter, March/April 2011.

The Condemnation of Man

A term paper written by Norm Miller at Faith Builders

The condemnation of man is a topic of relevance, due to this universal condition. We will be looking at how man was condemned, how man is condemned, and how man needs to think about his condemnation.

Mankind has his origin in God. God created Adam, therefore Adam came from God. Since God made Adam, God had the supreme authority to have certain expectations of Adam. God knew Adam had limitations, due to his earthly makeup. God knew Adam's abilities. God is just and fair. Therefore, God gave Adam only one rule that would define disobedience. His rule was that they should not eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God wanted man to know Him and His divine goodness. God's heart for man is always good, and He does not want us to experience evil. It is the

devil who wants us to experience evil.

When Adam and Eve sinned through their disobedience, they chose to obey Satan, the enemy of God, in favor of obeying God. This was a breach of the commandment. When they sinned, they chose the desire of the fleshly appetite over the purity of spiritual truths. This was walking in the flesh. When they sinned they chose death over life. This was the natural outcome of separation from God, who is the source of life. Adam was responsible for the choices he and Eve made, yet he found himself unable to undo those choices.

God's condemnation fell on Adam by virtue of His character. God is fair and just and would not just overlook or disregard this sin. Man had chosen this destructive path, and God would not keep man from sinning,

or protect him from the outcome of man's choices through a breach in God's character. God's holiness and righteousness would never be set aside to redeem man back to Himself. Rather, God sent Jesus to reveal His righteousness, and to redeem us back to Him.

Adam could do nothing to redeem himself back to God. He could do nothing to stop the spread of sinfulness in the lives of his sons. I think Adam probably felt the effects of sin every hour of the day for the rest of his life. He would have remembered the conversations with God in the cool of the day. He would have remembered the beauty and freedom that he and Eve had in the Garden. He would have remembered the taking of the fruit and his deliberate disobedience. He must have cried and wept over the mistake of yielding to temptation, and the subsequent condemnation that he felt from God.

How is man condemned now? First a story of an apple tree. It is fairly easy to count the apples on a tree, but impossible to count the trees in an apple. We are like the trees in an apple seed. We are in Adam by virtue of our birth. We also have a moral obligation to God, just like Adam had, by virtue of this natural birth. Every person born into this world has this relationship with Adam. We not only have a physical connection to him, but by virtue of our physical connection, we have a connection to his fallen state. When we are naturally born we are born of corrupted seed, seeds from a fallen tree. This means that man is separated from God by virtue of his natural birth.

Man has a way of wishing for the things he lost in the Garden. We could call these memories of Eden. Man feels that he is lost, and makes attempts to restore what was lost through his own physical energies. Every person has tried to make life work on his own, and has never accomplished it. On top of that, there seems to be a spiritual law: the harder we try to make life work on our own, the less it works on our own. We are condemned due to the weakness of our flesh.

The people that lived after Adam were a wild and wicked bunch. They were acting against God. Man has always done this when left to himself. Man that lives for and

of himself degrades fast. I know of several situations where in one generation people have gone from faith in God to promiscuity and homosexuality. In the next generation people in western society might be into pagan worship and cannibalism. This is not in the discussions of the church, but is in the eyes of the media and people emulate what they observe.

Man has made much effort to turn masses against God. This is not unique to our day, but never before in history has man had the tools to corrupt the masses that he has today. Only one hundred years ago, a man needed to be physically present, or write words to corrupt another person. Now people broadcast their corruption around the world. One person can have as much corrupting influence today as a nation of sinners had merely a hundred years ago. Due to this corrupting influence, man is trying to outdo each other in corrupting, which multiplies the current trend toward heathen thinking and action. If our churches don't take drastic action by repenting of our tolerance of wickedness, our children will fall into the traps the world has set for them. Man left to himself is condemned for his wickedness and lack of pursuit of God.

God in His sovereignty called Abraham to follow Him. Abraham responded rightly to God, and obeyed in faith. This was counted to Abraham as righteousness. This was the beginning of the redemptive work that God was doing for man. Abraham was justified due to his faith, just like the believer in Christ is justified by faith. God chose Abraham to do some very specific things. One of those things was to provide a people that would serve and glorify God. To this group of people came the law. This law was never meant to be an end in itself, but rather a definition of how God was to be worshiped and served.

The Jews, in their carnality, turned the law into a set of regulations that was even harder to observe and maintain. The Jews did not universally serve God through the keeping of the law. Many walked in wickedness and were condemned by the law. Those who tried to keep the law lacked the spiritual power to live it from the heart. This led

to their confusion and rewriting, adding to, and general disobedience to the spirit of the law. Many resorted to hypocrisy, thereby breaking the law that said a man shall not lie. They were condemned by the breaking of the law. The law had a purpose but was incomplete in that it had no power.

By all this we see that all the world is condemned. Romans 2:12 shows that condemnation is universal to the law keeper, and those that do not know the law. Many today do not keep or know the moral law of God. This causes alarm in the church community. However, the condemnation of the world is not changing as the world corrupts. The world has always been condemned. The world has never sought after God. The world has always been on a mission to eradicate God from their hearts and thoughts. While it seems like everything is changing in modern society, the condemnation of the world is not changing. We all are part of the world due to our birth, even from Christian parents.

Christians have an understanding of Christ, and faith in Him is our key to salvation. We are only as effective in living for God, converting sinners, raising our families for God, as we deal with our condemnation and wickedness. There is a push in

churches, again not a new push, that would deal with sinfulness of man, by minimizing it, and maximizing the grace of God. We need to maximize sinfulness of man and maximize the grace of God. This is a shift that requires faith. There again, does the new birth not require faith?

How can there be a reason for new birth if there is no understanding of the problems with out natural birth? The church needs to teach the fallen condition of man, the weakness of the flesh, and the lack of power of the law. Though this doctrine is in many of our creeds, it is too seldom in our pulpits, in our homes, and evidenced by our average Christian's life.

By saying all these things I risk being misunderstood. I want to affirm that man is made in the image of God, but is fallen. Fallen means that at one time he was in a non-fallen condition. Man is not condemned merely because he is made of matter, and is not fully a spiritual being. Gnosticism is not the answer. Asceticism is not the answer. Jesus Christ the Son of God, born of a virgin, crucified under Pilate, raised by the power of God, ascended into Heaven, is the answer! ■

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Book Review . . .

by Rosalind J. Byler

On the Other Side of the Garden

Author: Virginia Fugate
Publisher: Alpha Omega Publications, 1992.

During the general societal upheaval of the 1960s, a movement known as feminism challenged the way Western culture in general viewed gender, sexuality, marriage, and family. Until this time, Judeo-Christian values were generally accepted as the norm even by those who did not embrace Christianity. Feminism began with a search for “wholeness, meaning, and equality” for women; progressed to opposing Biblical teachings on manhood, the family, and worldview in general; and culminated with

an attempt to redefine God from a feminist perspective.

In our day the feminist movement seems to have faded away; however, alert Christian writers suggest that this is only because it has become such an accepted part of our culture that we do not think about it anymore. How does this affect us? The larger Christian world is becoming increasingly convinced that feminism needs to be carefully researched and Biblically addressed. In the last several years, thoughtful books on the subject have proliferated—from simple encouragement written by Christian homemakers to scholarly, intellectual research into

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the Bible's treatment of gender roles. *On the Other Side of the Garden* by Virginia Fugate is a simply-written and very readable book about Biblical womanhood contrasted with feminist ideology. Written in the early stages of Christian concern about feminism, it does not address some of the recent manifestations of feminist thought. However, there is enough solid, practical teaching on areas of concern to make it a good primer on the subject.

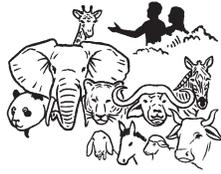
The book is divided into three main sections. Mrs. Fugate begins by establishing principles of Biblical womanhood: why woman was created and how she is uniquely equipped to fulfill that purpose. (The reader should be aware that Mrs. Fugate includes her own creative and unusual interpretation of why men and women are different; while a careful reviewer would have probably left this out, it is a minor "pet theory" such as most of us could admit to having. I did not feel it compromised the integrity of her teaching, particularly as the book is not intended as a scholarly treatise for theologians.) Some topics covered in the "Foundations" section include the design of creation and how sin has twisted it; principles of authority; submission versus obedience; differences between men and women; and a discussion of the powerful influence of a woman on her husband, her children, and other women.

The second section is entitled "Oppositions to Biblical Womanhood," and here we are introduced to some of the faulty thinking patterns and "vain philosophies" that feminism has made commonplace. We are shown how advertising and even factual news articles are slanted to produce an effect that lingers after the actual material has been forgotten. While this section is short, its principles are weighty. The media of influence to which they apply are continually widening today, now including much that is written for children.

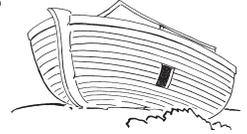
Mrs. Fugate wisely cautions readers against skipping to the third section of the book without having read the first two. This caution may be especially applicable to Anabaptist readers who want to find out right away how to live and what to DO! In the third section she covers practical applications of the principles as well as ways to avoid

falling into the pitfalls of the opposition. The first chapter points out that many of the frustrations of married life are due to the unrealistic expectations of immature people; this is followed by a realistic look at some of the differences between men and women and how these affect their perspective of the same situation. Differing styles of male leadership are explored, with helpful thoughts on practical ways to support and encourage your husband in his particular mode of leading. The issue of whether or not the married woman should work outside the home is addressed in a thoughtful and Biblical way, presenting considerations on its possible causes as well as its effects on everyone involved. A chapter on homemaking encourages seeing it as a challenging and rewarding career in itself, pointing out various objections to the idea as well as unhelpful excesses that can occur. There are chapters on child training, a woman's ministry outside her home, and dealing with conflict and suffering. There is Biblical advice for the woman who feels it is too late and she has done everything wrong; that Mrs. Fugate is no stranger to painful experiences is evidenced by her own marriage at seventeen to a husband who was eighteen, both of them unbelievers in rebellion against their parents.

While this book is not a particularly professional, deep, or scholarly look at the whole issue of feminism, it is written from a Biblical perspective and has much to offer. If you are looking for a simple way to see how feminism has affected you or your daughters, this is a good place to start. Mrs. Fugate addresses well an issue that has lacked coverage and that many women are not even aware of: How a woman's influence and perspective affect her husband's leadership. (The book is primarily addressed to married women, but could be read with profit by anyone who wishes to broaden her understanding of the two genders and how to relate Biblically. There is a helpful appendix covering "Women Alone"—single, widowed, or divorced.) Mrs. Fugate appears to take the view that divorced women are not free to remarry while the previous husband is still living AND there is still hope of reconciliation, but she does not expound on the idea. This book definitely has a place on our bookshelf and in our lending library! ■



Beginning Issues



Back to the Beginning (Part 2)

by John Mullett

There are a number of compromise positions and theories that have emerged among theologians and believers over the last two centuries, in the ongoing attempt to accommodate “millions of years” and an old age for the earth. In the first two verses of Genesis we promptly encounter one of these common compromise views (the so-called Gap Theory). I won’t address these positions individually for now (maybe later) so we can continue with an exegetical look at Genesis, but I want to address some of the foundational problems that are common to all of these positions. Let’s begin by asking ourselves some questions.

In a straight-forward reading of the text is there anything that gives any indication of an old-earth view? Without looking at any other source, is there anything in Scripture that gives any impression or idea that “millions of years” or long ages is expressed or implied in any way? Professor James Barr, Hebrew scholar and Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scriptures at Oxford University, in a personal letter dated April 23, 1984, said this:

“... Probably, so far as I know, there is no Professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the idea that:

(a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24

hours we now experience;
(b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the Biblical story;
(c) Noah’s flood was understood to be worldwide and extinguished all human and animal life except for those in the ark.”¹

Don Stoner had this to say, “. . . Christians are often inclined to take the young-earth position simply because it appears to be the plainest reading of the Bible.”²

And quoting Pattle P. T. Pun, “It is apparent that the most straightforward understanding of the Genesis record, without regard to all of the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science, is that God created heaven and earth in six solar days, that man was created in the sixth day, that death and chaos entered the world after the Fall of Adam and Eve.”³

None of the three men quoted here believe(d) in a “young earth,” but each has acknowledged the clear intent of the Genesis narrative. If the idea for long ages doesn’t come from Scripture, then where does it come from? When we take ideas that originate outside of Scripture (based on the ideas of man) and impose them on Scripture, aren’t we making man the arbiter of truth? The motivation of these compromise positions always appears to be an attempt to accommodate so-called scientific evidence of

1. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/tools/Quotes/barr.asp>

2. Stoner, Don, *A New Look at an Old Earth*, Harvest House Publishers, pp. 32, 33, 37. (Taken from an Answers in Genesis presentation.)

3. Pattle P. T. Pun, “A Theology of Progressive Creationism,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Vol. 39, No. 1, March 1987. (Taken from an Answers in Genesis presentation.)

How to Get Assurance (Part 3)

by B. Charles Hostetter

V. FEELINGS CAN'T BE TRUSTED

If while driving you came to a bridge that you didn't trust, would you stop to examine your faith or the structure? Common sense tells you to check the bridge. If upon examination you were convinced it was safe, you would proceed to cross the bridge with confidence. Many people lack assurance of salvation because they examine their faith rather than God's plan of salvation upon which their faith should rest.

There are also those who fail in their search for peace because they are seeking a dramatic starting point for their conversion. Usually they don't exactly know what they want to happen; almost anything will do if it's spectacular. They have the idea that when one is saved, he gets a physical or emotional manifestation to prove it.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told that God saves us only with a dramatic spiritual experience. While some people do have rather unusual happenings at their conversion, it is never the spectacular that saved them. The simple formula for salvation is "being justified by faith." The Bible is clear

that man's only Saviour is Christ. We are not saved by some spiritual thrill or bodily sensation. When Jesus said to the wicked woman, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace," she didn't need anything else to give her assurance.

The person who wants some special and dramatic experience to mark his conversion is likely headed for trouble. Many times he will try almost anything to get that emotional thrill. If some new sensation is gotten, there is the danger of counting that new feeling as the evidence of his being saved. Since one can't maintain those spectacular manifestations constantly, many folks lose their assurance when their feelings return to normal. Then they often agonize, worry, beg God, and try all kinds of stunts to recapture that old sensation. Some have paid huge prices physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and financially, trying to regain their former thrills.

The fault does not lie in having emotional experiences, because that can be a blessing. I am afraid of a religion that is cold and formal, and I fear for the Christian whose emotions are all dried up. It is human, normal, and beneficial to be revived and stirred up. Who of us doesn't need these special emphases? Even Jesus needed them, and at times spent a whole night in prayer. The problem is not in weeping during repentance and confession of sin. We certainly need much more of this and less dry-eyed formality. Rejoicing in one's salvation is no problem, nor is being blessed with a happy feeling at the time one is saved. The difficulty actually comes when one hangs his assurance of salvation on his feelings. They are never a safe test of our standing with God.

A little boy about three years old was put on a man's doorstep and deserted. He didn't know his name, how old he was, or where he came from. He had no birth certificate and knew nothing about the time or place

BACK TO THE BEGINNING . . . cont'd.

long ages. Whenever we attempt to add man's ideas to the Bible we encounter additional difficulties. I'll conclude the article with a series of questions in that regard. If the fossil record represents millions of years of history and if death existed before sin then what is the penalty for sin? What does it say about God's character if He looked at a world built on a history full of death, disease, and struggle and said, "Behold, it was very good"? Where did the creatures in the fossil record come from if they existed before the Biblical account of Creation? If the geological/fossil record represents millions of years what evidence did the great Flood of Noah's day leave us? ■

he was born. The important thing was that he was living; when and where he was born were incidental. In the same way, it is important to know that you have saving faith now. When and where you got started is really unimportant.

Sometimes people fail to get assurance because they won't believe that they are saved until they can live a faultless life. When a person examines himself, he'll always find enough failures to scare him. The more one studies the Scriptures and the closer he walks with Christ, the more aware he becomes of how far he is from the perfect righteousness of God. Even after one has steadily grown in his Christian life for fifty years, when he gets a glimpse of the holiness of God, he will cry out with the Prophet Isaiah: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

If it's possible to get God's guarantee of eternal life, and the Bible says it is, then one must get it while he is still short of perfection. You will never know assurance of salvation if you think perfection is a prerequisite. There are sins of omission as well as commission. No one except our Lord has ever lived an immaculate life. The Bible says, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

Some others lack assurance because they are not sure that God wants them. They insist that they want salvation, but feel that the Lord is reluctant to accept them. There are those who go so far as to say that some people are predestined to be damned; therefore, there is nothing they can do about becoming saved.

I certainly don't understand the Bible in that way. Rather, all through the Scriptures God expresses a deep concern for everyone. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The Lord longs to save all men and His provision is universal. "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). "He [Christ] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Jesus said, "Him that cometh

to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:8).

Finally, most people fail to have complete assurance of salvation because they use their feelings to determine their relationship to the Lord. Since our feelings do not always record the facts, we need something more accurate to determine our standing with God. Our assurance must be anchored in "thus saith the Lord."

I had a very good friend in the ministry who a number of years ago went to his doctor for a checkup. He was feeling quite normal, but because of his age and strenuous past life he went occasionally to be examined by his physician. On one of these examinations the doctor became very excited and told him to lie down on the cot he had there. My friend replied that he would drive home and rest, but the doctor objected. The minister smiled because he felt very good, but the doctor told him he was a very sick man.

Shortly after that, my friend was delivered to a hospital where only patients with heart trouble are admitted. After he arrived, doctor after doctor came to see and examine him, and at times there were several there together. He told me that the number of examinations they made, and the many doctors who visited him and their excitement, made him aware that they considered him a very sick man; yet he said he really felt very good. It was rather amusing to him. But his critical condition, of which he was unaware, kept him confined to the hospital for many months. Just before he left, the head doctor visited him. He told him that he was the sickest man that ever entered the hospital and went out alive. Yet through the whole experience there were only a few days when he *felt* sick. His feelings betrayed him. Had he followed his feelings, he would have died. The competent doctors said he was a very sick man, and taking their advice, he lived as a sick man and disregarded his feelings. It saved his life.

One should always remember that he can never finally determine his relationship to God by the way he feels. It is true that usually the way one feels is the way he is, but there are the exceptional times. When feel-

ing and fact disagree, we must always go by the fact and disregard the feeling—just as my preacher friend did. We must always be prepared for the traps of the devil. He sometimes directs our feeling so that it is contrary to the fact. Many are caught who use feeling rather than fact for the standard.

Many of you probably have had the experience, when in another community, that the sun seemed to come up in the west and set in the east. Or while traveling on the train, you may have gotten awake in the morning and it seemed as though you were going in the wrong direction. In both cases you worked hard to adjust yourself contrary to your feelings, because you knew your feelings were wrong. Well, there are times in our spiritual lives when our feelings betray us. Then we need to get the Bible and check for the facts. When facts and feelings disagree, it is always safe to go by the facts.

We should never rest our assurance upon easily changed emotions, but rather upon the testimony of God through His eternal and unchanging Word, the Bible. Jesus said, "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the Law to become void and fall" (Luke 16:17, *Amplified*).

Many of you, with me, have heard statements like the following: "If I ever get that feeling I had when I was eighteen years old, then I'll become a Christian, not before." Or, "I know I was saved five years ago by the way I felt then." Or, "I'd give anything to get back that old feeling I had a few years ago." These are just a few quotations revealing that many people are trusting their eternal salvation to their feelings alone.

The Word of God is the only unchanging thing in our world. Faith cannot rest on anything that changes—therefore one cannot be sure that he is saved by his religious associations, human standards, or anything that changes. Only the Bible remains the same. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." The Word of God, then, is the only foundation which is dependable.

Suppose when I arose tomorrow morning I would feel discouraged and sick, and Satan would take advantage of the situation and tell me I am not saved. I certainly wouldn't decide my condition on the basis of how I

felt at that moment. I would go to the Bible, God's Word, and I would find out what the Lord says I must do for Him to save me. Then if I had honestly met the conditions He required, I would stand on His Word that I am saved—not saved because I felt that way, but because God said so. I would believe God even against my feelings, if they disagreed with God's declaration in His Word. Always remember, the Bible is fact, and when the facts and our feelings disagree, stand on the facts.

Twenty-four years ago I was a very excited young man because I was only a few weeks away from my wedding day. It was a very thrilling anticipation. Finally, the day came when we were to be married. I can still easily remember it. Actually though, when the preacher said, "I pronounce you husband and wife," I didn't feel any different than before. Very likely I was more excited and emotionally stirred getting ready the few weeks before than I was when it actually took place.

After the preacher said that we were husband and wife, I didn't say, "Sweetheart, I just don't feel married to you yet. So you stay at your home and I'll go to mine, and when I get the feeling of being married, then we will go on a honeymoon." We never waited for a married feeling. The laws of our land and the preacher said it was a fact that we were married, and we simply believed them and have been living happily together ever since.

If a day should come that I don't feel married, I won't say, "Honey, I am going to leave you until I get this married feeling back." You say that's ridiculous. Yet that is exactly the approach a lot of people are taking in their spiritual lives. They feel saved one day and lost the next. We need something more sure to anchor to than our feelings because they are too unstable. We must go to God for our assurance of salvation by way of His unchanging Word.

If one feels as though he were a millionaire, but the facts are that he is poor, he had better live by the facts and not his feelings, or the law will catch up with him.

Here then is a great secret. Study the Bible, live by its precepts, stand on its verdict, and you will have little or no difficulty with assurance of salvation.

VI. GOD CAN BE TRUSTED

Someone has said that everyone can be put into one of the following groups:

First—Some people are lost, and know they are lost.

Second—Some people are lost, but think they are saved.

Third—Some people are saved, but think they are lost.

Fourth—Some people are saved, and know they are saved.

You will find yourself in one of these four groups. Which one is it?

First: *Some people are lost, and know they are lost.* There are many people who know what a man must do to be saved, but they are not willing to pay the price. For them it's a matter of preferring darkness to light. They deliberately reject God with His grace and mercy.

Second: *Some people are lost, but think they are saved.* Very likely there are many more people in this group than one would first imagine. My experience has been that one gets all kinds of answers when these people explain the basis for their feeling that they are saved. But the Bible is abundantly clear that there is only one plan of salvation, one Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We find many who are basing their hope of eternal life on their good works, their religious affiliations, their Christian parents, or their ethical principles. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). And the Apostle John says, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:11, 12).

Now let's look at the third group: *"Some people are saved, but they think they are lost."* Some of you may be inclined to argue this point. You say, "If a person is saved, he surely knows about it," but there are some exceptions. I have dealt with such people in the past. Let me relate just one incident.

Several years ago a young girl of sixteen or seventeen came to me for help. As soon as she stepped into the room where I was waiting to meet her, she began to weep. She sobbed for a long time before she could

speaking. After her crying subsided enough for me to speak to her, I asked her what her trouble was. She said that she was lost and wanted to become a Christian. She was so worried that she couldn't eat or sleep normally because she felt she was unsaved.

I knew that she was a member of a church; so I asked how she got to be a church member if she is not a Christian.

She replied, "I simply joined the church because my friends did; also my parents wanted me to, and I thought it would be nice to belong to a church."

I didn't know whether she was saved or not, for I knew that many people join churches for the same reasons, and nowhere in the Bible can I find that simply belonging to a visible church saves one. There is a great deal more to becoming a Christian than this. So I told the girl frankly that I didn't know where she stood with God, but that we would soon find out.

We started by assuming that she was lost, and I dealt with her as with one who is seeking salvation. As we went from Scripture to Scripture—those which tell the way to get salvation—we found that she had met the conditions upon which God has promised to save. So she believed that she was saved on the ground that God, who promised, was faithful. Her tears dried and her face radiated a beautiful smile of assurance.

She told me in the course of the conversation that she had tried and tried to become a Christian before, but it just didn't work for her. When she told me that, I was quite certain she was saved, but was ignorant of God's plan. However, I didn't tell her how I felt. She was born in a Christian home and had gone to Sunday school and church all her life, and I was confident that anyone who knew as much as she did about the plan of salvation, and who really wanted to be saved, was saved, and that Satan was taking advantage of her feelings and her ignorance.

After prayer together, I asked her if the Lord saved her.

She said, "Yes."

I said, "How do you know?"

"Because I have simply been faithful in my part of salvation's contract, and I know God is faithful in His part," she replied. Just before she left, I invited her to return to my office

the next day. I wanted to make sure that she really understood God's plan of salvation.

The next day when she appeared I knew by her countenance that she had the joy of the Lord in her heart. After we went over several Scriptures and had prayer together, I said to her, "Now that you know how one is saved, do you think you were saved when you came to me yesterday for help?"

She replied by saying, "I am sure I was saved before yesterday."

Here was a girl who was saved, but was upset to the point where she couldn't eat or sleep right, because she thought she was lost. Her problem was that she didn't know the theology of salvation and what she did know she failed to accept by faith. She was living by her feelings. One who knows what the Bible teaches, and is willing to stand by faith, will not generally get caught in this classification—that of being saved but thinking he is lost.

The fourth group—*those who are saved and know it*—are in the right group.

I trust that upon your examination you have found yourself in this class. If you have not, I am happy to tell you that it is possible for you to be saved and to know it.

The practical question we face is, How does an invisible God, who is Spirit, tell visible man, who is flesh and blood, that he is a Christian? I have found over and over that people who want assurance of salvation do not know what they are looking for. When I ask them what evidence would satisfy them and remove all doubts of their standing with God, they don't know what to say. They are in search of something, but what, they are not sure.

If you do not have assurance of salvation, what evidence are you looking for? What method should God use to tell you your standing with Himself? We must have a method that is not easily counterfeited, or Satan will ensnare us that way. It must be a way that is unchanging by time. Let us examine some possible methods and put them to test.

In our day we usually like to have the terms of a contract in writing so that we can keep them locked up in our possession. This gives us assurance. We can always go and look at the contract to make sure, or to recheck the terms, if we are in doubt. Can we expect God to send us a formal note or

letter telling us He has saved us? Are you expecting to receive a personal letter or telegram from the Lord telling of your forgiveness? None of us looks for such evidence. When people become Christians, they do not await confirmation by telegram or letter from the Lord.

Neither are we expecting God to confirm that we are saved by telephone. No one waits by the phone to receive a call from the Lord telling him of his saved condition. Many saved people never saw a telephone, and we don't have any telephone switchboards that connect to Heaven. We are certainly not looking for such evidence of our salvation.

Should we expect the Lord to tell someone else to tell us we are saved? Right after I accepted Christ as my Saviour, should I have expected my father or pastor or Sunday school teacher to come and tell me that God told him I was forgiven? I never did. This is too risky. How can one be sure where the pastor received the information? Why wouldn't God come and tell one direct? That would be more convincing. Yet I am afraid that many people are trusting their assurance to the feelings and statements of a trusted counselor. Don't gamble your eternal life with such an insufficient source of information. We need an anchor that is more sure. Perhaps our parents, friends, or preachers are wrong. They can guide and help us in life, but with eternity at stake we need information that is better founded than their feelings.

Neither should we trust our assurance to denominational opinions. Because a denomination should count me saved is not security enough. We have hundreds of denominations and groups and many are going in different directions. It seems quite evident that they can't all be right. I never want to put my eternal welfare into the hands of denomination or group. They constantly change their positions and practices. I appreciate the good work the church groups are doing and am glad to be a part of them, but they should not be the final authority as to who is lost or saved. In my own beloved group, if I had lived 75 years ago and believed and practiced as I do today, I would have found myself outside their fellowship. Actually, many of the heroes in today's church would have been unwanted

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Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

“... singing with understanding!”

“Come, Ye Disconsolate”



by Moore & Hastings/Webbe

Lyrics: Traditionally, this hymn has been thought of as a song of comfort in times of sorrow. While that certainly is a fitting application for the truth of this text, a closer examination reveals that it almost has more the flavor of an invitational hymn. The hymn’s core message is simply the Gospel, that we can only be saved and find healing through the atoning work of Christ. Notice particularly the references to the “mercy seat” and “Bread of Life.”

Thomas Moore was the son of an Irish merchant, and was born in Dublin in 1779. He is most well-known for his secular poems and ballads, although he did a fair amount of hymn writing as well. Some of his other writings include “The Last Rose of Summer” and “The Minstrel Boy.”

Although Moore obviously intended this to be a hymn (he published it in a volume called *Sacred Songs*), it contained some wording that editor Thomas Hastings was not comfortable with. Thomas Hastings was an influential church musician who idealized European-style (German in particular) church music. His ideals were more sophisticated than the folksy style of music that was prevalent in some American circles. Ireland in the early 19th century was not known for being on the cutting edge of cultural development and sophistication. The Irish poet Thomas Moore was known for his directness and, at times, biting satire. When Hastings published his version of this hymn in 1831, he edited out some of the more pointed terminology and morbid thoughts to make it more palatable for his

audience. Another reason for the edit was simply to make the text fit better musically into the tune he had chosen for it, which is the one printed here.

On a bit of a side note: the shaped-note tradition is one that Hastings took issue with for being rather “unscientific.”¹ It is very interesting then, to observe how the shaped-note hymnal the *Harmonia Sacra* dealt with this particular hymn. The *Harmonia Sacra* took the tune used by Hastings, some of Hastings’ revisions, and rather unscientifically threw some of Moore’s original wording and the whole last verse (which doesn’t fit well into the tune) back into the mix:

*Come, ask the infidel what boon he brings us,
What charm for aching hearts he can reveal,
Sweet is that heavenly promise Hope sings
us—
“Earth has no sorrow that God cannot
heal.”*

Music: This hymn is another instance of the music being penned before the words. The music was composed by Samuel Webbe in 1792, thirty-two years before Thomas Moore penned the original text of this particular hymn. It was originally written for a solo voice and published in *Webbe’s Collection of Motetts and Antiphons* (1792). Thomas Hastings adapted both text and tune to create the hymn that we have today.²

1. www.hymnary.org

2. www.hymnary.org