

# The SWORD and TRUMPET



“Blow ye the Trumpet and warn the People.”

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.”

“Take the Sword of the Spirit which is The Word of God.”

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

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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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the life of Tertullian makes it evident that he exercised his academic abilities to defend and spread the Gospel. The second century also saw the rise of the Apologists, of whom Dr. Riesen says that they were “men of impressive secular learning. For all the seeming anti-intellectualism of primitive Christianity, [by this time] the Church had recruited some of the best educated minds of the civilized world (p. 54).”

Concluding from practical, theological and historical arguments that education is a moral obligation for Christians, Dr. Riesen goes on to discuss some of the questions that arise. Why the liberal arts (reading, writing, and arithmetic; science, philosophy, and literature)? Is Christian education real education? What makes Christian education Christian? And the big one, whose underlying corollary troubles other Christian groups as well as Anabaptists: can education be too academic? (Dr. Riesen quotes a series of articles on the philosophy of Christian education: the fear of the publishers was that “an overemphasis on academic quality had almost always led to spiritual decline.”) Lest I spoil your enjoyment of his excellent arguments, I will quote only two ideas from this particular discussion: “Good Christian thinking is grounded in knowing what the Bible is about . . . The doctrines of creation, sin, redemption, incarnation, judgment, and eternity, taken together, provide a kind of grid we can place over subjects to yield the beginnings of a Christian understanding (p. 89).” And “. . . the opposite of a vigorous [sic] Christian intellect is not a spirituality that is above intellect or that does not require intellect. The opposite of a vigorous Christian intellect is an effete intellect (p. 80).”

How should the Bible be taught in a

Christian school? Dr. Riesen addresses the problem of mere proof-texting or of trying to find a Bible verse for every situation. He notes the tendency of many schools to relegate the teaching of the Bible to those who are not skilled at anything else (nor trained in the exposition of the Word!). This is a mistake; he contends that the Bible requires “rigorous academic study” and that “the Christian school is one of the places where that ought to be done.” He does differentiate between the Bible teaching done in a school and that of the church or a seminary, as well as discussing the place for spiritual formation in the Christian school. A bibliography for further study is included at the end of the book.

This book is a helpful resource for anyone—educator, parent, or individual—who is or should be concerned about Christian education. It also raises some disturbing questions, as the author no doubt intended it should. We are made in the image of God; what responsibility does this place upon us regarding the development of the gift of intellect? When are we misusing it, and when are we allowing it to lie buried, wrapped in a napkin? The book was of particular interest to me personally, having grown up in a home where reading was important and where both parents (one from Anabaptist background, the other not) had college degrees. In our church setting, education was somewhat feared; yet my parents’ gifts and abilities were gratefully used in both the local and larger Anabaptist church. This book provided answers for many of my questions in addition to verbalizing some concerns that had not yet arrived at question stage. May you be challenged and provoked! ■

# Person of the Month:

## *William M. Strong* (1900-1964)



Born October 12, 1900, William M. Strong was the oldest in his family, having a younger brother and three younger sisters. God spared his life, as a baby, from a fire in his bedroom caused by a kerosene lamp that was accidentally left burning.

Being the oldest of the children, William was asked by his dying mother to watch out for his siblings and see to their care. At the age of 16, Strong was baptized at Slate Hill Church. Eventually, William Strong had the joy of seeing all of his siblings join the Slate Hill congregation too.

While still a young man, Brother Strong attended the Bible School in Harrisburg for several winters. He also studied at Eastern Mennonite School for two years, graduating in 1927 from the Bible course at the age of 27. With a strong desire for learning God's Word, William continued taking Bible courses at home.

William married Emma E. Wenger. The Lord blessed their marriage with the births of three daughters.

As a layperson, Strong enjoyed conducting cottage meetings, along with serving in the work of the Sunday school. He worked in the Fisherville Mission in Harrisburg and was one of the directors of the Hebron Camp Association.

Brother Strong had a heart for missions, as evidenced by the fact that he would spend time just talking and getting acquainted with people, as well as being involved with street meetings in Harrisburg. He also had a ministry to men at the Bethesda Mission.

On November 20, 1938, at the age of 38, William M. Strong was ordained to the ministry.

It seems Brother Strong had a vision for a Mennonite witness in Harrisburg and gave encouragement to those who worked to see that the church became a reality. William, along with his church members, would hold services at the Bethesda Mission, already mentioned, once a month.

On December 18, 1949, at the age of 49, Strong was ordained to the office of bishop. His oversight included the congregations at Slate Hill, Churchtown, Diller, Mt. View, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Hub City, Wisconsin; and Anderson, South Carolina. At the Mennonite Mission in Harrisburg a black man, James Harris, was saved. Brother Strong eventually had the privilege of ordaining Brother Harris to the ministry in Anderson, making Harris the first black minister in Lancaster Conference.

Brother William also looked after the spiritual welfare of the boys who were doing their CPS service at the State Hospital in Harrisburg.

After a full life of service for his Lord, William M. Strong, age 63, died on Sunday, July 26, 1964. The funeral was held at the Slate Hill Church three days later on July 29.

~ Gail L. Emerson

# *Apologetics for the Glory of God*

by Timothy S. Yoder

*Let us return to the question of religious doctrines. We can now repeat that all of them are illusions and insusceptible of proof. No one can be compelled to think them true, to believe in them. Some of them are so improbable, so incompatible with everything we have laboriously discovered about the reality of the world, that we may compare them—if we pay proper attention to psychological differences—to delusions.” (Sigmund Freud)*

*“This I believe: I believe there is no God. Having taken that step, it informs every moment of my life. I’m not greedy. I have love, blue skies, rainbows, and Hallmark cards, and that has to be enough. It has to be enough, but it’s everything in the world, and everything in the world is plenty for me. It seems just rude to beg the invisible for more. Just the love of my family that raised me and the family that I am raising now is enough that I don’t need Heaven. I won the genetic lottery and I got joy every day. Believing there’s no God means I can’t really be forgiven except by kindness and faulty memories. That’s good; it makes me want to be more thoughtful. I have to try to treat people right the first time around.” (Penn Jillette)*

These two voices of unbelief should give us pause. They reflect millions of others who are secularists, agnostics, and atheists. To these individuals, we can add Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims,

and all the others who are believers—just not in Christianity. We live in a world populated by individuals who do not share our faith, and many of them actively oppose the very notions that we cherish most. This competition and debate regarding the existence of God, the Bible as God’s Word, the historicity of Jesus and the Gospels, the creation of the world, and a host of other controversies means that one of our most important duties as Christians is to be an apologist for the faith.

As Christians, our primary goal in life is to live in such a way that the glory of God is magnified. That God accepts our feeble efforts may frequently be astonishing to us; nevertheless, it is clear that God expects our participation in the defense of the faith. Apologetics contributes to the glory of God because it is dedicated to the truthfulness of the Christian message, and the correct understanding of God Himself. In this sense, apologetics magnifies God, because it contends for the veracity of the divine revelation and message.

For some, the word *apologetics* produces uncomfortable caricatures: a street-preacher with the “Turn or Burn!” sandwich board, the debater in a bad suit taking on all comers with an unquenchable supply of both facts and venom, the church lady with a purse full of tracts, and the oh-so-sincere “witnesser” who loves Jesus but is woefully uniformed about what other people really believe. Fortunately, a closer look at what genuine apologet-

ics really is helps to reveal the shortcomings of these caricatures.

To engage in Christian apologetics, of course, is not to be apologizing (“I’m really sorry that I am a Christian, and thus forced to tell you what I believe . . .”), but rather to defend the faith. The word *apologia* is Greek in origin, and it is borrowed from the legal arena where a defendant (like, for instance, Socrates in his famous “Apology”) offers a defense against the charges lodged against him. Peter enjoins his reader to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). To use a different metaphor, we are God’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), which implies that we are responsible to represent God in the various arenas of this world. We give voice to the divine perspective. We defend and explain His actions, His words, and His truths. We put a human face on the truth of Christianity.

In an academic sense, I think that apologetics is an interdisciplinary application of the truths of many academic disciplines to the task of defending the faith. As such, apologetics is not a discipline in its own right, but rather it employs all the disciplines—theology, of course, but also philosophy, history, science, archaeology, etc.—to the project of safeguarding and championing the Christian faith. The Christian apologist must know more than just a few simple spiritual truths or a couple of key verses. Apologetics involves interacting on a broad level with ideas across the academic spectrum. Being ready to give an answer to anyone who asks implies that the Christian apologists should be well read and able to interact on a diversity of topics, from Arminianism to Buddhism to Calvinism to Darwinism. The well-meaning tract lady is not

doing effective apologetics if all she can do is tell the Bible story. Apologetics requires a well-rounded education.

Apologetics as advocacy means offering positive reasons for Christianity, like arguments for the existence of God and reasons for the historicity of the Bible. The flip side of Apologetics includes refuting errors and correcting misunderstandings. Muslims believe that Christians are polytheists, because we worship “three gods.” Many think that a belief in creationism means that Christianity is at war with science. Still others believe that post-modernism has spelled the end of any kind of metaphysical truth or moral certainty. These are the kinds of beliefs and opinions that Christians must be able to effectively challenge and correct.

Being ready at all time to give an answer to the questions presented us is a demanding challenge. There is a whole world full of ideas and ideologies. How can we advocate for the Gospel and challenge erroneous beliefs if we don’t know what the world thinks? I think it is part of our apologetic responsibility to be well-read and well-prepared to engage in conversation, even with atheists and skeptics. One of our required textbooks for Apologetics is an anthology edited by well-known Christian antagonist Christopher Hitchens. It is called *The Portable Atheist*, and it contains excerpts from the writings of famous opponents of belief like David Hume, Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Bertrand Russell, not to mention the new crop of 21st-century unbelievers. The two quotations at the beginning of this article are taken from this work. It is my firm belief that Christians cannot be content to simply read the Bible and the work of like-minded individuals. How can we be a witness to those outside the faith if we have not read their key works?

A prominent misunderstanding of Christian apologetics is that defending the faith is at odds with polite human interaction: a genuine love for others means that we simply accept others' beliefs and values without trying to change them. To engage in apologetics is to perpetually be angry and intolerant of others, like the sandwich-board man and the angry debater. This approach is not Biblical. Peter's apologetic command includes the injunction to do so with gentleness and respect. There are two ways to fail to show respect to unbelievers: to avoid conflict altogether and never share the Gospel, or to make every apologetic encounter an all-or-nothing affair that inevitably leads to conflict. Not all persuasion is intolerant and disrespectful. On the other hand, acceptance of everything in the name of tolerance is not genuine love. It is interesting that even Penn Jillette, the atheist magician, recognized, in a recent video blog on YouTube, that proselytism out of a sincere belief is actually an act of love.

Apologetics is not only for our interaction with unbelievers. There is a role for apologetics in the church. If apologetics involves explaining the faith, refuting errors, and correcting misunderstandings, then certainly these sorts of intellectual activities need to be part of the educational programs in our local churches. Let me share a few examples of how I have engaged in apologetics in the context of my own church. A few years ago, my pastor and I "co-preached" a message on the problem of evil. He addressed some of the theological truths, while I explored some of the philosophical implications of the theodicy. I have taught adult Sunday school classes on philosophy, ethics, and other issues that relate to apologetics. One of the most interesting experiences was with a small group of individuals from the church who just wanted to ask me questions. We

met for several weeks in a row, and the agenda was simple. They asked me any theological or Biblical questions they could think of, and I tried to answer them! I believe that our churches need to provide a forum for individuals in the church who have questions. It is unlikely that every question can be (easily) answered, but the process of thinking, discussing, and researching is a healthy one and necessary for spiritual growth.

Recently, my wife and I attended a dramatic production of the story of Tom Sawyer at one of the small theaters in the Philadelphia area. We had a great time watching this American classic brought to life on the stage. Of course, one of the most memorable moments is when Tom and Huck listen in on their own funeral. Some of today's critics of Christianity (like the various authors of *The Portable Atheist*) hope to preside over the death of religion and faith. On the contrary, I believe that we are living in a golden age of Christian apologetics. Biblical scholars are defending the Bible with great skill, scholarship, and faith. Christian philosophers are providing answers to the problem of evil and bolstering philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Popular apologists are reaching large audiences with accessible books that address apologetic issues with great skill. With such a bounty of resources, my advice is simple. Read the books, study the issues, interact with other believers and seekers. In offering this exhortation, I am doing nothing more than repeating the words of Jesus, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19). May our ongoing efforts to defend the faith and to serve as divine ambassadors resound to the glory of our heavenly Father. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *PBU Today*, Summer 2011.

## From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

### Are We Too Gullible?

We are a simple, trusting, and defenseless people. Such is right and proper. However, sometimes this seems to result in our being “taken” by heretical doctrines and schemes perpetuated by unscrupulous men.

The recent “Love Wins” controversy, to which much of our August issue was devoted, is a case in point. A number of our fellow conservative Anabaptists have accepted all or part of this heresy.

The New Testament warns us again and again to be on our guard against any teaching that is contrary to “the faith once delivered.” One of the marks of the false teaching of the last days is that it “tickles the ears” or feels good. The proposition that some new idea must be better is a mark of pagan philosophy as the Mars’ Hill incident in Acts demonstrates (Acts 17:21).

Coupled with the above dynamics is the truth that our people are increasingly ignorant of Biblical teaching. We have generally (with a few notable

exceptions) done a very poor job of teaching Bible truth. Many of our people do not know the most basic information. Should we develop a Bible proficiency test? (List the books of the Bible in order. Name the Epistles. Discuss the messages to the seven churches of Revelation. What are the essential truths of salvation? Etc.) Are we facing a Hosea situation? (Hosea 4:6a) Does our preaching actually teach the Word of God? How effective are our Sunday schools?

Head knowledge *only* is not the answer. However, without a working knowledge of the Scriptures there is no hope that our people will be able to withstand the damnable heresies that are upon us.

Gullibility can be due to ignorance. It can also result from a misunderstanding of “simple.” Romans 16:19 commands us to be “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.” May we avoid false teaching by knowledge *and* wisdom. ■

# THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



## *A Devotional Commentary*



by David L. Burkholder

**October 2, 2011**

### *An Ordered Life*

Proverbs 29:16-27

Today's lesson continues the theme of "Growing in God's Wisdom," with the final lesson from the Book of Proverbs. This passage contains the last recorded proverbs of Solomon, copied by King Hezekiah's men as we noted in the introduction to last Sunday's lesson. Here again we have in these verses a series of unrelated couplets using various forms of Hebrew parallelism to express their teachings.

We will examine and paraphrase these truisms verse by verse.

Verse 16: The increase of sin and wickedness in society is in direct proportion to the increase of wicked men. However, the righteous will have pleasure at their downfall. (This is an example of antithetical parallelism.)

Verse 17: Proper training of your children will bring your soul delight. (An example of synonymous parallelism.)

Verse 18: Where there is no inspired revelation of divine truth the people perish in their sins, because that is the only means of salvation. By contrast, the one who hears and obeys God's law finds blessing and comfort.

Verse 19: An ignorant or unwilling servant cannot be corrected or instructed only by words.

Verse 20: The man who responds hastily without giving thought to his words is less teachable than a fool.

Verse 21: If you bring up your servant gently and carefully from childhood, he will eventually become as a son to you. (This is an example of synthetic parallelism.)

Verse 22: True to his nature, an angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in sin.

Verse 23: A proud, haughty man will be brought low, but an humble man will be honored.

Verse 24: The person who partners with a thief thinks nothing of himself. The man who hears an oath but does not disclose what he knows does so to his own hurt.

Verse 25: The fear of man puts one in constant turmoil and fear. However, the one who puts his trust in the Lord will dwell in peace and safety.

Verse 26: Many seek to gain favor with prominent people, but the Lord alone judges rightly.

Verse 27: The unjust man and the upright man detest each other because their ways are incompatible.

The basic truth underlying these maxims is that the one who gives heed to their instruction will increase in the wisdom that leads to a full and satisfying life. That life is both God-honoring and a blessing to oneself and to those with whom one interacts. An ordered life is one that consists of making right choices in the various circumstances and relationships which one faces in life.

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

1. What is the value of these concise, crisp statements as we seek direction

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- in life? What do they do for us?
2. What is the basis for the great contrast we note in these proverbs?
  3. What is the starting point for an ordered life?
  4. Note how these proverbs speak either to personal, or interpersonal issues.
  5. Pick a proverb that especially speaks to you and give it deeper thought.

*Lesson emphasis:* A properly ordered life is one that follows godly direction in all relationships.

*Key verse:* 18

## October 9, 2011

### *The Superiority of Wisdom*

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

This is the first of two lessons from the Book of Ecclesiastes, also from the pen of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, outside of Christ. His observations and experiences provide many and varied insights into life and relationships. He was uniquely endowed by God to provide instruction for living an upright, godly life. Sadly, he did not always profit from his own wisdom and insights. As we study his words let's be sure to allow God to speak to us through them.

In our study we have already determined that the basis for true living is the seeking out of godly wisdom. We have been reminded of that over and over as we have looked at various proverbs and truisms covering a wide range of subjects. In today's lesson we once again see the superiority of wisdom as it is here contrasted with brute strength.

Whether from observation or personal experience, the situation here described left a deep impression upon Solomon. He saw in it the contrast between humility and pride and wisdom vs. armed might. A small, insignificant city was being besieged by a powerful king who had set up his engines of war to conquer it. The

end result seemed like a foregone conclusion. However, there was one factor he had not reckoned with.

There was in that city a man who by his wisdom outsmarted the powerful king. But he was a nobody, poor and unknown. And his feat, however accomplished, went unrecognized. It would even appear from the following verses that perhaps some prominent loud-mouth claimed the credit. At least, the poor, wise man went unnoticed and unrewarded for his deed.

Solomon deducted several things from this event: wisdom is more powerful than strength, and poor men, though wise, are ignored. So, he concluded, wisdom is preferable to strength and in the end accomplishes more. Even weapons of war are no match for the strength of wisdom. Also, the quiet words of the wise man accomplish more than the ranting of fools.

Several principles are in focus here. One should be willing to do service for the good of his fellowmen without thought of reward or recognition. The reward is in the doing, not the acknowledgment. It is better to do quietly what wisdom dictates, than to promote oneself or one's actions publicly. The satisfaction of doing what one knows to do is more reward than the adulation of men. One outspoken sinner can undo the quietly done good work of the righteous.

Solomon recognized the true worth of wisdom by observing life. We can do the same.

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

1. Why does the wisdom of a poor nobody often go unnoticed? Discuss.
2. Review again the meaning of wisdom and how it is acquired.
3. Suppose the poor man would have kept quiet. Who would have been the loser? Do we at times fail to act for fear we will not be honored for our deed? Think about it.
4. Which is greater, the satisfaction of having done our duty, or praise from

those whom we have helped? What motivates our actions?

5. There are two other principles in contrast in this passage. What are they? How do they relate to true wisdom?

*Lesson emphasis:* The willingness to use our God-given gifts for the benefit of others with no thought of reward or recognition.

*Key verse:* 17

## October 16, 2011

### *Wisdom for Aging*

Ecclesiastes 11:9—12:7, 13

It is generally assumed that Ecclesiastes was written toward the end of Solomon's life. In this book he reflects on life, its meaning and purpose. He has seen and experienced a wide range of life situations and concludes that life is meaningless when lived selfishly, outside of a relationship with God. He affirms that a misdirected life brings no lasting satisfaction and that, ultimately, God will judge everything we have done on His scale of justice. So throughout the book he raises searching questions about the meaning of life, and concludes that life is vanity unless motivated and directed by someone wiser than ourselves.

As Solomon closes his treatise on life he directs special attention to the young, those just starting to find their way in life. His encouragement to them is to consider the brevity of life and the importance of doing everything under God's approval. Verse 13 sums up his argument: "Fear God, and keep his commandments."

Solomon recognizes that man's tendency is always downward, into folly, and that the longer one lives for selfish pleasure the harder it will be to turn around. Therefore, he says, give control of your life to your Creator while still young and unfettered by the pursuit of selfish pleasure.

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He follows that admonition with a vivid description of the results of the aging process upon the body and mind. There will be a gradual diminishing of abilities and deterioration of the physical body. Just as the seasons and weather patterns change, so, too, we will experience change and deterioration.

Then Solomon speaks to the degeneration of specific body parts. The hands begin to tremble with age and the legs are no longer strong and stable. The teeth are few which makes eating difficult, and the eyes become dim and clouded. Jaws become stiff, hearing is lost, and sleep is light.

The elderly become afraid of heights, they have more fears of personal harm, and the hair turns white like the almond blossom. Walking becomes difficult and life in general becomes a burden. And then death comes. The thread of life is broken and they are mourned by their survivors. The body eventually decays back to dust, but the soul is released to rejoin God who gave it.

So, is life without meaning? Is one to simply live it up for a few short years with no consideration for the future? Solomon, having tasted all of life's pleasures, warns that life is indeed futile without the presence of God in the heart to provide motivation, direction, and hope for an eternal future with one's Creator.

### **For thought and discussion**

1. How can we best give purposeful life-direction to young people? How does Solomon's life and experience help us? Discuss.
2. Does verse 9 give liberty for following one's own desires or direction in life? Verse 10 may help you with your answer.
3. What are the advantages of making the right spiritual decisions early in life? Discuss.
4. How do older people, and I speak as one of you, cope with the noticeable deterioration of the body and mind?

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What about our attitudes? What are we saying to the younger generation by our attitudes? Let's stop and think about our influence.

5. What is the bottom line? When do we start preparing for old age, or our "long home"?

*Lesson emphasis:* The importance of developing a meaningful relationship with God in our youth.

*Key verse:* 1

## October 23, 2011

### *The Wisdom of True Love*

Song of Solomon 4:8—5:1a-d

The Song of Solomon may be one of the most misunderstood and neglected books of the Bible. However, it need not be so if looked at in its historical, geographical, and cultural setting. It was written by Solomon to express his strong love and desire for the lovely Shulamite maiden who would become his bride. It is essentially a poem of love in marriage written in Oriental language and imagery. As such it depicts the beauty and intimacy of married love. It establishes without question the rightful place of God-honoring conjugal love within the marriage relationship.

In depicting the love and desire between human lovers, the Song of Solomon also metaphorically describes the love between God and His people. However, it should not be looked at solely as an allegory but as a true human love story with spiritual dimensions and implications. Just as God created male and female to find ultimate physical fulfillment within the marriage bond, so, too, will we as individuals find ultimate spiritual fulfillment in our love relationship with Christ.

In the first seven verses of Chapter 4 Solomon gives a physical description of his bride, the Shulamite maiden. Beginning with our text verse, verse 8, he tells

how her beauty has captured his heart and stimulated his passion for her. He invites her to come to him, she who has ravished his heart by her comeliness. He affirms (v. 10) that her love is more satisfying than any other pleasures. She is sweet, beautiful, and fulfilling.

In response to Solomon's description of her, the maiden likens herself to a garden, an orchard, and a fountain, providing a full aroma of smells as well as life-giving water. She invites the winds to blow upon this garden to carry the spicy aroma toward him. She also invites him into the garden to enjoy its pleasures to the fullest extent.

Solomon responds by saying he has come into this garden, he has gathered the spices, and he has experienced the joys and satisfaction of conjugal love. The marriage has been consummated, both are satisfied, both are fulfilled in their longings for each other.

As we have noted, this is no mere love story between a man and a maid. It also highly exemplifies the satisfying spiritual relationship between a soul and its Saviour. There is longing, then fulfillment and complete satisfaction as one commits himself/herself to the One who has sought him/her out and given Himself unreservedly for him or her. There is profound wisdom in true love.

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

1. Read the Song of Solomon in several different versions and do background study in commentaries to give you a better understanding of its message. This will also help you to determine the various speakers in this interchange.
2. Review the reasons God has created us as sexual beings and His intentions for fulfillment in marriage.
3. Only those who have experienced true love can fully comprehend the desires expressed by Solomon and his bride. If you are married, review again the attraction of your spouse and rejuvenate any lost ground in your affection

- for him/her.
4. Solomon's focus here seems to be wholly upon physical beauty. While that attraction is not wrong, what other attractions make for a wholesome marriage relationship?
  5. Can anyone truly love God if they do not have a satisfying, self-giving relationship with their spouse? Something to think about.

*Lesson emphasis:* To understand God's plan for marriage and the satisfaction and fulfillment found in that relationship.

*Key verses:* 10 and 8:7a

## October 30, 2011

### *Living as God's People*

Matthew 5:1-12

With this lesson, and through November, our lessons turn from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament to the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. Our five lessons will be from Matthew 5 and 6, The Sermon on the Mount, under the subtitle "Jesus Teaches Wisdom." And certainly there is no more appropriate source for us to seek wisdom than directly from the One who Himself embodies all wisdom.

As we noted in the introduction to the quarter's lessons, "Wisdom is not only important, it is necessary for the enrichment of life and relationships." In these next five lessons we have valuable instruction straight from the mouth of Jesus to instruct and guide us in our personal life and relationships with others. Let's take them to heart and apply them to our lives.

The Sermon on the Mount has been called the Manifesto of the Kingdom, setting forth fundamental laws of the Kingdom of God. The Beatitudes show the blessedness of right relationships to God and man, speaking to the inner being,

attitudes of the heart, and the development of personal spirituality. Those who heed these teachings, Jesus said, are blessed, happy, fulfilled.

These principles are not given for the regulation of general society, but for those who have chosen to follow Jesus in commitment of life. They will not work for the unregenerate. The Beatitudes cover three major areas: the development of inner spirituality, relating to others in a godly manner, and one's reaction to persecution for being a follower of Jesus.

The recognition of spiritual poverty and the desire to correct it is a ticket into the Kingdom of God. Those who sorrow over their sins will be comforted or consoled. Those who are gentle and meek are worthy of dwelling on the earth. They are good citizens. Those who, in recognition of their spiritual need, hunger and thirst after righteousness will have their needs met. Those with a pure heart and pure motives are worthy of God's presence.

Verses 7 and 9 show the disciples' relationship to others. Only those who have obtained mercy by submission to God are capable of showing mercy to others. Only those at peace with God are eligible to promote the way of peace to other searching souls.

Jesus says there is even a blessing in being persecuted or reviled for righteousness' sake. It not only proves one's relationship to God, it also invokes His blessing and comfort. It establishes one's spiritual lineage to the prophets of old who were reviled for declaring God's message to an inhospitable audience. Furthermore, Jesus says, rejoice, for the eternal reward far outweighs any earthly suffering.

To live as God's people is to submit to His laws and seek Him with the whole heart. Then we will find true wisdom and be truly blessed.

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

1. Some have attempted to define these

- principles as guidelines for society at large. What is wrong with that assumption, and why will it not work?
2. How is the desire for greater spirituality fulfilled? What is our role? Discuss.
  3. Besides our relationship to God, what other relationship is of significant importance? What governs that relationship?
  4. What enables one to take the taunts, threats, reviling, and physical harm

- for the sake of righteousness?
5. We should not serve God solely for reward, although that becomes part of the package. What other motives should drive our service for Him?

*Lesson emphasis:* The soul who seeks God and lives consistently and fearlessly for Him will be rewarded now and in eternity.

*Key verse:* 6 ■

## Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

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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

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### Extremist kills 76 in Norway

A Nazi-like extremist killed eight in a bombing of the Prime Minister's office and 68 in a shooting at a Labour Party youth camp on an island.

Police took over an hour to respond and when the SWAT team finally boarded a boat that didn't sink and got to the island, he surrendered. The Norway police do not have a helicopter sufficient to carry more than two SWAT members and their lone helicopter was not stationed near the SWAT team anyway. A news chopper was circling the island long before police arrived. It's no surprise that he surrendered, given that Norway's maximum sentence in this case is 21 years (no death penalty). However, at the end of 21 years his sentence will be evaluated and can be indefinitely extended in 5-year blocks if the judge deems him likely to commit further crimes. There was an off-duty police officer on the island who was acting as a security guard and was unarmed and killed.

Norwegian police are not allowed to carry guns unless under special circumstances.

The terrorist was strongly against Islamic immigration, his main concern. He released a 1500+-page manifesto right before the attacks. Therein, he envisions a "Christian" Europe and thus some have labeled him a Christian terrorist, but that couldn't be further from the truth. I'll quote from a column (<http://j.mp/BreivikAFA>) by Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association (AFA) which is mostly stitched together quotes from the terrorist's manifesto:

"Breivik is all about racial purity, with his goal being to 'prevent the ongoing genocide of the Nordic tribes' (p. 1153). He wants a 'repro-genetics' program established on a state level, 'which facilitates reproduction clinics who focus strictly on indigenous genotypes from pure sources (non-diluted [95-99% pure] Nordic genotypes) (sic) found in Northern Sweden and other areas . . .' (p. 1153). This, he argues, is not about 'white supremacy' but is rather 'an indigenous rights movement.'

“In so doing he forgets another central doctrine of Christianity: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28).

“He reiterates this concept a few short pages later. ‘The key to our survival is to liberalise the strict biotechnology laws and to commercialise and glorify repro-genetics while there is still a sustainable selection of Nordics of 99% purity left (this window of opportunity will be forever lost within 150 years). Not only will we have the option to secure our survival but we will be able to purify our tribe and add several IQ points to our offspring in the same process’ (p. 1159).

“Our environmentalist friends will be happy to know that Breivik is entirely on board with the myth that there are just too many people in the world. His solution to reducing pollution is to implement one-child policies in all 2nd and 3rd world countries ‘where the birthrate is above 2.1.’ As Margaret Sanger said and Hitler believed, ‘More children from the fit, less from the unfit.’

“Breivik wants to impose a worldwide population cap of 2.5 billion people (down from today’s 6.8 billion) and impose ‘population capacity guidelines for continents or countries.’

“Again, this is a fundamentally anti-Christian view, as God commands man, on the first page of Scripture, ‘*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*’ (Genesis 1:28).

“Oh, and he’s a big-time greenie, and hopes to ‘phase out diesel/benzin vehicles (and thus end our dependency on Muslim oil) and focus on commercialising electric cars/battery cells’ (p. 1200).

“Breivik claims to have revived the Knights Templar, who were sworn to protect Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land from the depredations of Muslims. However, Breivik is notably lax about demanding doctrinal purity of his new Knights. ‘Requirements: must be a Christian, Christian agnostic, or a Christian atheist,’ whatever a ‘Christian atheist’ is.

**PAGE 12**

“Says he, ‘If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God then you are a religious Christian. Myself and many more like me do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God’ (p. 1307).

“For good measure he adds, ‘I’m not going to pretend I’m a very religious person as that would be a lie. I’ve always been very pragmatic and influenced by my secular surroundings and environment . . . I have not yet felt the need to ask God for strength’ (p. 1344).

“He assures his would-be jihadist colleagues, ‘The cultural factors are more important than your personal relationship with God, Jesus, or the holy spirit (sic). Even Odinists can fight with us or by our side as brothers in this fight as long as they accept the founding principles of (the) Knights Templar . . . So no, you don’t need to have a personal relationship with God or Jesus to fight for our Christian cultural heritage. It is enough that you are a Christian-agnostic or a Christian atheist’ (pp. 1360, 1361).

“. . . his view of the Church and its role sounds like something he got from the Freedom from Religion Foundation. ‘The Church and church leaders will not be allowed to influence non-cultural political matters in any way . . . This will also include all areas relating to procreation/birth/fertility policies and related issues of scientific importance (repro-genetics) . . . Furthermore, the Church will not be allowed to influence domestic issues relating to national security . . .’ (p. 1137).

“Here’s the bottom line for this self-proclaimed Christian: he doesn’t believe a personal relationship with Christ is necessary, he’s prayed once in recent memory (that God would help him kill as many people as possible), he doesn’t believe in a Christian view of sexuality, he doesn’t believe the values of Christianity should play any role in public policy, he doesn’t believe in a Christian view of population and fertility, he believes in taking conception and child-raising away from moms and dads and giving them to scientists and

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

the state, he believes in 60% of Hitler's agenda, and his highest good is not unity in Christ but ethnic purity.

"In other words, he may call himself a Christian. But I don't think anybody else will."

—Sources: *Washington Post*, *AP*, *Wikipedia*, *AFA*

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### News Snippets

"Onondaga, NY—A man riding bare-headed on one of about 550 motorcycles in an anti-helmet-law rally lost control of his cycle, went over his handlebars, hit his head on the pavement, and died, police said Sunday." (AP)

Thailand has had six prime ministers in the past six years with many coups and bloody protests over the past few decades. The most recent PM to be elected is Thailand's first female PM and is a daughter of very popular former-PM Thaksin Sinawatra who was ousted in a military coup on apparently trumped-up corruption charges. It seems to be a strange cycle of Thais mostly electing people from Thaksin's party (now the PPP, People's Power Party), then the military ousting them and outlawing/banning the party, and then a new party with the same ideals being elected once again.

The White House's Council of Economic Advisors, three men appointed by Obama, released their Seventh Quarterly Report on the economic impact of the stimulus. It shows that the stimulus has cost \$278K per job created. (*Weekly Standard*)

Conservatives in Congress are refusing to pass a debt limit increase unless severe budget cuts are made. Much could be said, but I'll just highlight one erroneous idea that is much touted: that the U.S. is in danger of default on its debt. The Treasury Department is constitutionally obligated to prioritize interest payments on U.S. Bonds over other spending. So the U.S. will not default—if the deficit is not financed by additional borrowing, the deficit will be made up by the Treasury Department underpaying government agencies' budgets—an automatic spending cut.

A semi driver crashed into an Amish buggy in Christian County, KY, on July 8, killing three-year-old Barbara Smoker. She was an only child, born after her parents had tried to have children for years and had given up. Her grandparents and aunt were seriously injured. The driver failed three field sobriety tests and has been charged with DUI and murder.

(*Kentucky New Era*)

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### Correction to Timothy Miller Story

I referred to Timo Miller as a "pastor with Christian Aid Ministries" (per news articles) in the July 2011 issue. Paul Weaver of CAM emailed to correct. On further questioning, the church at Waslala was indeed planted at CAM's request as an outreach of the Costa Rica churches. Waslala's pastors were supported financially by CAM for some time, but are no longer, though it's the church that the CAM missionaries attend. The church at Managua where Timo is a pastor is an outreach and sister church of the Waslala church.

As Paul has chosen to highlight CAM's role, it is worth revisiting a portion of the FBI's Criminal Complaint against Timo. In it, they excerpt emails from Timo expressing his frustration with "CAM higher ups" forbidding CAM personnel from helping her. "I can understand that CAM has a large organization with many interests to protect." If there were others that could help her, it was best to keep the legal exposure limited to as few people as possible, which Paul indicated was their intent; they didn't necessarily want to not help. However, there is also Christian duty and ministry to fellow believers. I don't pretend to know what the prudent balance was in this case, even with 20/20 hindsight. In any case, I believe this highlights the case for better information technology security (encrypted emails, for instance) amongst our mission organizations. ■

As always, I welcome your feedback to [hansmast@hansmast.com](mailto:hansmast@hansmast.com).

# Look at the Sales Data

by Chester Weaver

Businesses watch their sales closely. Increased sales most likely mean increased profits. Diminishing sales indicate trouble. Turning a blind eye to whatever sales is doing spells disaster, sooner rather than later.

Sales indicate that customers believe in the product. Customers purchase the product to serve their interests. Refusal to purchase a product translates into the customer's belief that it is inferior in some way to the competition. Non-purchase sometimes means that the customer does not know that the product exists. No customer purchases a non-product.

The Anabaptist people have a product to sell. Maybe marketplace language is a crude way to discuss the matter but somehow it must be considered. Let me say it yet another way. Jesus Christ is offering the best returns possible on any investment. Who believes Him?

Jesus did say, "No man comes to Me except that the Father draw him" indicating that belief is more than just a personal whim. But who does the Father draw? How does the Father get a voice in men's lives? Does the Father speak to some men and women in louder tones than He does to others?

I believe that the conservative Anabaptist people have offered a venue for the Father to speak in particularly clear tones. Other Christian traditions have their own stories of how this works in their own settings. Since we are Anabaptists, I would like to consider our accumulated sales record both to non-Anabaptist people and to our own Anabaptist people.

At the beginning of our movement in the 1500's our message sold well, extremely well, causing many European

political leaders to become apprehensive about the stability of the social order. They were absolutely convinced that a state church system was necessary for a solid social fabric. The state and the church were the warp and the woof of that fabric. Separate the two and no fabric could exist. The Anabaptist debacle at Munster confirmed their fears.

But the passing on of the faith from generation to generation is the real test of durability and worth. It is one thing for a parent generation to deeply prize the faith but it is another matter to "sell" that prize to the next and have that generation just as "sold" on the product. Often the second generation reacts and rejects the "prize" of the first. The product did not "sell."

The hard sales data of the 1600's is mixed. The pressures of long-term persecution dampened "the sell" for the Swiss-German Anabaptists while the absence of persecution led many Dutch Anabaptists to "repackage" their product to participate in Holland's cultural Golden Age. The Hutterites of Moravia were almost crushed out of existence from their own Golden Age of the 1500's.

The story becomes increasingly complex with the passing of the centuries. But the hard facts provide two brutal realities. One is that generations of Anabaptists did sell "their product" to their offspring so that the Anabaptist Vision is still alive today. The Vision has become distorted in various ways but the Vision is still alive after five centuries, not a trivial accomplishment. (Of course not just a human accomplishment.)

The other brutal fact is that the Anabaptist Vision should be the philosophical foundation of tens of millions of

people today. Somewhere along the line, parents and churches have not “sold” their product well. Either they did not prize the Vision themselves and thus did not work hard to “sell” it or the teaching program broke down in some way or some competition outdid them. The Vision was lost. But once that Vision was lost, a veil seemed to descend upon hearts so that the Vision was no longer deemed valuable at all. Non-valuables do not sell.

How well are we “selling” today? What does the “sales” data reveal? What is the hard evidence? What is the retention rate for your family, your congregation, your affiliation?

The conservative Anabaptist peoples today are among the very few “Christians” that have insisted upon the permanence of marriage, making it a test of church membership. Thus the conservative Anabaptist people enter into marriage with confidence, knowing that both marriage partners are committed for life, absolutely. This fact is a tremendous “selling” point. (Recently the writer had a conversation with a wayward Old Order Amish boy who recognized that fact, thus causing him reservation about selling his birthright.)

By contrast, Evangelical Christians have a divorce and remarriage rate equal with general society. Thus what do they have to offer general society? And coincident with the breakdown of marriage is the breakdown of courtship and the unwillingness of many young people in the present generation to even get married. Self-fulfillment (selfishness) is deemed of greater value than the sacrifice to a family. And on top of that is the legitimizing of homosexuality.

Moral purity, strong families, and a strong stand against sexual perversions of any kind is normal fare for conservative Anabaptists. This normal fare powerfully reminds many Americans of what was “normal” one hundred years ago but no longer exists today. And so they troop to Anabaptist tourist attractions by the millions to see the Plain People. The Plain People who were persecuted for genera-

tions by the Roman Catholics and Protestants find their former persecutors coming to admire them for their unwavering stand against the evils of the present generation! A powerful light is beaming into the darkness.

On another level the Anabaptist Vision is being discovered for the first time by men who are writing books and institutions of learning who are “selling” the Vision across the entire earth. At no time in history has the Anabaptist Vision been looked upon with so much favor by a broad spectrum of honest searchers into the historical record. Today, institutions of higher learning regularly include Anabaptist history as part of their normal church history courses. This would not have been the case just one hundred years ago.

Why all this interest? Discerning minds are able to see the value of the Anabaptist Vision and are “sold” on it. (Time and persecution will tell how “sold” they really are.) In the meantime many people across the world are “buying” the Anabaptist Vision. As far as numbers go, the most explosive growth is in Africa, outside of North America. Today most “Anabaptists” do not live in North America. Granted, many of these people have only a superficial understanding of the Anabaptist Vision but they are at least identifying with it.

It seems inconceivable that conservative Anabaptists who have inherited such a priceless theology would lightly give it up. But the hard facts indicate that they are. For one reason or another some conservative Anabaptists as well as many of the less conservative Anabaptists are “selling out” to an inferior human value system. They seem to be copying Esau “who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright” to Jacob. Who was the loser? Who gained?

What can be done to better “sell” this most valuable birthright? First of all, parents and preachers must personally value the birthright. When they are “sold” on it, they will do their best to “sell” it to their children and their congregations. Lovers

long to have the beloved receive the best they can offer. They long to bequeath the best legacy possible for the beloved.

But how can parents and preachers discover the value of their birthright? They need a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. This is the first, foremost, and absolutely essential element for “selling” the Anabaptist Vision. The Anabaptist Vision is not about Anabaptists; it is about Jesus Christ becoming incarnate in the lives of His followers in His church today. The Anabaptist story is the record of how that has played out in history. And the Anabaptist story is replete with mistakes and failures, which must be honestly reckoned with.

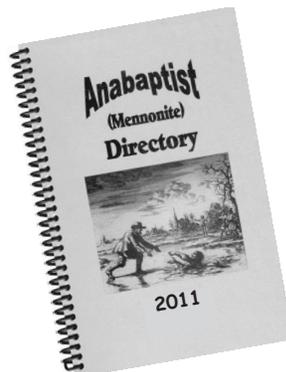
Secondly, we must teach, teach, and teach some more. Nothing will substitute for teaching except living the message. Living and teaching is an unbeatable combination. Teach the Living Message in Sunday schools, Bible schools, over the pulpit, in church periodicals, in missions, on the streets, in personal conversations, at tourist attractions, with CD’s, with public singing groups, in books, in business, in humanitarian work, in prisons, on the job, in family worship, on trips, while shopping, and in every human encounter. The

message is all about a real Jesus Christ who makes a real difference in a real world.

Thirdly, conservative Anabaptists are delighting in making their counterculture work. The culture has been a working whole for a number of years already and has been “selling” its vision to a rising generation who, for the most part is “buying” it. The movement is growing in numbers and seems poised to continue that growth. Not much discernment is necessary these days to see the failure of mainstream culture. Grotesque, tongue-studded, tattooed samples repulse decent people everywhere. Thus the “selling” is easier today than it has been in the past. The Christian school and the homeschool movement has greatly facilitated the production of a worthwhile “product.”

Finally, we must understand that just as Jesus had His Judas who chose differently, we will discover that not all people choose their own well-being. Some are deceived into “selling” their own souls for “thirty pieces of silver.” But we are accountable to offer the “product” to them anyway. We must do the best “sales job” possible. If they reject, we have tried our best to “sell.” The results are up to Jesus Christ. ■

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## Sermon of the Month



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

### ***Balancing Discernment With Charity***

by Eric Brubaker

*“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear; let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:1-7).*

We are living in a very dramatic time in the history of the Church of the Brethren. Many people are eagerly anticipating the 2011 Annual Conference where seemingly the future direction of the Church of the Brethren will be decided (at least on the subject of homosexuality). Many Brethren are standing firm (and have been standing firm for years) against the open acceptance and approval of the practice of homosexuality in the church. The Bible is quite clear on the subject. And while we have been strongly encouraged to listen to and to dialogue with people of opposing views, no amount of conversation can change the fact that Scripture plainly teaches that the conduct is sin.

The faithful, Bible-believing members of the Church of the Brethren are rightly standing firmly against this onslaught of evil and wickedness. And although we run the risk of being labeled as fundamentalists or hateful or legalists, it is certainly always

right to stand for Biblical truth. But Scripture also plainly teaches that while it is completely necessary and appropriate to expose and call out sin, and in fact to hate sin, it is also totally necessary to have a heart of charity both toward God and others. In fact Jesus said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on the two commandments to love God and to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40). While on the one hand we are duty bound to hate sin, we are also duty bound to love God and others. One of the real dangers in the Christian life is that it is possible to get to a point where we can rightly discern and expose sin, and yet still not have a heart of compassion that pleases God.

In Revelation 2:1-7, Jesus addresses the angel of the church at Ephesus. And while He gives the church words of commendation and praise, He also rebukes them because of the condition of their hearts. In these seven verses there are three verses of

praise (verses 2, 3, 6) and two verses of rebuke and warning (verses 4, 5). And so, although the words of praise outnumber the words of rebuke, the rebuke is strong enough to warrant the removal of their lampstand from its place, if the church did not repent.

### **1. Five Words of Commendation (Revelation 2:2, 3, 6)**

Jesus had five words of commendation and praise for the church at Ephesus. First of all He commended them for their *deeds* or good works. The church at Ephesus was committed to proving their faith by their works. They had obviously been faithful in displaying a life of good works. In Revelation Chapter 3, Jesus said to the church at Sardis, “*I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead*” (Revelation 3:1).

And to the church at Philadelphia Jesus said, “*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it*” (Revelation 3:8). And to the church at Laodicea He said, “*I know thy works, that thou are neither cold nor hot*” (Revelation 3:15). Jesus knows our works and our reputations, and He knows if they line up. Good works are a sign of genuine faith. Jesus said that good works bring glory to the Father and are the way that we prove our faith to the world. It is how we let our light shine (Matthew 5:16). The church at Ephesus was committed to good works.

Secondly, Jesus commended the Ephesians for their *labor*, or their hard work. The Ephesian church was committed to the faith, and they surely applied great effort, along with physical, mental, and emotional energy in their walk with the Lord. They were not passive and lukewarm in their religious fervor, but were vigorous and energized. They were fully devoted to the task.

This is commendable and noteworthy because the apostle Paul encourages us to be, “*steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Very often our tendency can be to not put our all into our

work, or to do a halfhearted job. This was not the case with the Ephesians. They worked hard for the Lord. Sometimes we don’t do our best because we are distracted or sidetracked or just don’t care. Very often our level of interest or care in a project or task is reflected in how hard we work at it. The Ephesians worked hard for the Lord.

Thirdly, Jesus commended them for their *perseverance*. Endurance and perseverance are very difficult things because they test our resolve. The longer something drags on (the more it lingers), very often the more difficult it is to hang in there and not give up. If we are called to persevere in something, it means that we are being asked to put up with a difficult situation. If we never encountered difficult situations, there would be no need to endure anything. But whenever there is a situation that is less than ideal within the context of something we hold dear, then we must choose either to endure it, or to walk away from it. This may be in the church, or in a marriage, or at work. If we find ourselves in a situation that is less than ideal within the context of something that we hold dear, and we are committed to it, then we will choose to endure it. Sometimes there is nothing we can do to improve our situations; we simply need to endure them. The easiest thing is to give up, or to walk away. But the Ephesians were commended for their patient endurance, and their long-term commitment to faithful Christian living.

Fourthly, Jesus commended the Ephesians for their *discernment*. The word *discernment* is not used in Revelation 2:2, but the principle seems evident. Discernment is the process whereby we separate what is true from what is false, and distinguish truth from error. It is the process whereby we sift and separate the good from the bad. Historians say that the first-century church had an abundance of itinerant evangelists, men who would travel in the name of Christianity seeking an audience. It was the responsibility of the church to put these men to the test to see if they were genuine. The traveling evangelists and prophets seem to be those to whom the Apostle Paul was

referring in 2 Corinthians 11. He refers to these imposters as “super-apostles” (2 Corinthians 11:5/NIV), who were trained speakers that could influence crowds. But in the end he finds them to be “false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves into the apostles of Christ” (v. 13, ESV). It is always the responsibility of the church to put teaching *and teachers* to the test.

The Apostle Paul had earlier warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 about both *external* and *internal* attacks on the church. The external attacks would come from “savagely wolves” who would come in among the flock. And the internal attacks would come from people who would arise from within the church, who would preach perverse and misleading things in order to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:29-30). The Ephesian elders had heeded Paul’s warning and they had put these would-be apostles to the test and found them to be false. Historians record that the popularity and spread of Christianity made it necessary for the church to test the character and the doctrine of teachers and evangelists and apostles to see if they were genuine. The Ephesian church had done that and exposed those who were false.

Finally, Jesus commended the Ephesians for their *lack of tolerance* of wicked men. When some teaching has been tested and found to be false, it is commendable not to tolerate it. Tolerance is very similar to endurance or perseverance. When we “tolerate” something it means that we put up with it or bear with it. A tolerant person is one who is marked by forbearance. But the church cannot forbear false doctrine or false teachers. While forbearance and tolerance is commendable in human relationships when dealing with the quirks and deficiencies of differing personalities and character development, it is not commendable when dealing with wrong doctrine or behavior.

In Old Testament times God rewarded the intolerance and extreme behavior of the Levites. Aaron had let the people get out of control while Moses was on the mountain. When Moses returned and saw that the people had become wild, and to keep them from

becoming a laughingstock to their enemies, he issued a summons, “*Who is on the Lord’s side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him*” (Exodus 32:26). That day Moses commanded the Levites to strap a sword to their sides and to go throughout the camp, killing those involved in the riotous behavior, even if it was a brother, a friend, or a neighbor. The Levites did so, and that day about three thousand people died. Then Moses said, “*You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and He has blessed you this day*” (Exodus 32:29, NIV). The Levites were rewarded because of their zeal for the Lord and, “*were set apart to be caretakers of the tabernacle and aides to the priests*” (NIV Study Bible, footnote). Aaron’s grandson Phinehas, son of Eleazar, was also rewarded by the Lord for his zealous actions when the Israelites began committing sexual immorality with Moabite women. Because of Eleazar’s actions, the Lord said, “*He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites*” (Numbers 25:13, NIV). These are two extreme cases of intolerance in the Old Testament, but they demonstrate how in the past God has *honored intolerance* when it is for *His* honor.

Jesus also commended the church at Ephesus for their *hatred* of the practices of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6). *Hatred* is a strong word, but here Jesus commends the Ephesians for their hatred of the deeds of the Nicolaitans, because *He also hated their deeds*. The Nicolaitans are also referred to in Revelation 2:14-15 (the church at Pergamum), but in neither case does it identify what their offense was. However, some commentators believe that the Nicolaitans were associated with Nicolas, the proselyte from Antioch recorded in Acts 6:5. Some historians believe that Nicolas had lapsed into lawless and immoral behavior and teaching and had led others astray. Whatever the offense was, the Ephesian church had exposed the heresy and had come to hate their practices, just as Christ Himself did.

In a nutshell, the Ephesian church was committed to good works. They were zealous and vigorous in their labor for the Lord. They persevered in some very difficult circumstances. They tested would-be apostles, evangelists, and teachers and exposed those who were imposters. They refused to tolerate and to forbear with those whom they found to be false. The Ephesian church had maintained pure doctrine. They had not grown weary in all their labors. Their hard work had not worn them down to the point where they no longer could discern truth from error. They were committed. They were zealous. They were vigorous. And they were unrelenting in their exposure of false teaching and teachers.

But the ability to discern truth from error is not the final proof of one's faith. Just because we may be able to spot a fake, or sense red flags when we hear wrong teaching, or notice deficient character in a religious leader, does not mean that we ourselves are right with God. This is not at all to diminish the importance of discernment. Discernment is vital and critical to the health and unity and longevity of the church. And sadly it is woefully lacking in the church today. But while discernment is critical, it must be combined with charity. If we have all discernment, but have little charity, we can tend to be abrasive and cold and hard. If we are constantly testing people and their teaching, but have no warmth and affection, the Christian faith soon begins to look quite unattractive. All discernment with no charity leads to factions and divisions.

## **2. One Word of Rebuke (Revelation 2:4)**

And so, although the Ephesians had excelled in purity, they had become hard and callous and were not imitating the warmth of Christ. Revelation 2:4 says, "*But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had first*" (ESV). It is a very difficult thing to be constantly on your guard against wrong doctrine, and yet filled with a charitable spirit toward all people. When we are jealous for pure doctrine in the church,

and are constantly evaluating and sifting and testing teaching and teachers, it tends to put a strain (over time) on the warmth of our hearts. We tend to become cynical and pessimistic. We tend to become cold and aloof. And in the end, it can lead to a hard heart. It had been about thirty years since the church at Ephesus had been founded. And somewhere in those thirty years they lost (or more literally—"abandoned") their love. Back when the church was first founded Paul wrote to the Ephesians saying, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:15, 16). Thirty years earlier, when they first started out, they were full of love and good deeds, and excelled in doing kind acts. But over time, the warmth in their hearts had cooled. Singer and songwriter Keith Green lamented this in a song where he confesses:

*My eyes are dry, my faith is old, my heart  
is hard and my prayers are cold,  
And I know how I ought to be, alive to You  
and dead to me.*

*Oh, what can be done for an old heart like  
mine?*

*Soften it up with oil and wine, the oil is  
You, your Spirit of love,  
Please wash me anew in the wine of your  
blood.*

The Ephesians had abandoned the love they had at first. Commentators are divided as to exactly what this means. Does this mean that they had left their first love *for Christ*? Had they become cold toward Christ, even though they were zealous in their labor for Him? Or does this mean that they had left their first love *for other people*? Many believe both interpretations are valid because they are closely connected. Love for Christ is shown in our love for others. Jesus had taught that brotherly love would be the proof of our discipleship. In John 13:34, 35 it says: "*A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to*

another.” Brotherly love is the proof of Christian discipleship. But the Ephesians had abandoned their first love.

### 3. Two Words of Correction (Revelation 2:5)

Very often discernment is associated with Christian maturity. And it is hard to admit that although a person may be well along the Christian path, and may possibly hold a prominent position in the church, there may be a need to retrace steps and get back to their earlier practices. Jesus had two words of correction for the Ephesians. First, He said, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen” (Revelation 2:5a). Very often when something has slipped gradually over a long period of time, it is hard to realize that anything has happened. When there are small, incremental steps of decline, it can be hard to realize the subtle shift. But Jesus said that the Ephesians had *fallen* from their prior spiritual height. Apparently the Ephesians did not realize that it had happened. And therefore Jesus instructed them to remember from where they had come. One of the first steps in recovery is to realize and acknowledge that something has gone wrong and that there is a problem. Jesus challenged them to realize that they had fallen, and to remember their prior standing.

Secondly, He said, “Repent, and do the works you did at first” (Revelation 2:5b, ESV). Here Jesus gives insight into what it takes to recover what has been lost. Certainly when we lose something of value, or realize that we have become less than we should be, there is a sense of sorrow and grief and perhaps even shame at the loss and disappointment. It’s impossible to have real repentance without feeling a sense of grief. The Apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians that, “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Sometimes it is very easy to be overcome with excessive sorrow and regret when we realize that we have slipped so far. Sometimes it’s hard not to wallow in feelings of remorse and sorrow

when we finally realize how far we have fallen. But repentance leads to action. Worldly sorrow produces death, but godly sorrow produces repentance, which leads to action. The way to recover what has been lost is to start doing the things we did at first. For someone whose heart has become cold and callous, it may take some time to regain the feelings of warmth and affection and charity toward others. But by committing ourselves again (anew, afresh) to a genuine, unhypocritical love toward all, we can again begin to prove the genuineness of our faith.

The church at Ephesus had begun so well. They were zealous for the Lord. They were faithful in their service. They were committed to purity of doctrine and life. They had worked hard, they had persevered, they had exposed falsehood, and they possessed a godly hatred for the practices of imposters and false teachers. But over the course of time, as the battle raged on, it took a toll on the very thing they were trying to defend. And the charitable, warm, compassionate spirit that had marked their good beginning, gave way to callous, unfeeling, insensitive, unmoved hearts toward God and others. We must not think that this is impossible in our lives. But if the searchlight of the Spirit reveals such attitudes in us, there is hope, if we do again the works we did at first.

This is certainly not the time for us in the Church of the Brethren to *waiver* on what we know is right on the issue of homosexuality, not to cave in to the forces of tolerance and acceptance so prevalent in this age. Like the church at Ephesus, we must be relentless in our stand for the truth of Scripture. This is not the time to be wishy-washy and vague. But we must also remember that we are not dealing with abstract and theoretical ideas, but with real people for whom Christ died, and in whom He wants to reign. May the love of Christ reign in committed brothers and sisters as we stand firmly on His Word at this critical time in the church. ■

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## The Empty Column

*The setting of this story is in Canada, but it could just as well be in the United States, or elsewhere. Although income tax returns are generally filed only once a year, bookkeeping takes place year round. This story is a timely reminder that, for the Christian, honesty is the only true choice.*

Thoughtfully Clayton inserted the single sheet back into the official-looking envelope that had come in the morning's mail. He had always hoped this wouldn't happen to him. The letter was brief and to the point. He, Clayton Martin, had been selected for a random income tax audit. The auditor would come to his farm the following Wednesday, and he was to have his paperwork ready.

"I surely hope the auditor doesn't come up with a lot of taxes owing," he thought as he reached for his hat after dinner. "This is right in the middle of haying, too."

That afternoon as Clayton was cutting hay, he had time to think about the impending audit. He mentally reviewed his dairy operation. "My banker always seems satisfied with the records I give to him. I hope the auditor will be too."

That evening Clayton decided to talk to Orvie, his accountant.

"According to the letter, you happen to have been included in a routine audit program," Orvie explained. "You always have detailed and balanced records. So this shouldn't take long, nor is it anything to be worried about. If you have recorded all your transactions, an audit is nothing to fear. A genuine mistake is usually recognized as such." Orvie's calm voice sounded reassuring.

In spite of Orvie's words, Clayton was still uneasy. "What about those cash deals I sometimes make? Oh, well," he consoled himself, "if it isn't in the books, it shouldn't make a problem."

The following Wednesday was a wet day. Rain pelted incessantly against the windows of the house. "At least it's not a hay day," thought Clayton as he added papers to the growing stack on his desk. Even though Clayton knew his books balanced, and that he could supply everything the auditor had listed, he was still on edge.

Every few minutes he glanced up to check

the driveway. Sure enough, at exactly ten o'clock, a late-model car marked with the Canadian flag insignia splashed to a stop.

"I am Kassim Harran," announced the slim stranger with a distinctive accent, as he offered his hand to Clayton. "You are Mr. Martin?"

"Yes, I am Clayton Martin."

"I am with the Income Tax Audit Unit at Canada Revenue Agency." Kassim pointed to his photo badge that dangled from a clip on his shirt pocket. "I am here to conduct an audit as outlined in my letter."

"Please be seated," Clayton invited.

"First of all, I would like to ask a few basic questions about your farming operation," continued Kassim with an authoritative voice as he settled himself into Clayton's office chair. He opened his laptop computer and placed it on the desk. "According to your tax returns, your operation is primarily dairy. Do you carry on any other business?"

"What do you consider another business?" wondered Clayton. Instantly, his mind returned to the cash he hadn't recorded as income.

"Any products or services you sell besides milk or livestock," answered Kassim.

Suddenly it dawned on Clayton what Kassim must be coming to. Just recently, he had erected a "Firewood for Sale" sign at the end of his lane. Kassim's observant eyes had likely not missed it.

"Ah, we also sell some firewood," offered Clayton.

"Anything else?" was Kassim's curt response.

"Um, not that I can think of right now," replied Clayton. He was mentally reviewing what would show up in his record book.

Kassim's fingers deftly clicked some keys on his computer. After several more questions about Clayton's operation, Kassim was ready to begin with the pile of records.

Clayton had no idea what Kassim was thinking by now. He was polite but very businesslike. Occasionally he would type more information into his computer as he studied Clayton's record book.

"Your figures match what was reported on your tax return," Kassim announced. He pushed aside some papers and peered at his laptop once more. "Tell me more about how you record your income," he began as he pointed to a column of figures in Clayton's book.

"Well, the milk board sends a check once a month," Clayton explained. "It is recorded in my deposit book. Any checks I receive for crops or cattle are handled in the same way."

Kassim paused to enter this information. "Does your operation ever receive cash for goods sold?"

Clayton's heart did a flip-flop. His accountant's words flashed back to his mind. *I must be honest*, he resolved.

"Yes," replied Clayton slowly. His face reddened. "Sometimes people pay cash for firewood."

"How is that income recorded?" was Kassim's prompt question. "Is it included with the firewood total listed in your book?"

"Not . . . um, no, I guess not," stammered Clayton. How he wished that he had been recording those cash sales.

"Where did you record those transactions?" wondered Kassim. He straightened up in his chair as he awaited the answer.

"Um, I . . ." began Clayton, drawing in a deep breath. "I just pocketed the money and didn't record it when I was paid cash. I used it for groceries . . . I guess I was thinking that if most of the firewood sales got recorded, it should be okay," he finished lamely.

"Do you receive cash for any other goods your farm sells?"

"Um, I have occasionally sold a calf to a dealer who pays cash," responded Clayton. "And that income is also not included in my records," he offered. "That's all I can think of right now."

"I see," was all Kassim answered. He began typing some more. "In the tax year we are reviewing, do you have any idea how much your cash income amounted to?"

There was a brief pause as Clayton did

some mental estimating. "I'm only guessing, but it could have been something like, um, maybe close to one thousand dollars," he answered meekly. He hoped this amount was on the generous side.

"Hmm," was Kassim's terse response. "Do you realize that in your situation, cash is taxable income too?" His steady eyes bored the question deeply into Clayton's guilt-stricken conscience.

"Yes," Clayton answered contritely.

"Cash must be reported as income even though it doesn't show up on your bank statement." Kassim's voice rose slightly. "Many people think they can get away with it by not recording. The name for that is tax evasion. I trust you realize that part of our job is to enforce the law."

Kassim shifted in his chair. "I have most of the information I need to complete my review. It will take me a few minutes, however, to create a preliminary report."

Clayton resumed his unfinished task of paying his monthly bills, as the auditor did his work. "I wish I could go back and change my record book, Clayton thought to himself. But I know that's impossible now. It did bother me at times when I saw the column in my book with the heading, 'Cash Not Deposited,' which I never used. It always remained an empty column. I do wonder what Kassim is thinking."

The auditor's silent features showed no hint of emotion as he worked on the final stages of his report.

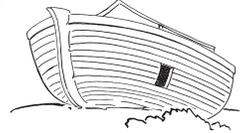
"TAX EVASION!" The words hit Clayton in a fresh way. "I have actually committed a legal offense, he realized, hot with shame. It had to take an audit for me to realize the seriousness of what I have been doing. How can I show remorse to Kassim in a way that he will believe me?"

Finally, Kassim rolled back his chair. "Here is a copy of my initial report," he said, as he offered several sheets to Clayton. "For the most part, you have reported your transactions properly. Your record book balances with the bank statements. However, we must deal with the cash income that was not reported. I will take this file back to my supervisor, and only then can the review be completed. He will help me decide what

*(continued on page 31)*



## Beginning Issues



### Back to the Beginning (Genesis 1:2-5)

by John Mullett

As we continue in our series of going back to Genesis for a closer look at what Scripture actually says, I want to touch on one more thought in regards to Genesis 1:2 before moving on. One argument often raised by proponents of other views (especially the Gap theory) is that God does not create chaos so earth's state in verse two is evidence there was life and history prior to the Biblical Creation. As I mentioned earlier there is nothing in Scripture that gives any indication of any long ages. The incentive is to accommodate man's ideas from outside of Scripture in an attempt to harmonize the idea of long ages and a fossil record covering millions of years with the Bible. The explanation to defend a young earth position and to refute this idea is really quite simple. Yes, God is orderly and no, He doesn't create confusion and chaos in the fashion that sin does, but that doesn't create a problem here. In Genesis 1 God is recounting to us order and time frame in which He created. In the beginning the earth was in an unfinished state because it was just that, unfinished! There's really no need for any other explanation. God tells us He created in six days (not in one day) and there is no reason for us to think that the earth should be in a finished state until after day six. In Martin Luther's day there was a debate on whether God created in **less** than the six days as taught by the Bible. There were those who claimed it wouldn't take God that long. Martin Luther's response still applies today: "When Moses writes that God created Heaven and earth and whatever is in them in six days, then let this period continue to have been six days, and do not venture to devise any comment according to which six days were one day. But, if you cannot understand

*how this could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.*"<sup>1</sup>

One of the keys to verses 3-5 is the source of light; not what the source was as much as its existence on day one. The sun was not created until day four so we know the light didn't originate from the sun. It appears it may have been a fixed source—at least if the earth was rotating as it does today, as one evening and one morning marked the passing of one day just as it does today. While it is not revealed to us what the light source was, what is clear is that light originates with God (the Bible tells us in 1 John 1:5 that God is light) as do our current sources of light (sun and stars). Throughout history numerous cultures have esteemed the heavenly lights as gods and perhaps for that very reason God wanted to reveal to man from the beginning that He is the essence of light. Romans 1:24, 25<sup>2</sup> warns us of the consequences of worshipping the creature instead of the creator while James 1:17<sup>3</sup> reminds us of the source of every gift—including light. Let all praise be to the one true God and let us believe and trust Him that all that He has revealed to us is true—just as He has spoken!

<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, *What Martin Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*.

<sup>2</sup>"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 1:24, 25).

<sup>3</sup>"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). ■

# The Truth About Living Together Before Marriage

by Harold S. Martin

## A Bible Helps Booklet No. 394

**T**he moral slide in our culture is seen in many ways, one of which is related to the number of people who are living together without the commitment of marriage. We live in a self-centered and pleasure-oriented society. Bible standards related to righteousness and morality are falling by the wayside. More and more couples are living together apart from the marriage bond. The trend is alarming. The flippant attitudes of some who “shack up together” are startling.

There is no effort in our day for many couples to even bother trying to conceal their unmarried status. They rent apartments, check in at motels, purchase houses (with their different names signed on the contracts), and visit their parents (expecting to be accepted and given the use of the guest bedroom). Since their idea is that they will live together if they “love” each other, and will stop living together if they stop “loving” each other, they prefer not to complicate the arrangement with a marriage commitment. Many pastors and churches have given approval to the “new morality.” The end result is the proliferation of all kinds of strange living arrangements. The mindset of a permanent marriage is not in their immediate plans.

A letter written by a young woman (addressed to one of her college teachers) says she is considering a live-in relationship with a man, and states the issues very well. She writes:

*My boyfriend and I are contemplating living together for one or two years before getting married. We are intelligent, moral, law-abiding citizens. We love each other deeply. We want to live together, work together—to share, to trust, and to love one another. We want to test*

*marriage before moving blindly into it. We do not have financial means for marriage; and if we decide marriage isn't for us, we will just separate and avoid the heavy expense of divorce. Of what value is a piece of paper—the so-called marriage license—anyway? We are religious people, church members, and do not see any moral problems. Most broad-minded people think this will be the standard lifestyle for the future. Some people, who refuse to accept social change, including our parents, object to our plans. Why?*

Because of the kind of thinking described in the letter above, cohabitation is more and more made to seem normal, and is becoming a substitute for marriage. Yet most sources indicate that nearly half of all cohabiting couples break up before the wedding, and those live-in couples who do marry are *fifty percent more likely to divorce* than those who did not first live together. In addition, those who lived-in before marriage are more likely to be unfaithful to their marriage vows, and generally experience more domestic violence than those who did not cohabit earlier.

Many people believe it is wrong *to even question the morality and value of living together before marriage*. It is becoming more and more acceptable in our society for young men and women to “try it out” before committing themselves to a lifelong relationship. What are the moral implications involved in “live-in” relationships?

Living together really is not a good preparation for marriage. One secular book on marriage states that couples who live together before marriage have significantly lower marital satisfaction than those who did not cohabit before the

wedding. It is important to note that during the same time period in which living together before marriage has become acceptable, the rate of divorce has skyrocketed. Living together apparently has not helped to cement relationships.

Craig Alan Myers has said, "Couples engaged in fornication, and wanting to be married in the church or by the minister, should be asked to repent of their sin and refrain from those practices before a church wedding takes place . . . Further, Christians ought to be taught the Scriptural truth that their bodies (and their sexuality) do not belong to themselves but to God. Fornication and other sexual sins are acts that God roundly condemns and will judge. The Bible flatly says, *'Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [male prostitutes], nor abusers of themselves with mankind [sodomites], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God'* (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). However, the good news is that God will forgive those sins and heal them, when the sinner is penitent. The very next sentence in the Scripture above says, *'And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God'* (1 Corinthians 6:11). There is forgiveness and cleansing in the blood of Christ for the repentant sinner!"

—(Myers, Craig Alan. *On Living Together Before Marriage*, BRF witness. Volume 30. Number 5. September/October 1995.)

There are a number of social reasons for the rising practice of premarital cohabitation:

- 1) A general breakdown of personal morality.
- 2) The changing sexual values in society.
- 3) Extended adolescence and later marriages.
- 4) The availability of more effective methods of contraception.
- 5) Tax laws which sometimes make marriage a disadvantage financially.

The primary factor, however, is related

to the general human rebellion against the laws of God.

Committed Christians believe that sharing bed, breakfast, and bills (apart from a marriage bond) is a violation of the will of God. To the hundreds who are asking, "What's wrong with living together before marriage, anyway?"—we offer the following paragraphs as a Christian response.

**1. Living together as husband and wife without being legally married is fornication.**

Fornication is defined narrowly as "sexual intercourse between unmarried persons," but sometimes it broadens to include all forms of sexual immorality. It is a sin which God will judge. The Bible states clearly (as quoted earlier) that fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers—will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). And again, God's Word says that marriage is to be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed be kept undefiled—for God will judge fornicators and adulterers (Hebrews 13:4). It is a sobering thought that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

**2. God designed sex to be enjoyed by one man and one woman within the permanent shelter of total commitment to each other in marriage.**

Any deviation from this model is a violation of God's Law with some serious consequences. Jesus speaks of a woman who was living with a man who was not her husband (John 4:17-18) as a case of unmarried cohabitation. When Jesus spoke of her private life she quickly changed the subject. Jesus did not regard *cohabitation* and *marriage* as being equivalent in meaning. The lesson of history is that any civilization that turns from the commandments of God, and lavishly devotes itself to carnal pleasure, cannot long endure.

**3. The bodies of Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we are not to grieve Him by wrong conduct.**

Because of this principle, Christians cannot do exactly as they please. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 speaks clearly about what that means. We are to know that our bodies are dwelling places of the Holy Spirit who lives within, and that we are not our own, for we were bought with a price—and therefore believers are *to glorify God in their bodies*. God says that the proper place for the sexual relationship is within the bonds of honorable marriage. To engage in fornication is immoral; it is a sin against the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believer's body.

**4. Sex without the binding commitment of marriage cheapens oneself and the other person involved.**

Love without commitment is not really love at all, but rather it is lust. Marriage alone provides the security from the fear of being used, and seduced, and then abandoned.

Why is marriage so important? Why do we need to receive the church's blessing and be registered by the state? Why do we encourage couples to save the sexual relationship for marriage? In order for a relationship between a man and woman to continue over the years, both partners must give each other their word completely. That is one of the reasons for a public wedding. Both need the support of the community.

Walter Trobisch in his little book entitled, *I Married You*, describes the three aspects of a normal marriage:

- 1) The legal or public ceremony.
- 2) The personal act of consent and commitment.
- 3) The physical sexual union. (The sex act alone does not constitute marriage, for if that were true, there would be no such thing as fornication, because as soon as individuals engaged in the act, they would be married.)

Marriage is a public vow which makes the commitment more difficult to break. We treat marriage as a public contract, so that we will be reminded in our darker

days, and during our times of temptation, of the importance of our obligation to love and cherish and nurture our chosen spouse with genuine care, even if there are difficult days.

Out of fear of losing her boyfriend, a young girl may decide to give in and have sex with him. In the end, she often loses him anyway—and then she feels used and humiliated. Many teenagers fall into the trap of “sex or else.” The boy says, “*If you loved me, you would become intimate with me.*” But when the girl gives in and consents to having sex, she often ends up getting dumped and is badly hurt. The fact is that if he really loved and cared for her, he wouldn't ask her to yield to his sensual feelings.

**5. Violations of God's standards of morality carry consequences which follow later in life.**

Some of the many consequences of cohabitation and fornication are misplaced trust, unplanned pregnancy, venereal disease, and the negative Christian witness which the cohabiting lifestyle presents to the world. The few moments of ecstasy experienced in an illicit affair will be greatly outweighed by the hours of remorse that come from disobeying God.

Sex outside of marriage always does some kind of damage. It leaves some people grieving because they can no longer claim virginity. Others carry dark secrets about things they did in the past. Some are afraid of getting pregnant, or getting a venereal disease, including AIDS.

Another consequence of cohabitation is the greater likelihood of divorce if the couple later decides to marry. *The National Survey of Families and Households* found that couples who cohabit before marriage are 50% more likely to divorce. The same survey also found that unmarried couples living together are twice as likely to be unhappy later on in their relationship, than are those who are duly married. One writer says that cohabitation is not preparation for marriage; instead, it is training for divorce. One study found that “cohabiting couples show higher levels of

aggression than either daters or married people” (*Time* magazine, October 5, 1988).

People who move in before making a marriage commitment are people who have not learned to practice *delayed gratification*. They want the *benefits* of a solid relationship before investing the time and effort to *build* a solid relationship. Later, when the road gets rocky, these folks won’t invest the time and effort to *sustain* the relationship either. One writer says, ‘Having sex too soon, moving in without commitment . . . , are the behaviors of basically immature, let-me-feel-good-now . . . people.’

—(from “*Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives*” by Laura C. Schlessinger © 1994).

Those who urge a period of unmarried cohabitation in order to test the sincerity and durability of their love overlook a common characteristic of human nature. It is *the sense of being bound* that helps love to become stabilized. The couple that is firmly committed to the principle of lifelong togetherness, has a much greater chance of experiencing a genuine lasting relationship, than the couple who regards their domestic habitation as being subject to termination.

**6. Living together before marriage is an offense against God’s Law and is an injustice to one’s partner.**

God’s original command in creation was that male and female should “cleave” (or “cling”) to one another in covenantal partnership, that is, in marriage (Genesis 2:24). A man shall leave Father and Mother, and become united to his wife, and they two shall become one flesh.

Our objection to living together before marriage is based upon the Biblical teaching that sexual activity outside of marriage is an offense against God’s Law. We are told in Ephesians 5:3 that there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality among God’s people.

The Bible has no direct teaching on what should be involved in a marriage

ceremony, nor does it tell how the ceremony should be conducted to make it a valid transaction. However, marriage has always been a public *event*. There has always been a specific point at which persons were recognized as being married. The Bible has specific regulations about the sins of adultery and fornication. It is assumed that the community will know *who is married* and *who is not married*. Marriage is not a private affair. It takes place within the community. And the Christian is a member of a special community—the Body of Christ. Our entire life (including our role in marriage) is lived out as a member of this special community. In the wedding ceremony, the couple makes pledges in the presence of family, friends, the church, the state, and God. When this commitment has been expressed, then the man and woman are ready for physical consummation. This pattern is in harmony with the teaching found in God’s Word.

A public marriage ceremony demonstrates that we are to take seriously our responsibility to a larger society—including our friends, family, neighbors, and fellow Christians. We do not live to ourselves. We live as members of a community whose approval is important, whose love is desired, and whose reputation is esteemed. A marriage which occurs under God, before an audience, and ratified by the laws of the state is a strong statement of intention. It says that the couple intends to worship God, to contribute to the welfare of the community, and to put the commitment to persevere in the marriage on public record.

The marriage bond bestows meaning upon the couple’s sexual activity as expressed in the phrase “one flesh.” It highlights the complete interchange of the two selves, as in the bride’s delightful statement in the Song of Solomon, “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (Song of Solomon 2:16). Marriage *confirms* the mutual commitment and bonding of a man and woman by specifying

and guarding certain expectations and responsibilities. In cohabitation, by way of contrast, there is mutual *exploitation within* the possibility of *potential flight*. And that does not tend to promote strong and lasting relationships.

A Hallmark card says, “*I can’t promise you forever, but I can promise you today.*” This is one of the newest love cards for the current generation—no commitment—just warm fuzzy feelings. And then when the mood changes and the fuzzies are gone, the earlier “love” and “respect” begin to fade. Living together before marriage is not an effective way to test the compatibility of potential marriage partners. Living together without marriage usually does more emotional harm than good. Total commitment is what makes a lasting and good marriage. Yet commitment is what cohabiting couples are purposely avoiding. Couples *who mate before they are mates*, tend to rely on sexual intimacy to keep them together. Strong human relationships require more than that. Couples who share the same roof before the public marriage ceremony often build a shaky foundation for their life together.

Our churches need to call for a renewed commitment to chastity and to the sacredness of sex *within* marriage. Kevin Ray, in *Disciple Renewal*, says, “There is a powerful movement today to *ignore* the clear teaching of Scripture regarding human sexuality. This problem is pervasive. In our society, living

together outside of marriage is now acceptable. Divorce is viewed as an easy alternative to the struggle of making a marriage work. Children are being taught in our public schools that sexual activity is acceptable as long as it is done ‘safely.’ Homosexual behavior is being promoted as normal human sexual expression. The perversion of Biblical teaching regarding human sexuality threatens to undermine society and is bringing great division to the church of Jesus Christ. On the issue of human sexuality, we have abandoned the God-given standard, and are therefore in danger of incurring God’s wrath. This is a point where the church must be called to faithfulness.”

The church needs to reach out to those who are suffering the devastating effects of venereal diseases, and make their days as pain-free as possible by offering the peace which Christ brings to those who embrace Him—but we must also teach abstinence from sexual encounters outside of the true and honorable marriage bond. Christians must repudiate the “new morality.” ■

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#### **BIBLE HELPS**

*Robert Lehigh, Editor*

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## **Counseling From the Word**

### **Psalm 73: Too Easy to Be Senseless**

by Paul Tripp

“I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.”

The driven, watchful envy of a horizontal pleasure-oriented heart will drive you

crazy. It will not only rob you of your satisfaction and joy, it will take your humanity from you. It will turn you into a bit of a beast. It will make you more of a brute

than a friend. It will eat your heart and consume your soul.

You see, if you somehow fall into thinking that life is found in the pleasures and comforts of the physical; created people; things and experiences of this here and now world; then that is what you will live for. You won't live for God. You won't live for the good of others. You won't be motivated by what is loving, good, true, and wise. No, you will live for you, and whether you know it or not, every day will be a hot personal pursuit of your private definition of pleasure. You will have you at the center of your will. You will be your own king, seeking the control over people and circumstances that is necessary to ensure that you will, in fact, get the things that you have set your heart on. You will become a hyper-vigilant observer of your own life and the lives of others. You will be an incessant pleasure/comfort accountant; measuring your experience of these things over against the experience of those around you. You will daily measure who has the biggest pile of pleasure and you will not be happy if it is not you. You will naturally judge that you are more deserving than your comfortable friends and you will question the goodness of God and the moral good of obeying, if, in reality, at the end of the day you end up with the shorter end of the stick. You will do this with regularity and perseverance, but you won't know you are doing it. You'll know that you're unhappy, but you will tell yourself that God has failed you. You will say that it simply is not fair that bad people get blessed while good people like you have to suffer through life with little. You will struggle to hold onto your faith, wondering if it is all worth it in the end.

What has happened is that the architecture of your life is shaped by an infrastructure of personal expectation and self-focused demands. You know all too well what you want from people and situations and you know what God needs to do in order for you to name Him as good. What all of this means is that at the deepest, most profound and life-directing level of your

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heart, you have lost your senses. In the Biblical sense of what the word means, you have gone mad. Sin has simply made you crazy. Without realizing it, you have taken on a distorted view of reality. You have a distorted view of yourself, others, life, and God. Life will never operate the way you want it to. People will not submit to the laws of your kingdom for very long. God will not get up and give you His holy throne. Your reality is irrational and your hope is hopeless. Your dreams are gas. And the more you work to fill your heart, the emptier it becomes. The more you work to get your dream, the more it vaporizes in your hands. The more you live for you, the more envious you become. It is socially acceptable madness. It cannot and will not ever work.

Asaph's confession is insightful and indicting. There is a way in which it indicts us all, because in his confession, he calls us to examine what sin does to each of us. God hardwired us to be kingdom-oriented people. We were designed to live with both king and kingdom consciousness, because we were designed to live for Him. The architecture of our lives was to be shaped by all of the plans, purposes, words, and actions that would flow out of these words, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." It is inside the boundaries of these words that true and lasting peace of heart will only ever be found. Inside these boundaries is where real wisdom and real love lives. Inside this moral structure, life lives in gorgeous beauty. Outside is frustration, discouragement, anger, disappointment, and doubt. Sure, the temporary pleasures are pleasurable, but their shelf-life is short. The reality is that creation has no capacity whatsoever to satisfy your heart. Your heart has been wired to find its hope, peace, and rest in God alone.

Living for the pleasures of here and now, as the principle quest of your life, is a vain attempt to re-create the world and how it was designed to operate. No, it is not wrong to find pleasure pleasurable. It is not ungodly to desire comfort. It is not evil to desire good and loving relationships. It is not wrong to appreciate beauty. But

**SWORD AND TRUMPET**

here's what you need to understand: all of these things were beautifully designed by God to point and connect you to Him. These created pleasures were not made to be an end in themselves, but a means to an end. All of creation is a finger pointing to the Lord of creation in whom life can be found. Creation was made to introduce you to Him over and over again. It was not meant to replace Him.

Look around and you will see the evidence that we have gone crazy. We are a culture that is deeply in debt because our cravings are bigger than our means, and so we have charged ourselves into financial oblivion. Our cravings are bigger than what is needful and healthy, so we have eaten ourselves into ill health, obesity becoming a national health crisis. We have lived for the buzz, becoming addicted to an endless variety of substances and experiences that give us short-term relief. We reduce one another to vehicles of happiness instead of objects of love, living in cycles of relational dysfunction and separation. We stand before closets that would clothe the third world and tell ourselves that we have nothing to wear. We stand in front of stuffed refrigerators and tell ourselves that we really have nothing to eat. We are jealous of one another and threatened by the prospect that the good life will pass us by, and we cope with it all by numbing ourselves with things that are not healthy, or with hour after hour of the brain-deadening pleasure-porn that we call entertainment. And we wake up no more at rest or at peace than the day before, hoping to succeed more, acquire more, enjoy more, possess more, experience more, love more, and feel more—all so we can smile more. We are driven and crazy and Psalm 73 gives us the answer.

Psalm 73 powerfully reminds us that this is not all there is. The name of the game is not personal, temporal pleasure. There is an end coming. All that is now wrong will be made right. You see, we are not only kingdom-oriented beings, we are beings with a future. We were made to live with God and for God—forever. In pointing

us to the final end of all things, Psalm 73 tells us what the drama of life is all about. Although we were made to have God as the one life-shaping treasure of our hearts, sin turns us in on ourselves. It cause us to forget who we are and that God exists. It turns us into little self-sovereigns, wanting to reign for our own glory. But God, in His grace, invaded our madness in the person of His Son. Jesus did not transgress God's boundaries. He did not live for His pleasure. He lived a life that was perfect in His Father's eyes. But He did more; He willing paid the price for our selfishness. On the cross He purchased our forgiveness. But there is still more. He gave us His righteousness. In Jesus, all who believe not only don't get what they deserve (condemnation), they are given what they have not earned (righteousness). Because of this forgiveness and righteousness, we are accepted into God's family forever. Psalm 73 reminds us that the crisis of the human existence is not that we are horizontally unfulfilled, but that we are vertically cut off. Grace connects us once again to God, and in so doing, to the one place where hearts can find rest and we can be given back our senses. Grace not only connects you to God, but delivers you from you and from the madness of you and your propensity to make life about little more than you in the here and now. ■

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### THE EMPTY COLUMN . . . cont'd.

penalties you have incurred due to noncompliance under the Income Tax Act. You will likely face charges for tax evasion. Do you have any questions before I leave?"

"I would like to, um, to apologize for not reporting all of my income," began Clayton slowly. "I want to pay any taxes owing because of my not recording the cash income, and also for any other penalties your department considers necessary."

*(continued on page 35)*



# Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

*“ . . . singing with understanding!”*

## “Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated”



by Havergal/Malan

**Lyrics:** Frances Ridely Havergal lived in England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She was a highly cultured and well-educated person, and a passionate follower of Jesus Christ in the Anglican tradition. She was a prodigious child, reading by the age of four and writing poetry at seven.<sup>1</sup> Her formal education covered a broad base of subjects, including linguistics, several modern and ancient languages, and music. This broad base of knowledge allowed her to write very effective hymns, which she did throughout her life. While she dabbled in music as a composer and soloist, she is primarily remembered for her hymn texts. She experienced poor health for much of her life, and died at the age of only forty-two. She never married.

This little paragraph, taken from a publication relatively soon after Havergal's death, describes in her words the origin of this particular hymn:

Perhaps you will be interested to know the origin of the Consecration hymn “Take My Life.” I went for a little visit of five days [to Areley House]. There were ten persons in the house, some unconverted and long prayed for, some converted, but not rejoicing Christians. He gave me the prayer

“Lord, give me all in this house!” And He just did! Before I left the house every one had got a blessing. The last night of my visit after I had retired, the governess asked me to go to the two daughters. They were crying, and then and there both of them trusted and rejoiced; it was nearly midnight. I was too happy to sleep, and passed most of the night in praise and renewal of my own consecration; and these little couplets formed themselves, and chimed in my heart one after another till they finished with “ever only, ALL FOR THEE!”<sup>2</sup>

The tendency of humans (even Christian humans) is to think of ourselves and our possessions as our own. This hymn walks us through various aspects of our existence that we would typically be tempted to view as our own, and consecrates them each individually to God and His service. Beginning from the bird's eye view, the hymn begins simply “Take my life, and let it be. Consecrated . . . .” The poet then branches into more specifics. The specific items that we are led to consecrate include our time, hands, feet, voice, money, intellect, will, and heart. The hymn then concludes with another bird's eye snapshot, “Take myself . . . .” All that we are and have is a result of

# Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated

HENDON 7.7.7.7

HENRI ALEXANDER CÉSAR MALAN, 1827

FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL, 1874

ARRANGED BY LOWELL MASON, c. 1827

1 Take my life and let it be Con - se - crat - ed,  
 2 Take my hands, and let them move At the im - pulse  
 3 Take my voice, and let me sing, Al - ways, on - ly,  
 4 Take my sil - ver and my gold; Not a mite would  
 5 Take my will and make it Thine, It shall be no  
 6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour At Thy feet its

Lord, to Thee; Take my mo - ments and my days; Let them flow in  
 of Thy love. Take my feet, and let them be Swift and beau - ti -  
 for my King. Take my lips, and let them be Filled with mes - sag -  
 I with - hold. Take my in - tel - lect and use Ev - ery power as  
 long - er mine: Take my heart, it is Thine own, It shall be Thy  
 trea - sure store; Take my - self, and I will be Ev - er, on - ly,

cease - less praise, Let them flow in cease - less praise.  
 ful for Thee, Swift and beau - ti - ful for Thee.  
 es from Thee, Filled with mes - sag - es from Thee.  
 Thou shalt choose, Ev - ery power as Thou shalt choose.  
 roy - al throne, It shall be Thy roy - al throne.  
 all for Thee, Ev - er, on - ly, all for Thee. A - men.

God's goodness to us, and the only logical response is to offer ourselves back to Him in a life of worship.

**Music:** The tune for this hymn is a simple one, easy to sing and memorable, almost "catchy." Written by Swiss composer Cesar Malan, this tune was brought to America and arranged by the great church musician Lowell Mason.

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

2. *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, Ed. John Julian, MA. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892 (accessed as a Google book).

# Adoration—The Basis of Our Worship

by Larry Bergey

**A**dore, not a term that we usually think of when we think of Jesus, but why not?

Come with me to Jerusalem. Picture a magnificent gate in a huge stone wall. Through the gate comes a man, riding on the back of a donkey. The man and animal are dwarfed by the majestic gate. Isaiah 53:2 says of this man Jesus, “*He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him,*” yet throngs of people, waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna!” accompany them. As Jesus entered Jerusalem through the eastern gate, riding on a donkey, the people shouted, “Hosanna!”

What were they saying? The word *hosanna* is a term of adoration meaning “one who will save us,” not a command to save but praise to the one who has the power to save. The people with Jesus were shouting their adoration for all to hear. Were they truly adoring Him because of who He was, or because of what they had seen Him do and expected Him to do for them?

Recently I asked my family, “What would you say if I asked who or what you adore?” Our young son responded immediately that he adores his three-month-old niece. There is something very profound in this. We do often think of an infant or small child when we use the word *adore*. Our tiny granddaughter has done nothing to earn our adoration other than simply to exist. We love her because she is herself, special and wonderful. It causes us to fall in awe before our Creator as we see the

perfection of her tiny hands and feet, the way she grows and learns and changes.

I wonder what response I might get if I asked around town who or what the people adored. Maybe their spouse or a friend, a person who had done some great thing for them, Miss America, or a sports superstar or rock star. Why would they give the answer they did? Would it be because of what the object of their adoration has done, for what that person looks like or acts like, or because of what others think of him or her?

As we think of adoration as an aspect of our worship of God, why do we worship God—for what He has done for us or because of Who He is? The Psalmist says, “*It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD*” (Psalm 92:1) and “*O that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*” (Psalm 107:8). It is good to praise

God for what He has done. We should praise Him for salvation, that He sent Jesus to make a way that we can be reconciled to Himself, the Holy God who is truth and purity, even though we have gone away from Him and tried to do our own thing, or even thought we could be good enough on our own. We praise Him for what He has done for us in creating the wonders of the world, for creating us, and then for making us into new creatures and continuing to work in us to sanctify us. Our printer would run out of ink long before we finished listing all the great things He has done for us. But our worship also needs to be that of praise for who He is: the great Creator of the universe, the

God for what He has done. We should praise Him for salvation, that He sent Jesus to make a way that we can be reconciled to Himself, the Holy God who is truth and purity, even though we have gone

away from Him and tried to do our own thing, or even thought we could be good enough on our own. We praise Him for what He has done for us in creating the wonders of the world, for creating us, and then for making us into new creatures and continuing to work in us to sanctify us. Our printer would run out of ink long before we finished listing all the great things He has done for us. But our worship also needs to be that of praise for who He is: the great Creator of the universe, the

Good Shepherd who cares for us, and for His inexpressible wonderfulness.

So do you adore God in this way? Adoration is something we might not spend much time thinking about. The word *adore* has a deeper meaning than just praise or admire, but our praise should come from adoration. When we become too familiar with something or someone, we tend to take for granted the person or handle the item with less care. God is great, and we need to take time to keep God as the One we adore more than anyone else or any other thing. Adoration is something that almost takes our breath away. Something we adore we think about and keep special.

Worship then is something we live as well as something we do when we gather together with other believers. In those special times, whether it is Sunday morning, evening, or other special evening or other special times, what kinds of actions show an attitude of worship? If we adore God, will we come to Him casually or sloppily—looking like the world, or like a people set apart for Him? In Exodus God gave very specific instructions on how the priests were to appear when they led the people in worship. Dress and manners express different things in different cultures and times, but the question we need to think about is, “Does my life, action, dress, or demeanor show adoration to God?” The people in the wilderness cleaned themselves, put off their jewelry, and cleaned their clothes in preparation for meeting with God. God also gave special instructions in Exodus 20:25 of how to make the altars. Do we then say it doesn’t matter what type of music we use to worship our God? What are we saying about how we view God when we sit erect to hear the reading of His Word or maybe even stand at such times? Our coming together to worship Him involves recognizing and describing what He has done and who He is, His attributes and characteristics. We worship with praise, prayer, and proclamation. So if you were to look at your public worship of Christ, how much of Himself do you

think God sees being reflected? Does He see us selfishly trying to appease our personal preferences or does He really see His people concentrating on Him?

As we place God first in our lives, His principles will overrule all of our life and our own reasoning. Our life and worship will then express absolute adoration of Him. ■

—Reprinted with permission from the *KMF Messenger*, May-June 2011.

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### THE EMPTY COLUMN . . . cont’d.

“I appreciate your apologizing,” answered Kassim. “I will make a note of it in your file.”

Kassim got up from his chair. “You will be receiving a final report of this audit in several weeks.” He handed his business card to Clayton as he stepped through the door to leave.

After supper, as Clayton was milking his cows, he had lots of time to think. With shame and remorse he reviewed the day’s events. “Noncompliance. Charges for tax evasion. If only it wouldn’t have taken an audit to wake me up, and help me form more conviction! It would have been so easy and simple to record all my income right away when I received it, including the cash payments. I would much rather pay a bit more income tax than carry a burden of guilt. Why did I think that the government doesn’t need to know? Jesus taught us to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” If only I could have left a better Christian example.”

The sun pierced through broken clouds as Clayton headed for the house. A brilliant rainbow had formed on the eastern horizon. Even though the audit was not yet complete, Clayton knew that from now on he was going to make some changes in his book-keeping. There would no longer be an empty column in his record book! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Family Life*, May 2011.

## *Piety and Philosophy: A Primer for Christian Schools*

Author: Richard A. Riesen  
Publisher: ACW Press, 2002. 183 pp.  
Available from: *Barnes & Noble;  
Online Stores*

What does the development of the mind have to do with the cause of Christ? Can intellect and faith be integrated without the triumph of philosophy over piety? Dr. Richard Riesen suggests three premises: the two entities “must and will be joined”; they have not always been successfully integrated in American schools; and Christians have the responsibility and privilege of connecting them well in our schools. Given this subject, one might expect a volume perhaps three inches thick. However, Dr. Riesen describes his work as merely a primer or short essay on some of the elementary principles of Christian education, in the hope that it will “prime” thought and stimulate discussion.

Several convictions prompted Dr. Riesen, head of a Christian school for thirteen years, to write this book. The academic abilities of American young people seem to be at an all-time low. The difficulty here lies not only in the means of educating young people, he

says, but the end: what do we hope to accomplish by education—what should children learn, and why? Being convinced that Christians ought to be involved in the discussion, he sets out to explore a number of interesting questions (most of the chapter titles are interrogative).

What does the Bible have to say about education? This is a question without a simple answer, as evidenced by the titles of the first two chapters: “Is Education Biblical? No” and “Is Education Biblical? Yes.” Dr. Riesen outlines the history of Jewish education, both at home and formal, then moves into the early church era, where there was definite opposition to the classical education and culture of the Greeks. It is particularly interesting that Tertullian, himself a highly educated man, appears in some of his writings to disparage education and philosophy. This idea seems to have taken root: a pagan philosopher said sarcastically of the second-century Christian community that its only requirement for entrance was that a man be ignorant, unintelligent, simple, and uneducated. However, a study of