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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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other aspect of human existence. This fall-
 enness perverts the arts against fulfilling
 their original purpose and prevents us from
 embracing them uncritically.

More recently, many Christians have ob-
 jected to art on the grounds that it is domi-
 nated by an anti-Christian view of the world.
 They rightly perceive that over the last cen-
 tury or more many artists, writers, and mu-
 sicians have become increasingly cynical
 about the possibility of knowing the truth.
 In many cases, they have abandoned the
 quest to discover and express transcendent
 meaning. Art has also suffered a tragic loss of
 sacred beauty, as many modern and post-
 modern artists have been attracted instead
 to absurdity, irrationality, and even cruelty.
 Stuart McAllister was right when he wrote
 that "much of the energy and effort of our
 artists and cultural architects has gone into
 debunking, dismantling, or deconstructing
 all that is good, beautiful, and respected, to
 be replaced with the shallow, the ugly, the
 ephemeral."¹ In many ways the art world has
 become—in the words of critic Suzi Gablik—a
 "suburb of hell." At times the pervasive
 sense of unhappiness is palpable. Anyone
 who doubts this should attend the senior ex-
 hibition at nearly any art school in America,
 or view the subversive artwork of recent
 winners of the Turner Prize,² or consider
 how much trouble major orchestras have
 capturing an audience for dissonant work
 written since 1950. There are exceptions, of
 course, but a good deal of contemporary art
 is the art of alienation, which, if it is true at
 all, is true only about the disorder of a world
 damaged by our depravity. God can use
 transgressive art to awaken the conscience
 and arouse a desire for a better world. But as
 a general rule, such artwork does not reveal
 the redemptive possibilities of a world that,
 although fallen, has been visited by God and
 is destined for His glory.

Yet even Christians who are dismissive of
 art continue to use it. Doing so is in-

escapable. Every time we build a sanctuary,
 arrange furniture in a room, or produce a
 brochure, we are making artistic decisions.
 Even if we are not artists in our primary vo-
 cation, there is an inescapably artistic aspect
 to our daily experience. The question be-
 comes, therefore, whether as Christians we
 will aspire to high aesthetic standards. All
 too often we settle for something that is
 functional, but not beautiful. We gravitate
 toward what is familiar, popular, or commer-
 cial, with little regard for the enduring val-
 ues of artistic excellence. Sometimes what
 we produce can be described only as *kitsch*—
 tacky artwork of poor quality that appeals to
 low tastes. The average Christian bookstore
 is full of the stuff, as the real artists will tell
 us, if only we will listen.

Ultimately this kind of art dishonors God
 because it is not in keeping with the truth
 and beauty of His character. It also under-
 mines the church's Gospel message of salva-
 tion in Christ. Art has tremendous power to
 shape culture and touch the human heart.
 Its artifacts embody the ideas and desires of
 the coming generation. This means that
 what is happening in the arts today is
 prophetic of what will happen in our culture
 tomorrow. It also means that when Chris-
 tians abandon the artistic community, we
 lose a significant opportunity to communi-
 cate Christ to our culture. Furthermore,
 when we settle for trivial expressions of the
 truth in worship and art, we ourselves are di-
 minished, as we suffer a loss of transcen-
 dence. What we need to recover (or possibly
 discover for the first time) is a full biblical
 understanding of the arts—not for art's
 sake, but for God's sake. Then we will be
 able to produce better art that more effec-
 tively testifies to the truth about God and
 His grace. This goal is important not just for
 artists, but also for everyone else made in
 God's image and in need of redemption. ■

—Reprinted from the book *Art for God's Sake*,
 published by P&R Publishing Co., NJ. © 2006.
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1. Stuart McAllister, "What Is Good and Who Says?" as quoted by Ned Bustard, "God Is Good Like No Other," in *It Was Good—Making Art to the Glory of God* (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2000), 13-14.
 2. Witness the vulgar creations of Martin Creed, Tracey Emin, Grayson Perry, and others; see Gene Edward Veith, "Stealing Beauty," *World* (March 20, 2004): 32-41.

Person of the Month:

John S. Martin

(1908-1964)



The fourth of seven children, John S. Martin was born October 9, 1908, in Earl Township, Pennsylvania, to Milton H. and Henrietta Weaver Martin. In 1915, at the age of seven, John moved with his family to a farm located in West Earl Township.

For his elementary education Martin attended Good's School in West Earl Township and later graduated from New Holland High School in 1927 at the age of 19.

John Martin came to Christ as his Saviour early in his teen years. He was then baptized and joined the Groffdale Church, February 3, 1924, at the age of 15. He happily served the church as a Sunday school teacher and also as its Sunday school superintendent. He was also active in his district's winter Bible schools, serving for many years as a teacher and also as director.

Brother Martin met and fell in love with Elmeda Bowman and the two of them were married September 21, 1935, when John was almost 27 years old. God eventually blessed their home with the birth of a daughter.

The couple resided in Voganville for eleven years while John worked doing the bookkeeping for businesses in New Holland.

In 1946, at the age of 38, Martin moved his family back to his father's farm where he lived the rest of his life.

At 41 John S. Martin was ordained to the ministry of the Groffdale Church on January 19, 1949.

During his years at Groffdale he was also active as an evangelist in the conference, serving in his own county as well as in Union and Franklin counties, the Washington-Baltimore district, and churches in Florida and Alabama.

Brother Martin was ordained again, this time as Groffdale bishop on February 1, 1962, at the age of 53.

Brother John was also faithful in serving on various committees, etc., such as the following: the Nonconformity Committee, the Eastern Mennonite College Advisory Council, the Mission Board Nominating Committee, a study committee concerning hospitalization, the Voluntary Service Committee, the Conference Program Committee, and as a charter member of the Philhaven Hospital Board.

Sadly, two years later, on Saturday, January 18, 1964, at the young age of 55, Brother John S. Martin went home to be with the Lord. His funeral was held January 21 at the Groffdale Church with burial in the church's cemetery.

- Gail L. Emerson



The Splendor of Thorns



by Jud Davis

Can you imagine the Wal-Mart floral department offering a bouquet of thorns? Does the Garden Center ever advertise Acacia thorn bushes? Do carpenters choose two-by-fours made of thorn wood? Except for our botanist friends, few people find thorns captivating. They are not beautiful. And they don't seem very useful, though they do burn extremely well.

The negative association of thorns is what makes their appearance in the Bible so intriguing, for God weaves these very thorns into the revelation of His grace. He gives them a star role in the unfolding drama of His judgment and unbelievable mercy.

“Thorns and thistles” (a Hebrew phrase referring to the entire class of thorns) were not in the original creation (Genesis 3:18). When man sinned, God cursed the ground with thorns—a negative, hurtful, even repulsive element that intruded into the original creation’s perfection.

Every pricked finger, every overgrown field, every ugly thornbush, reminds us of the frustrating pain of sin and its hideous blotch on the canvas of God’s masterpiece. Thorns have all the natural charm of Magic Marker on a Monet painting.

At first glance, the perfection of the pre-Fall world seems forever lost because of unsightly thorns. But God has woven these thorns into a beautiful plan.

The Burning Thornbush

Thorns appear next in the Bible as the burning bush.¹

Both Jesus and Stephen use a special Greek word to describe this bush’s thorny nature. Stephen describes the scene in Exodus with these words: “in the flame of a burning thorn bush” (Acts 7:30, NASB). Jesus says the same thing in Luke 20:37.

So why did God choose to appear inside thorns at this dreadful mountain, where He later gave the Law—a law that serves only to remind us of our failure (Galatians 3:10–4:25; Hebrews 12:18-24)?

When God later visited that same holy mountain to give the Law, it was so deadly that any human or beast that merely touched the mountain would be killed (Exodus 19:12). So why didn’t the thorns—that combustible remnant of the Curse—explode in flame when the Holy One, in fire, first appeared to Moses?²

The whole event at the burning bush is almost a parody of the Curse in Eden. The One who appeared in the Garden and pronounced the curse of thorns now reappears in the midst of thorns, promising deliverance. Ultimately, He promises a land flowing with milk and honey. How can these things be?

A Thornwood Tabernacle

The enigma of the thorns continues in God’s revelation. The next time we meet

God wove
thorns into
His beautiful
plan for
fallen man.

1. The Hebrew word *sinah* and its Greek translation *batos* both mean “thorn bush” (Exodus 3:2).
2. God gives us a hint at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire without consuming the 120 disciples.

thorns, God instructs Moses to build a tabernacle.

The raw material of that tabernacle is Acacia wood (Exodus 26:29), a small tree or bush whose branches are covered with long thorns. God then directs that they cover this thorn wood with gold (Exodus 26:29).

Now, why would God take a cursed element of the Fall and beautify it with gold? How can thorns, fit only for fire, become the glorious dwelling place of the fiery pillar of God's presence?

The Field of Thorns

The last place Israel encamps before they enter the Promised Land was called Abel-Shittim, which means "the Field of Thorns" (Numbers 25:1; Joshua 2:1). Israel was living in the Field of Thorns because the lawgiver Moses had not fully obeyed the law (Deuteronomy 32:49-51). He must perish without entering the Promised Land.

Disobedient Moses could only gaze from afar, pining for that land, pleading with God in vain to go in.

The people of Moses thus languish in the Field of Thorns, longing for that promised Prophet, who was like Moses, but better—that utterly perfect prophet, priest, and king who would accomplish all things that other men from dust failed to do.

In the Old Testament, God foreshadows that One who will come after Moses. His Hebrew name is Joshua, "Yahweh saves." Greeks would translate his name as *Iesous* (Jesus). God the Father points to this connection between Joshua and Jesus when He commands, "Thou shalt call his name JESUS [*Iesous*], for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus is that promised Prophet like Moses, but much more than a prophet. He is the One to lead God's people into Paradise.

An Unlikely Crown

Thorns find a role in the climax of this divinely crafted plan of redemption. Jesus,

tortured in anticipation of crucifixion, was mocked while wearing a crown of thorns. The "thorns and thistles" of Eden's Curse now became this mocking crown.

God first promised His people redemption when He appeared in the midst of thorns at the Mountain of the Law (Mount Sinai). To fulfill that promise, Jesus appeared in thorns again, but this time bearing the curse of Mount Sinai's law. He wore the crown we earned by our rebellion in Adam and by the years of ratifying Adam's choice as we sin. . . .

The beauty of thorns is that they remind each of us of God's lavish—almost foolishly lavish (1 Corinthians 1:23)—grace upon us. He died for us, absolutely guilty sinners, whose sin caused those thorns to so mar God's creation and Christ's brow.

Thorns
reappear in
the climax
of God's
drama of
redemption.

Adam and Eve attempted to usurp God's place as the only lawgiver in Zion. God would have been just to hang them on their tree of rebellion—like the rebellious kings of Canaan who were cursed by God for all Israel to see (Joshua 10:26).

But God had a different plan. God the Son stepped out of eternity. He took human flesh on Himself, lived under the law in perfect obedience, and then suffered all the punishment due Adam, and all of those who would ever come to Jesus.

God the Son wore the thorns. On behalf of rebellious mankind, He allowed Himself to be stripped naked and hung on that tree, cursed by God. Just like those kings of Canaan who were hung by Joshua, Jesus was hung and then His body was placed in a garden cave, with a stone over its mouth (Joshua 10:27)! But death could not hold Jesus.

God intends to transform us, the descendants of the rebels in Eden, entangled as we are with thorns. He will turn us into a kingdom of priests. In fact, we ultimately are a new temple, the heavenly temple, where the holy, fiery, triune God dwells with His redeemed people forever (2 Corinthians 6:16).
(continued on page 11)

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

“Keep Yourselves From Idols” 1 John 5:21

by Larry Warren

When the Holy Spirit inspired John to pen these words I doubt if John envisioned any of the Jewish believers going back to the idol worship that caused their nation to apostatize over and over again. God's recurring judgments in time cured the nation of worshipping the images of false gods.

I believe the Holy Spirit was warning of a form of idolatry that would be hardly noticeable, and much harder to define. An idolatry that in time would weave its way into a way of life, even in the Church for which Christ died.

One of the better, and all inclusive definitions of idolatry is this: “Whatever is so desired and loved, so trusted in or honored, as to displace God from His preeminence is an idol.”

It does not take intellectual depth to see the desires of most people today are set on everything but God. The time they spend following sports in an almost worshipful way, memorabilia fetishes and all, is evidence of their idolatrous fixation with the sports god. The same is true of all the Holly-

wood and Nashville stars and starlets who are idolized by the masses.

This glaring display of idolatry is offensive to God and all of God's true followers. But it goes unnoticed by those who are Christian in name only, and have their own idolizing problems. They have convinced themselves that idolatry is a sin committed only by wicked sinners in some dark corner of the world. Since they make an open declaration of their religious beliefs they feel far above the common sinner. Burning a little religious incense now and again to the God of Heaven, they think distracts God's attention so He will not take notice of their little darling idols. They feel they can slide by if they dress up and sweeten the aroma of their stale, out-of-touch spiritual life, with some religious activity.

Some have become so obsessed with even legitimate things, they fail to realize how large a part of their life they have claimed, and how they affect their moods and outlook on life. It might be something that conforms with all religious standards, but if it preoccupies a person's life with deepfelt

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intensity, it is an idol.

The idol could be your closest friend, a member of the family, a hobby, education, reputation, power, money, popularity, or pleasure. It is the thing that is at the forefront of your memory. It fills your mind, stimulating and inspiring your imagination. I know you do not want to call it an idol, but that is what it is. It is no wonder so many professed Christians live such shallow lives, lacking spiritual expression. They failed to heed John's warning to keep themselves from idols.

A. W. Tozer said, "We must boldly repudiate the cheap values of the fallen world and become completely detached in spirit from everything that unbelieving men set their hearts upon, allowing ourselves only the simplest enjoyments of nature which God has bestowed alike upon the just and unjust."

When our ancestors came to America to be free to worship and serve God, their only desire was to love and please Him. He was preeminent in their lives. As they honored Him and His Word, He blessed and prospered them. Prosperity in most cases accompanies a godly life. However, prosperity also has a tendency to lessen a person's love and devotion to God, and in time turns into idolatry. Cotton Mather was a famous early American clergyman and author. He made this statement back in 1702: "Religion brought forth prosperity, and the daughter destroyed the mother. There is danger lest the enchantments of this world make the people forget their errand into the wilderness."

That almost prophetic statement is more applicable today than any other time since the beginning of our nation. People who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ idolize the enchantments of the world. They trust and honor their economic well-being as a cherished idol. This form of idolatry is encouraged by the prosperity preachers.

Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Is this what has absorbed the Christian's first love for Christ? The more a

person has the more they want, and the more they want the stronger grows their affections and attachment to things they have. They will not allow themselves to see this as a form of idolatry, and become annoyed and insulted when a preacher does.

In most cases this sin of putting one's trust and love in material possessions goes unnoticed because it has the appearance of respectability, and is so common among many. However, idolatry is idolatry whether it is called that or not, and it will shut a person out of Heaven. This is why Paul said, "Wherefore my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." We need to take this sin dead seriously. The Bible says in Galatians 5:20, 21: Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: . . . they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Idolatry is at the very top of this dreadful list of sins that will keep you out of Heaven. That should cause you to heed Paul's warning to "flee from idolatry."

To save you from being hopelessly joined to your idols, God might remove them from their pedestal and dash them to pieces as He did the Philistines' god, Dagon. When this happens, the child who held the place of preeminence in your life might break your heart, disgrace you, and become a vexing burden. The business might fail and other endeavors be unsuccessful. All of these things can come to pass in God's effort to rescue you from the sin of idolatry.

God did all He could to rescue the northern kingdom of Israel, which God's Word referred to as "Ephraim." But the people stubbornly resisted all of God's loving efforts until God said, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." One writer said, "Leave him to his fatal infatuation. Let him take his fill of carnal delights till the day of repentance is closed and judgment bursts upon him." May that never be said of any of my readers. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen." ■

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

Introduction to Quarter's Lessons

The lessons for June, July, and August focus on the general theme of *Christian Commitment in Today's World*, broken down for the three months under the themes of "The Nature of Christian Commitment" (June), "The Foundation of Christian Commitment" (July), and "The Marks of Christian Commitment" (August). The lessons cover the Books of First and Second Thessalonians and Philippians, all from Paul's pen, closing with a lesson from Acts 28, detailing Paul's imprisonment at Rome.

The aim of these lessons is to help us focus our commitment on Christ, and to Christ and Him alone. These lessons are practical in nature, showing the way to Christ and how to live as His children. They also give advice for living in Christian community, getting along with others, reaching out to others with the Gospel, and enduring persecution for the sake of the Gospel.

One major challenge in these lessons is the testimony of Paul and his faithfulness to his calling in spite of setbacks, misunderstandings, personal attacks on his integrity, and outright persecution. His life provides an excellent example of Christian commitment.

Let's be sure to uncover all we can in these lessons to enable and enhance our commitment to Christ, His work, and His people. May God guide and bless your study of these important epistles. Read them thoughtfully and do background reading to understand the setting and purpose.

JUNE 6, 2010

Witness for God

1 Thessalonians 1

The Thessalonian church was founded on Paul's second missionary journey. The circumstances of its founding can be read in Acts 16 and 17. Apparently Paul was not in Thessalonica long, being forced to flee due to opposition from unbelieving Jews. It was here that he was accused of "turning the world upside down." In reality, he was preaching a message which would turn it right side up.

The believers at Thessalonica, likely mostly Gentiles (v. 9), had endeared themselves to Paul and now, separated from them, he yearned to hear how they were getting along, knowing that persecution continued (see 2:14). So he sent his faithful co-worker Timothy to assess their situation and to fortify the believers. This first Thessalonian epistle is Paul's response to Timothy's report.

Paul begins this epistle with his typical blessing of grace and peace. This alone shows somewhat of his concern for them. But he goes further, ensuring them of his constant prayers on their behalf. Paul was a

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praying man “remembering without ceasing” his many scattered converts, praying for their stability and faithfulness.

The outstanding qualities Paul remembers about these believers in Thessalonica is the triad of faith, love, and hope demonstrated in their lives—faith toward Christ in the salvation experience, love toward others motivated by the outworking of faith, and hope for the future with Christ in Heaven. The expression of their faith could be summed up in three words—salvation, service, anticipation.

Paul gives recognition to the power of the Gospel in their lives through the work of the Holy Spirit and by the call of God. He also recognizes the impact he, Silas, and Timothy had on their lives as living examples of what they were teaching and preaching. Had not their lives been exemplary the whole picture would have been different. In spite of persecution, they had received and held onto the life-giving Word.

And then they became examples to others of the power of the life-giving message of salvation through Christ. And they were not hesitant in sharing that message. Located as they were on the heavily traveled Egnatian Way, they not only had an easy means of travel, but trade brought many people through their city. The impact of their transforming faith spread throughout the provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. Something had happened in the lives of these believers and they could not keep quiet.

The transformation in their lives was that they had turned from dead idols to serve the true and living God. And it made such a noticeable difference in their behavior that others could not fail to take notice. That, coupled with their verbal testimony, had its impact on their communities, and beyond. It proved the power of the Gospel and authenticated the message Paul preached.

The final word in the triad is hope. Not only had they embraced salvation and been active in sharing their faith, they now also lived in anticipation of Christ’s return to bring to culmination the total salvation

experience. They served a risen Saviour, and looked forward eagerly to the time they would be united with Him for eternity.

These Thessalonian believers were on fire for the Lord and Paul is moved and grateful that he had a hand in their experience.

For thought and discussion

1. Notice Paul’s pledge of prayer for the Thessalonian believers. (Check out his other epistles as well.) What does that tell us about pastoral concern and a faithful church?
2. This lesson emphasizes the necessity of the messenger being an example of the impact of the message he brings. Discuss this issue.
3. The witness of the Thessalonian believers was effective. Discuss various methods we can use to impact our nonbelieving world with the transforming power of the Gospel.
4. Notice how faith, love, and hope build one upon the other. Which of these qualities needs most attention in your life?
5. It is obvious from this passage, and others in this epistle, that persecution did not dampen their faith or enthusiasm. Discuss ways we can fortify ourselves should persecution come upon us.

Lesson emphasis: The transforming and impelling impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the life of the believer.

Key verse: 8

JUNE 13, 2010

A Life Above Reproach

1 Thessalonians 2:1-13

In last Sunday’s lesson from Chapter 1, Paul was commending the Thessalonian believers for their steadfast and outgoing faith. In today’s lesson from Chapter 2, he is defending his personal integrity. In the days of the early church there were many itinerant preachers and teachers (see 3 John). Not all of these labored with pure

motives, as evidenced by Paul's comments here in this chapter. Perhaps the criticism Paul was here countering arose from the way he had rather ingloriously been thrust from the city following the unbelieving Jews' attack on his ministry (Acts 17).

To assure the Thessalonian believers of his integrity and pure motives, Paul launches into a bit of history and some explanation. He first reminds them that his ministry among them was not in vain (see Chapter 1). Then, to assure them his motives were not questionable, he reminds them how he was "shamefully treated at Philippi" (see Acts 16). In spite of such treatment, Paul says, "We were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God." Paul was not easily deterred from his mission.

Paul further explains that it was God who entrusted him and his helpers with the Gospel message, so the discharge of that trust was to please God, not man. Their message was not deceitful, it was not impure, nor structured in such a way as to lead to false assumptions. They did not flatter their hearers in an attempt to gain their response, nor did they seek monetary gain from them. Their motives were pure. They preached a life-changing Gospel in its truth and simplicity. Their goal was to please God and properly influence men God-ward.

Paul mentions that they were as gentle as a nurse with them and as encouraging and protecting as a father with his children. Paul upheld their behavior among them, indicating that their goal was not only to preach to them, but also to become their friends. Therefore they walked "holily, justly, and unblameably" before them, calling upon God as witness to their sincerity.

To avoid the potential charge of preaching out of selfish motives, Paul and his companions provided for their own physical needs by working with their hands. Even if the Thessalonian believers could have financially supported them, Paul's intent was to preach the Gospel "without charge," thus clearing himself from any

potential conflict of interest (see 1 Cor. 9:18; Acts 20:33, 34; 2 Thess. 3:8).

Paul's overriding desire was that these Thessalonian believers, though under testing and persecution (v. 14), would "walk worthy of God, who had called [them] unto his kingdom and glory." That speaks both of present and future conditions. It was a blessed calling, one that required the utmost diligence to maintain. Paul assures them (1:2) of his continual prayers in their behalf.

He also thanks God (v. 13) for the way these believers had accepted the word he preached. They understood it to be from God, not man's invention. They responded appropriately and embraced its life-changing power and precepts.

Paul rejoices in their response to the Gospel and is grateful for the role he was able to play in bringing it to them. His defense is complete. His motives were pure. The blessing, theirs. The glory, God's.

For thought and discussion

1. Persecution can build the church, or destroy it. Discuss ways to fortify believers so the latter does not happen.
2. This lesson emphasizes the simplicity of the Gospel and its simple presentation. Do we sometimes start at the wrong point with the claims of the Gospel? Do you have a well-thought-out approach to presenting the Gospel to an unbeliever?
3. What about supported pastors, missionaries, or other church workers? Discuss benefits and pitfalls.
4. What is of utmost importance in the life of one presenting the Gospel message? Discuss.
5. One thing Paul seems to be saying in this passage is that a Gospel worth living for is also worth suffering for (or even dying for). Perhaps now would be a good time to check your level of commitment.

Lesson emphasis: The importance of integrity of message and messenger in regard to the Gospel.

Key verses: 4 and 8

JUNE 20, 2010

Sustained Through Encouragement

1 Thessalonians 3

This chapter more fully explains the main purpose of the epistle. Paul, having been driven from Thessalonica before he felt the church was adequately established, had an intense concern for their spiritual stability. As we read in Chapter 3, verses 17 and 18, Paul had made several attempts to return to Thessalonica, but had been hindered from so doing. These hindrances he attributed directly to the work of Satan, adversary of God and His work.

No longer able to stand the suspense of not knowing their present spiritual state, he sent his faithful co-worker Timothy to assess their state and establish and encourage them in their faith. This resulted in some sacrifice for Paul. He gave up his valuable helper (see Philippians 2:19-22), and was left alone in the strange city of Athens, dominated as it was by pagan philosophies and coldness toward the Gospel. But his desire to learn whether the Thessalonian believers remained faithful obsessed his thinking, and spurred his actions.

So Timothy had gone, and had returned with a favorable report of the steadfastness of the Thessalonian believers, as well as their fond remembrance of Paul and desire to see him once again. Paul was satisfied, and gratified that his brief work among them had not been in vain nor come to naught through persecution, of which he had forewarned them (see also Acts 20:29).

Paul reminds them that they were to expect trials and persecution (see also 2 Timothy 3:12). It comes with the commitment to follow Christ. Our adversary will do all he can to dissuade, defeat, and discourage us from our commitment. Knowing this gives a first line of defense. Experiencing it provides opportunity for growth and stability. Maintaining victory in face of persecution gives courage and

brings joy and steadfastness to the believer.

Paul, previously beside himself with anxiety over the Thessalonian believers, is now beside himself with joy over their reported faithfulness. "Now we really live," he says, "since you are standing firm in the Lord." What a comfort and joy it was to Paul that these believers, even in adverse circumstances and without adequate nurture and leadership, were nevertheless faithful to what he had taught them.

Paul realized their need for continuing nurture and instruction. Theirs was an immature faith that needed strengthening and grounding. His constant prayer was to be able to see them again and supply what was lacking in their faith and their understanding of the concepts of Christianity. Remember, these people were largely ones who had come out of heathendom and embraced Christianity and had no background in true spiritual matters. That's why Paul was so concerned and why he longed to further instruct them in the faith.

So Paul turned the matter over to the Lord to "direct our way to you." In the meantime he also left it up to the Lord to instruct them in their interpersonal relationships and their relationship to those outside the body of believers. That would be so important in countering persecution and laying groundwork for presenting the claims of the gospel.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers was that God would "establish their hearts unblameable in holiness" before Him at His coming, that they would be faithful to the end.

For thought and discussion

1. One of the lessons in this passage is the value of teamwork in the work of the Gospel. Discuss.
2. What are some ways for Christians to fortify themselves against persecution? What role does the brotherhood play in this? Discuss.
3. Paul had the heart of a pastor. Identify

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the qualities mentioned in this passage that bear this out.

4. What has it done for you to know that someone was concerned about the stability of your faith? Perhaps spend class time sharing experiences.
5. What factors come into play in the “establishing of our hearts unblameable in holiness before the Lord at his coming”?

Lesson emphasis: The joy and satisfaction that comes in knowing that those we have had a part in discipling are standing firm in their faith.

Key verse: 8

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Commitment Demonstrated

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Here in Chapter 4 Paul moves into the more practical portion of his letter. After words of encouragement to the Thessalonian believers and a defense of his motives among them, Paul now lays out more specific actions which would demonstrate their new life in Christ. These believers had come out of heathendom and the moral demands of Christianity were entirely new to them. They needed to learn a new code of moral behavior, not only because they now were children of a holy God, but also to demonstrate to their peers the life-changing impact of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The primary issues Paul deals with in this passage are sexual purity, brotherly love, and diligent work habits.

The moral climate in Thessalonica was very lax. Much pagan worship was associated with sexual immorality and no doubt many of Paul’s converts had been involved. He has no doubts that many may still be tempted to fulfill the pleasures of the old life. He had taught against this issue (v. 1), but now reiterates his concern for their moral purity and holiness of life.

Sanctification means to be made holy,

set apart from sin. It is the primary earmark of the one who has accepted new life in Christ. There must be an outward, observable evidence of a changed heart. There must be no sexual activity outside of marriage, rather, evidence of a disciplined life and carefulness in social relationships. These things, Paul says, are part of God’s call to the believer. To reject these principles is, in effect, to reject God.

Paul turns next to the matter of brotherly love, another hallmark of the follower of Christ (John 13:34, 35). They understood self-giving love as exemplified by Jesus giving Himself for man. And indeed, Paul says, you are practicing self-giving love among yourselves, but I urge you to increase in its expression more and more. Unselfishness exhibited by the believer would be another demonstration of a changed life and a witness to others of the power of the Gospel.

A quiet, diligent lifestyle enhances the effect of the Gospel in one’s life and witness. Paul in other places warns against being a brawler, one who stirs up trouble. A quiet, unassuming life, not meddling in others’ affairs, with one’s time and energies devoted to diligent, productive work, speaks loudly. Paul says that will not only provide one’s own needs, but be an open witness “toward them that are without.”

There was a problem here at Thessalonica (spoken to in 4:13-17 and dealt with more fully in the lesson for July 25 from 2 Thessalonians 3). Some, under the mistaken notion that Christ’s second coming was imminent, had apparently quit working, were making a nuisance of themselves, and living off the labor of others. Paul says, get back to work, don’t meddle in others’ business. That will be a good witness to the observing society and will provide their personal needs.

The best way to defeat the criticism of those outside the brotherhood and to demonstrate the change Christ brings to the life is to live a holy life, in sexual purity, show love to one another, and work diligently with their hands while

awaiting the Parousia.

This is what Paul asks in this passage.

For thought and discussion

1. If you are a teacher (or preacher), allow verses 1 and 2 to challenge you to become more of a worthy spokesman for God. We carry great responsibility.
2. Discuss ways sanctification impacts the daily life of the believer.
3. Sexual sins are rampant in our society. Discuss ways we Christians can guard ourselves against their damning influence.
4. What is the motivating factor for selfless, agape love? How is it demonstrated?
5. How do you draw the line between being adequately informed of your brother's needs, and becoming a busybody in other men's matters?
6. Besides providing for one's own needs, the benefit of honest toil does what? Discuss.

Lesson emphasis: The life of the Christian must be a visible correlation between the heart, the hand, the mouth, and in relationships to others.

Key verse: 7

THE SPLENDOR OF THORNS . . . cont'd from p.3

The story of the Bible is this: Adam comes naked to a live tree and spiritually murders the entire human race by a single act of disobedience. Jesus comes to a dead tree and allows Himself to be stripped naked. Then, in the ultimate act of obedience—His very death after a lifetime of full and total obedience to God—He makes alive all those who would ever by God's grace repent of their sins and trust in Him alone for salvation.

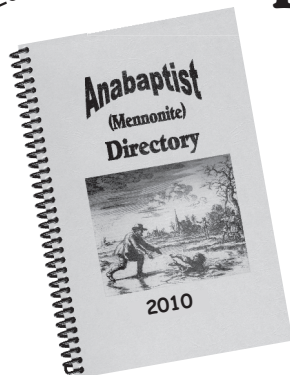
As Eve had encouraged her husband in his rebellion against God, Jesus' love for His bride, the church, motivates and enables her to obey God from her heart. Adam took from his wife food which kills. Jesus, by His death, provides all grace, enabling us to partake of eternal life.

Through Christ, thorns take on a whole new meaning because they focus our thoughts on God's plan of redemption, worked out through the centuries. While Adam's sin disrupted the beauty of God's creation, the Son of God came to earth to set things right, which brings beauty even to thorns. ■

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IRS Visits Sacramento Car Wash

“It was every businessperson’s nightmare.

“Arriving at Harv’s Metro Car Wash in midtown Wednesday afternoon were two dark-suited IRS agents demanding payment of delinquent taxes.

“‘They were deadly serious, very aggressive, very condescending,’ says Harv’s owner, Aaron Zeff.

“The really odd part of this: The letter that was hand-delivered to Zeff’s on-site manager showed the amount of money owed to the feds was . . . 4 cents.

“Inexplicably, penalties and taxes accruing on the debt—stemming from the 2006 tax year—were listed as \$202.31, leaving Harv’s with an obligation of \$202.35.

“‘It’s hilarious,’ [Zeff] says, ‘that two people hopped in a car and came down here for just 4 cents. I think (the IRS) may have a problem with priorities.’

“Now he’s trying to figure out how penalties and interest could climb so high on such a small debt. He says he’s never been told he owes any taxes or that he’s ever incurred any late-payment penalties in the four years he’s owned Harv’s.

“In fact, he provided us with an Oct. 22, 2009, letter from the IRS that states Harv’s ‘has filed all required returns and addressed any balances due.’ ”

—Excerpt from “Bob Shallit: IRS visits Sacramento car wash in pursuit of 4 cents” (<http://j.mp/be1kCW>) in *The Sacramento Bee*

* * * * *

The Catholic Church, Sex Abuse, and Righteous Anger

“Any institution tends to preserve itself by avoiding conflict, whether external or internal. In addition to this universal tendency, many Christians have a false understanding of the nature and role of anger. It is seen as something negative, something that a Christian should not feel.

“In the sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Church, those who dealt with the bishops have consistently remarked that the bishops never expressed outrage or righteous anger, even at the most horrendous cases of abuse and sacrilege. Bishops seem to think that anger at sin is unchristian. Gilbert Kilman, a child psychiatrist, commented, ‘What amazes me is the lack of outrage the church feels when its good work is being harmed. So, if there is anything the church needs to know, it needs to know how to be outraged.’

“Mark Serrano confronted Bishop Frank Rodimer, asking why he had let his priest-friend Peter Osinski sleep with boys at Rodimer’s beach house while Rodimer was in the next bedroom: ‘Where is your moral indignation?’

“Rodimer’s answer was, ‘Then I don’t get it. What do you want?’ What Serrano wanted Rodimer to do was to behave like

a man with a heart, a heart that is outraged by evil. But Rodimer couldn't; his inability to feel outrage was a quality that had helped make him a bishop. He would never get into fights, never rock the boat, never 'divide' but only 'unify.' Rodimer could not understand why he should feel deep anger at evil, at the violation of the innocent, at the oppression of the weak.

"The emotions that are now suppressed are hatred and anger. Christians think that they ought not to feel these emotions, that it is unchristian to feel them. They secretly suspect that Jesus was being unchristian in His attitude to the scribes and Pharisees when He was angry at them, that He was unchristian when he drove the moneychangers out of the temple or declared that millstones (not vacations in treatment centers) were the way to treat child abusers.

"Conrad Baars noticed this emotional deformation in the clergy in the mid-twentieth century. He recognized that there had been distortions in 'traditional' Catholic spirituality. It had become too focused upon individual acts rather than on growth in virtue; it had emphasized sheer naked strength of will. In forgetting that growth in virtue was the goal of the Christian's moral life, it forgot that the emotions, all emotions, including anger and hate, are part of human nature and must be integrated into a virtuous life."

—Excerpt from "Unhappy Fault" by Leon J. Podles (author of *Integration of Anger Into the Virtuous Life*) in *Touchstone Magazine*

Obama Humiliates Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu

"For a head of government to visit the White House and not pose for photographers is rare. For a key ally to be left to his own devices while the President withdraws to have dinner in private was, until this week, unheard of. Yet that is how [Israeli Prime Minister] Binyamin

Netanyahu was treated by President Obama on Tuesday night, according to Israeli reports on a trip viewed in Jerusalem as a humiliation.

"After failing to extract a written promise of concessions on settlements, Mr. Obama walked out of his meeting with Mr. Netanyahu but invited him to stay at the White House, consult with advisers and 'let me know if there is anything new,' a US congressman, who spoke to the Prime Minister, said.

"'It was awful,' the congressman said. One Israeli newspaper called the meeting 'a hazing in stages,' poisoned by such mistrust that the Israeli delegation eventually left rather than risk being eavesdropped on on a White House telephone line. Another said that the Prime Minister had received 'the treatment reserved for the President of Equatorial Guinea.'"

—Excerpt from "Binyamin Netanyahu humiliated after Barack Obama 'dumped him for dinner'" (<http://j.mp/cM7mQp>) in *The Times of London*

British Universal Health Care Lets Man Die of Dehydration

"A man of 22 died in agony of dehydration after three days in a leading [British] teaching hospital.

"Kane Gorny was so desperate for a drink that he rang police to beg for their help.

"They arrived on the ward only to be told by doctors that everything was under control.

"The next day his mother Rita Cronin found him delirious and he died within hours.

"She said nurses had failed to give him vital drugs which controlled fluid levels in his body. 'He was totally dependent on the nurses to help him and they totally betrayed him.'

"A coroner has such grave concerns about the case that it has been referred to police.

"Miss Cronin said: 'The police told me

he'd said, "Please help me. All I want is a drink and no one is helping me."

"By this time my son was confused due to his lack of medication and I think the nurses just ignored him because they thought he was just being badly behaved. They were lazy, careless and hadn't bothered to check his charts and see his medication was essential."

"Eventually the ward doctor came round, took one look at Kane and started shouting for help."

"Miss Cronin was asked to leave her son's bedside. 'He died an hour later,' she said. 'I didn't even realize he was dying. I didn't even have a chance to say good-bye.'

"The death certificate said Mr. Gorny had died because of a 'water deficit' and 'hypernatraemia'—a medical term for dehydration."

"His mother added: 'When I went back to the hospital I was told that all the nurses had been offered counseling as they were so traumatized, but nothing was offered to me.'

"There has been an internal investigation but St. George's never made it public and it was a whitewash. After his death the hospital never phoned me or wrote to me to apologise. How could this happen in the 21st century?"

—Excerpt from "Neglected by 'lazy' nurses, Kane Gorny, 22, dying of thirst rang the police to beg for water" (<http://j.mp/byCUjc>) in the *UK Daily Mail*

* * * * *

Burka Ban Supported

A recent *Financial Times* poll showed over 50% support for a law banning the wearing of burkas in France, Germany, the UK, Italy, and Spain. This is a huge encroachment on religious liberty and harkens a return to medieval times in which the State mandates religious behavior.

—Source: *Financial Times*

* * * * *

China: Christian Village Choir Wins Gold

"Newspaper *China Daily* reports that a Christian choir from the poor Xiaoshuijing Miao minority village in Yunnan province, China, is on its way to conquer the nation. The choir was formed 70 years ago when the villagers received the Gospel. The missionaries built schools and a medical clinic, helped the Miao people to establish their own language, and brought encouragement to this people group that at that time lived in extreme poverty. The missionaries also taught the people hymns that helped them to stand firm during the 'cultural revolution' (1966-1976), when all Bibles were burned and church services were banned. Today, of the 447 villagers, some 80 percent are Christians."

"When a government official accidentally heard the village choir perform, he was astonished by the farmers' professional singing skills and encouraged them to participate in a chorus festival. Their amazing bel canto skills and selected sophisticated pieces, which conquered and shocked the audience and judges, won them the gold medal. They began to compete in other national competitions, letting the outside world learn about their pure and reverent singing, as well as their unconventional Christianity. 'Winning prizes doesn't make sense to us,' says Long Guangyuan, the choir's conductor. 'As Christians, we take each performance as preaching the gospel. As long as we can sing, we feel quite satisfied.'

"Although the village is still poverty-stricken and the average annual income per person is at most 1,200 yuan (\$175.68), they agree with the ruling elder: 'If there was no Christianity, our development process would be much slower.'"

—Reprinted with permission from Joel News International #724, www.JoelNews.org

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Nonbiblical Reasons for Believing the Bible Is True

by Harold S. Martin

The Bible tells us that Jehovah God created the earth in six days; that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour; and that belief in Him is the only way to salvation and Heaven.

The Bible says that there are two destinies after this life—eternal life, and everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46).

The Bible says that marriage is an honorable bond between a man and a woman, not a relationship between two persons of the same sex—and that in an honorable marriage, the bed is undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Gen. 2:24; Heb. 13:4).

The Bible says that children are a heritage from the Lord, and that they are to be trained and brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Psalm 127:3; Eph. 6:4).

The Bible says that we are to lay aside past disagreements, and forgive those who have wronged us—even to the point of turning the other cheek to those who abuse us (Matt. 6:14, 15; 5:39).

The Bible says that we are to dress modestly—covering the body appropriately so that there is no suggestion of sexual immorality (1 Timothy 2:9).

Is the Bible really for us today? Can we believe what the Bible says? Can we go by the moral standards promoted in a book that's 2,000 years old? What about a book that says we should not swear with a civil oath before a court of justice? What about a book that commands us to wash one another's feet like Jesus did on the night before His crucifixion?

Should we really take the message of this book seriously? Is the Bible a reliable guide for us in this twenty-first century? Can the Bible be trusted? Or, is it merely a collection of the writings of a group of misinformed

men, with ideas that are carried over from ancient times?

Loyal Christians down through the years have accepted the Bible as a book that is verbally (word for word) inspired of God—and that in the original documents it is without error in all its parts. The best theological term to describe this belief is the word *inerrancy*, meaning that every statement in the original text of Scripture is without error of any kind, whether factual, historical, or doctrinal. The Bible itself claims that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Greek text literally says that “all scripture is God-breathed.”

But—to say that the Bible is true because the Bible itself says that it's true—in the minds of some thinking people, is circular reasoning. You say that the Bible is true, but then you use the Bible to prove that it is true! That, they say, is just thinking in circles!

And so in this message, we will seek to establish the trustworthiness of Scripture by using nonbiblical reasons for believing the message of the Bible. There are five strong nonbiblical arguments that have helped convince many, that indeed, the Bible is God's Word—and not merely a collection of the ideas of a group of misinformed men. These are five reasons why I am convinced that the Bible is the only sacred book in all the world which reveals the truth about God, man, sin, salvation, and eternal destinies.

1. The Bible's Amazing Composition

The Bible is composed of 66 individual books, written by forty different persons, who lived over a span of sixteen hundred years. The first part of the Bible was written fifteen hundred years before the writer of the last book was even born. These 40

writers grew up in thirteen different countries, and spoke three different languages.

Some of the writers of Scripture were kings; others were tax collectors, doctors, shepherds, and fishermen. Some were men of learning; others were men without learning. The writers of Scripture were persons from all walks and stations in life.

What would you expect from a book written in such remote periods of time, under such differing circumstances, and by so many different persons, but absolute contradiction and discord, and a total lack of unity?

Imagine a doctor book written over a period of sixteen hundred years—part of it authored by writers who lived in the days when snake oil was the only sure remedy for many ailments, and other parts of the book written in more recent times by people who had the benefits of modern science? Certainly there would be a total lack of unity. All kinds of remedies would be offered.

But the marvel about the Bible is that out from these many differing circumstances has come a book which is one whole complete unit from Genesis to the Revelation. The writers lived far apart in time and space, yet every part of the Bible fits perfectly in place.

The Bible has only one theme. It deals everywhere with man's complete ruin in sin and God's perfect remedy in Jesus Christ. The theme of the Bible is *redemption*.

Redemption is *required* in Genesis 1–11.

Redemption is *prepared* for in Genesis 12–Malachi 4.

Redemption is *affected* in the Gospels.

Redemption is *shared* in the Acts.

Redemption is *explained* in the Epistles.

And redemption is *realized* in the Revelation.

Moses the prince, David the king, Luke the doctor, Peter the fisherman, Paul the learned Pharisee—all bring us the same message: man is completely ruined (lost in sin), and Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, the only Name under Heaven whereby we must be saved!

Throughout the Bible there is one central message, one code of ethics, and one plan of salvation. Surely God was the Author who

spoke through many human writers. The Bible is the Word of God, and not merely a collection of the words of men.

2. The Bible's Scientific Accuracy

The Bible was written in a nonscientific age. Its writers were not scientists. The Bible is not a textbook on science. It wasn't written to tell us how the heavens go; it was written to tell us how to go to Heaven. But when it touches on a scientific subject, there is a tremendous degree of accuracy.

Job (for example) lived in a day when all the learned men believed that the earth was a platform, resting on the backs of elephants which were standing on the shell of a mighty turtle, and the turtle was standing on the coil of a huge snake. What supported the snake, no one seemed to know, but they believed that when the elephants shook themselves the earth quaked! That's what the learned men of Job's day believed!

How did Job know to utter a strictly scientific truth when he said, "[God] hangeth the earth upon nothing" (Job 26:7)? We recognize that the earth is spinning in space (literally hanging on nothing)—but how did Job know that the earth is suspended on nothing way back in those dim dark days of superstition and ignorance? The fact is, Job was speaking better than he knew—because God was speaking through him.

Or, how did Isaiah (who lived almost 3,000 years ago)—long before Columbus crossed the Atlantic—how did Isaiah know that the earth was round, and not flat, when he said, "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22)?

The fact is that scientists have not yet caught us with the science of the Word of God. Don't ever let even an accomplished scientist lead you to believe that the Bible is unscientific and out of date. The Bible is never out of date because it's always ahead of date.

3. The Bible's Miraculous Preservation

The Bible has been the most persecuted book in all history. It has been burned and buried and ridiculed and attacked in many,

many ways—yet today it stands as strong as ever. It has been miraculously preserved.

The 119th Psalm says, “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). When we consider the hatred shown toward the Bible down through the centuries, we must marvel that it exists at all. The Bible is not only the most loved book in the world, it is also the most hated book. It teaches things that are wholly distasteful to mankind, and as a result, people have either rejected it, or have attempted to explain away its meaning.

Thomas Paine wrote in his book *The Age of Reason*, “Fifty years hence the Bible will be obsolete and forgotten.” But the very press on which that book was printed was afterward used to print thousands of Bibles. Lenin, the founder of modern Communism, said one time, “I expect to live long enough to attend the funeral of all religion.” But Paine and Lenin have passed on to the eternal world. The Bible is still here!

Before the invention of the printing press, Bibles had to be copied by hand. They were scarce and expensive. Bibles were chained to tables in the churches, and people paid a sum of money to read them for a short period of time. Besides the scarcity and expense, there was bitter persecution. For centuries, in some countries, it was a criminal offense to even be caught reading the Bible. Bibles were burned to light the streets of cities at night. They were torn to shreds and buried at sea. But empires have risen and fallen; kings have been crowned and uncrowned; civilization has changed—yet the Bible has never been destroyed.

There are printed materials that seem to explode with hatred for the Bible. One pamphlet says that the Bible is filled with contradictions, and absurdities, and impossibilities, and insane sex ideas, and injustice to women, and so forth. The writer goes on to say that “if bad books are ever burned, the largest bonfire should consist of Bibles.” Why all this hatred for a book that has led thousands of people to lead a better life? No one hates *Andersen’s Fairy Tales*. No one starts bonfires with *Aesop’s Fables*. Why all

the hatred for the Bible?

The answer is that many persons hate the Bible because it tells them what they are; it condemns sin; it makes demands upon their lives. Men and women may spurn the Bible, they may burn it, they may abuse it and misuse it; but while their bodies are crumbling back to the dust of the earth the Bible will continue on its forward march. These words of God will never pass away! If the Bible had been a fraudulent book, it would have disintegrated long ago. The Bible’s miraculous preservation is another nonbiblical reason why we believe that the Bible is trustworthy and true.

4. The Bible’s Fulfilled Prophecy

Human beings simply do not know what is going to happen next. The most striking characteristic about the Bible is the fact that it predicts *in plain language* events that will take place in the future history of mankind. And then God confirms what He says by bringing them to pass. The Koran of the Muslims, the Vedas of the Hindus, the Upanishads of the Buddhists, and the sacred books of other world religions contain no prophecies whatever—but every last prophecy of the Bible that was to have taken place to the present time, has been literally fulfilled.

Many events in the life of Jesus, for example, were foretold in accurate detail, long years before they occurred. The 22nd Psalm alone contains more than thirty exact descriptions of Jesus on the cross—and even though the psalmist is writing one thousand years before the event actually took place, his descriptions are so exact that it seems like he was standing right at the foot of the cross when he was writing.

One of the most impressive fulfillments of prophecy occurred when Jesus and the two malefactors were hanging on the cross. The Sabbath was approaching and the soldiers were ordered to break their legs. They went to Calvary and they broke the legs of the two malefactors, but when they came to Jesus, they stopped! They didn’t break His legs. They were ordered to break His legs, but they didn’t break them. Why? You say, “Because

He was dead already.” Why didn’t they say, “We’ll be sure this blasphemer is dead; we’ll break them anyhow”? The obvious answer is that more than 4,000 years ago, God said of Jesus Christ, “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (Exodus 12:46). The Roman soldiers could not have broken the bones of Jesus any more than they could stop a planet from its flight in the heavens. When God speaks, His prediction will be carried out.

The many examples of the Bible’s fulfilled prophecies are another reason why we can be certain that the Bible is a reliable document.

5. The Bible’s Transforming Power

Many thrilling stories could be told about the transforming power of the Word of God. The Bible’s message changes the lives of people. Drunkards have been made sober; harlots have become pure and decent; thieves have been made honest and upright. The Bible has lifted ignorant, superstitious savages out of the depths of satanic bondage and transformed them into gentle peace-loving men and women of God.

Every page of the Bible points to Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Christ is the center, the end, the core, and the circumference of all the Scriptures. Anyone who studies the Bible, and believes its content, and sincerely accepts the Christ whom it reveals will experience a complete change of life. The Bible is the only book in all the world whose teachings have the marvelous power to make bad people good, completely changing their characters.

In a book entitled *A Square Talk to Young Men About the Inspiration of the Bible*, written by H. L. Hastings, and published in 1893 by the Brethren Publishing House—there is an interesting example of the Bible’s transforming power.

A young infidel and his uncle were traveling the West during the early frontier days of our country. They carried a considerable sum of money with them; it was late in the evening, and they found no place of shelter for the night—until they came upon a log cabin in a small clearing in the woods. They

knocked and were admitted by an old man—uncouth and untidy and unshaved. He granted their request to sleep in one of the two rooms of the little cabin.

It was a crude cabin with two rooms, separated by an old board partition. But not knowing how secure their money might be in the house of this stranger, they decided in whispers to each other, that one of the men would remain on guard with a loaded revolver while the other slept. The infidel nephew took the first watch while his uncle went to sleep; but shortly after the uncle had gone to sleep, the young man noticed, by the flickering of a candle through the wide cracks in the boards that separated the two rooms, that the old man was sitting at a table reading his Bible; and then he saw him kneel by his chair and pray.

The young skeptic awakened his uncle and said, “There’s no need that we stay on guard in the house of this man with a loaded revolver. I saw him reading his Bible and then I saw him kneel and pray”—and so both the uncle and his nephew went to sleep! Even the unbelieving young skeptic knew that when a man reads the Bible, and then gets down before his Maker in prayer—there is very little danger of his stealing their money.

The Bible lifts up *the Christ* who changes the lives of people. It was the Bible’s transforming power that enabled an early Christian named Ignatius to say (while on his way to be devoured of beasts), “The closer I get to the lions, the nearer I get to God.”

Another early disciple (named Polycarp), who served as a bishop in the church at Smyrna, was tied to a stake and burned for his faith. A wind came along that day and blew the flames just far enough away, so that instead of burning to a crisp immediately, he literally roasted to a slow and painful death. While Polycarp was tormented in those flames, his persecutors gave him one more opportunity to renounce his Saviour. This faithful disciple of Christ said, “*Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can*

(continued on page 21)



Sermon of the Month



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

The Bible Speaks on Alcohol

by David R. Brumbelow

*“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging:
and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise”
(Proverbs 20:1).*

We all agree that the Bible directly condemns getting drunk. But does it speak against drinking at all? I believe that it does.

Evidence That It Does

First, the biblical words for wine are generic. When the Bible speaks of wine, it may be referring to wine that is unfermented or fermented—or to wine, either unfermented or fermented, that is greatly watered down. How do you know what kind of wine the Bible is referencing? You must figure it out by the immediate context in the Bible, and the entire message of the Bible.

By the way, the English language also has a number of words that can refer either to an alcoholic or nonalcoholic drink: cider, punch, eggnog.

The Bible did not have a particular word with which to refer to alcoholic, fermented wine. But a description of that kind of alcoholic wine is given in Proverbs 23:29-35. And notice that this Scripture says not to even look at it (v. 31). That is a direct prohibition.

The Bible instructs us to be sober and vigilant (1 Thessalonians 5:6; 1 Peter 5:8). The first thing alcohol does is affect our

judgment. Therefore a defensive driving instructor said, “Any amount of alcohol disqualifies you from driving.”

Alcohol causes you to do foolish things you would not do in your right mind. *Sober* is the opposite of *drunk*. The first drink of alcohol ends your sobriety. The Bible tells us to be sober, not half sober.

Biblical Principles Condemn Alcohol

1. The Bible says those deceived by wine are not wise (Proverbs 20:1). We are commanded to be wise (Ephesians 5:15, etc.).

2. The Bible teaches us to guard our influence and not to lead others astray. You may be able to hold your liquor. There are still two problems with that. First, you are supporting an evil industry that has brought untold heartache to the world. Second, someone else will look at you and say, “That is the best man I know. If he can drink then so can I.”

3. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19, 20). Alcohol destroys that body.

4. The Bible says you are to love God with all your mind (Matthew 22:37). Our minds are altered and damaged by alcohol.

Beverage alcohol is a recreational, mind-altering drug. Every drink kills brain cells and dulls your judgment. When it comes to beverage alcohol, its very use is abuse.

5. The law of love, as A. T. Robertson called it, teaches us not to drink (Romans 14:19, 21; 1 Corinthians 8:9).

6. Scripture proclaims us kings (Revelation 1:6; 5:10). Kings are not to drink lest they pervert judgment (Proverbs 31:4, 5).

7. God commended the Rechabites for not drinking wine (Jeremiah 35).

8. Don't abuse your Christian liberty (1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:23).

9. The Bible often gives the appalling results of alcohol: Noah, Lot, and others getting drunk and the terrible consequences of their acts.

10. Is it biblical for a believer to support the alcohol industry that has wrecked so many homes and lives? Is it biblically permissible to support them with your God-given resources? And drinking is expensive. By not drinking you can save a lot of money that you can use for more noble purposes.

11. Biblical wisdom and truth would compel us to recognize the incredible damage alcohol does to society. Alcohol contributes greatly to traffic accidents and deaths, unwanted pregnancies, fetal alcohol syndrome, the spread of sexually transmitted disease, all types of criminal behavior, cirrhosis of the liver, destruction of brain cells, addiction, breakup of homes, and so on.

12. About one out of nine drinkers become problem drinkers. Never take that first drink and I guarantee you will never become an alcoholic. With those odds in mind, would biblical principles allow you to play "Russian Roulette" with your life and the lives of those you love?

13. From the overall teaching of the Bible, do you really believe God condones the recreational use of a mind-altering, dangerous drug? Whether that drug is alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, etc., the answer is obviously, "No!"

14. Countless lives have been saved from ruin by teaching abstinence from alcohol.

What is the worst that can happen to you by not drinking? Abstinence works every time it is used. Not drinking is safe, and it is wise.

15. Addiction to alcohol and other drugs is a serious problem. Jesus said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). With beverage alcohol, it is easier to not start, than to start and then struggle to stop. God's "Plan A" is for us not to sin in the first place (1 John 2:1). As it is, you will have plenty of problems in life. But I can save you from many of the self-induced ones. You can save yourself and others a world of heartache by just staying away from alcohol.

When it comes to biblical principles, alcohol is kind of like the issue of slavery. The Bible does not directly say, "Thou shalt not own a slave." But clear biblical principles certainly teach against slavery. Whether or not you accept that the Bible directly speaks against alcohol, the Bible clearly teaches against it.

Bible verses that directly and indirectly teach against alcohol: Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35; Isaiah 28:7; Daniel 18; Habakkuk 2:15; Romans 14:19, 21; 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8, etc.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Before the days of electricity and refrigeration, could they keep wine without fermentation?* Yes, several ways. First, some grapes were "good keepers" and could be stored fresh for months in a cool dry cellar. They could then be directly squeezed into a cup. The Bible even speaks of Pharaoh's wine being prepared this way (Genesis 40:11). I guarantee *that* wine was not fermented.

Second, wine could be boiled down and the thick syrup would keep unfermented. (By the same principle, honey is so thick that it keeps for long periods of time unrefrigerated and without preservatives.) This thick wine would later be mixed with water. There are even ancient accounts of wine being so thick it had to be scraped from the wineskins.

Third, wine jars could be sealed with pitch. Preventing air from getting to it kept it from fermenting. In a similar way, modern-day country folks sometimes seal jars of preserves with paraffin or wax. There were also other ways to prevent wine from fermenting (see *Bible Wines* by William Patton). People today often do not give ancient people enough credit for their knowledge and resourcefulness.

Also, even fermented wine in Bible times was not as strong as alcoholic drinks of today. Whether fermented or unfermented, it was often diluted with water. Even wine that was technically fermented was much weaker than common alcoholic drinks of our day. Dr. John A. Broadus said wine regularly used in the New Testament “would stimulate about as much as our tea and coffee” (*Matthew*; Kregal: Grand Rapids, 1990, p. 244).

2. *Didn't Jesus turn water into wine?* Yes. Just as He continues to do every year in every vineyard, although with a slower process. Remember, *wine* is a generic word. Why do so many jump to the conclusion that Jesus miraculously made wine that was rotted, fermented, and alcoholic, wine that would make people do things they would never do in their right minds? That is not what He does in the vineyard.

3. *Wasn't Timothy told to drink a little wine for his infirmities (1 Timothy 5:23)?* Yes. First, that shows that Timothy was drinking no wine of any kind, not even grape juice. Second, the wine Paul recommended could very well have been unfermented wine. Unfermented wine has great health benefits. Third, even if it was fermented wine, that would endorse the use of alcohol for medicinal use only, not as a beverage or a recreational drug.

4. *Isn't a glass of (alcoholic) wine each day healthy?* Studies have shown a glass of unfermented wine (grape juice) is even healthier. And it has no harmful side effects. The same is true with most any fruits and vegetables. Eat and drink them!

5. *What about moderate drinking?* You are still supporting an evil industry. One

day you may become more than a moderate drinker. By your influence you are telling others that it is okay to drink. You may be able to handle it (don't count on it), but you may lead others to drink who can't handle it. Even in moderate amounts, alcohol still affects your judgment and health. A scientific study reported in February 2009 found that women *drinking moderately* significantly increased their chances of several kinds of cancer. Finally, I believe the Bible both *directly* and *indirectly* condemns it.

Because of the Bible, medical science, common sense, and love for others, we should abstain from alcohol in all forms. As Bass Fishing Pro Lendell Martin said, “I've never seen anything good come out of a can of beer.”

Confederate General Robert E. Lee said: “Whiskey? I like it! I always did, and that is the reason I never use it.”

Thomas Edison declared: “I have better use for my brain than to poison it with alcohol. To put alcohol in the human brain is like putting sand in the bearings of an engine.” ■

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THE BIBLE IS TRUE . . . cont'd from p. 18

I renounce my King and my Saviour?” He didn't get that testimony from a \$4.95 novel. The Bible had transformed his life! That testimony was the outgrowth of an experience with the Christ who is revealed within the pages of the Bible. Certainly a book that lifts men and women up to God like the Bible does must have come down from God in the first place!

These have been nonbiblical arguments for the accuracy of the Bible's message—and for this reason you can build your present life and your future destiny upon what it says. The children's song expresses the truth very well: “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” ■

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The End of Normal

by David Steinhauer

We indisputably live in the last days. In fact, as you read these lines, you are living on the oldest day in the history of this earth; for you see, *today* is older than any other day.

For generations the church of Jesus Christ has awaited the consummation of the church age. No human being knows when the last day of this age will occur; however, with each succeeding day that comes and then goes, we can confidently state, "Today we are one day nearer to the end than we were yesterday!"

While these thoughts may startle us betimes, we often view our existence as comparatively ordinary. God promised Noah that "*while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease*" (Genesis 8:22). This natural rhythmic pattern has become the norm of our lives. It is normal that the sun comes up in the morning and goes down in the evening. It is normal that we experience spring, summer, fall, and winter each year nearly at the same time.

We work during the day and sleep at night. We labor and toil during the week and go to church and worship on Sunday. We plant our crops and gardens in the spring and harvest them in the fall. We are born, we grow up, we get old, and then we die. The ebb and flow of life remains perfunctorily normal.

The Apostle Peter says "*that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*" (2 Peter 3:3, 4). These last-day scoffers seem to conclude that normalcy lasts forever! "Since Jesus' coming still has not occurred, everything will continue as it always has since the creation," they reason.

Peter, in rebutting these erroneous sentiments, exposes two flaws. First, the scoffers have forgotten that the routine norms of the world were catastrophically interrupted by the flood of Noah's time—"*the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*" (2 Peter 3:6).

Secondly, God never forgets His promises. "*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness*" (2 Peter 3:8, 9).

Peter further warns, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*" (2 Peter 3:10). We may not allow the methodical march of our mundane routine to become so normal that we begin to believe that nothing will change. The Lord *will* come.

The Scripture is exceedingly clear that the return of Jesus Christ is imminent. "*For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17). A shout, a trumpet blast, and the voice of the archangel shall shatter the normal routine of the followers of Jesus Christ! The Church of Jesus Christ, both the resurrected dead and the living, shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air and live with Him forever and ever!

Every day God blesses our lives with predictable processes, common occurrences, everyday events, and usual incidences—normal life, we call it. Within this reoccurring framework of existence, we are called

(continued on page 25)



Counseling From the Word

A Peace Not as the World (or Therapy) Gives

by Jeremy Lelek

The legendary scholar and theologian John Owen once wrote, “When men measure out peace to themselves upon the conclusions that the convictions and rationale principles will carry them out unto, this is a false peace and will not abide” (Kapic & Taylor, 2006, p. 121). Owen lived from 1616 to 1683, an era and time that seems an eternity from this present moment. Yet, interestingly enough, his words are as relevant (if not more so) in modern culture as they were in his own day. Mankind is by nature a pursuer of personal peace. Unfortunately, however, the peace pursued (often by means of counseling) resembles the type of peace cited by Owen, and in the end “will not abide.” As biblical counselors, what is a (or the) viable alternative to offer counselees?

Jesus said this: “Peace I leave with you. my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). Notice, the peace offered in and by Christ is not typical of the peace offered by the world. Worldly peace has many venues through which humanity has sought to capture it. Sadly, one of those venues has taken shape in the form of modern psychotherapy and counseling. It is asserted by the proponents of secular psychology (and often adopted by the Christian cul-

ture) that peace comes from finding purpose, searching for significance, healing old emotional wounds, healing the inner child, correcting breakdowns in the family structure, rewriting new narratives for life, improving self-esteem, replacing poor communication habits, learning to love self, finding ways to properly meet one’s emotional needs, cognitive restructuring, rational thinking, developing a success identity, and on goes the list. However, such pathways to peace are merely temporal at best, and outright blasphemous at worst. They fall exceedingly short in comparison to that which Jesus was referring to earlier in this article. Helping counselees to achieve true peace will take them down a very different path than self-help and therapy. On the contrary, the path to God’s peace leads down the narrow path of selfless worship.

A precious passage that captures the essence of what Jesus was referring to in the Book of John may be found in Romans 5:1, 2 when the Apostle Paul proclaims, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” This is the haven of peace: that one knows Jesus Christ, and has been justified

by faith in Him. How tragic is the modern scene in which this titanic reality, this Gift of gifts, is often obscured (even replaced) by the trends of psychology and counseling. And it is here that the biblical counselor is most needed and valued within the Church. To effectively deal with a sense of hopelessness in the world, past hurts, family strife, difficult life experiences, hateful speech from others, a sense of emptiness, and sinful thinking, one must first acknowledge the depth and breadth of peace found in what Christ has already accomplished for His children. It is here (i.e., glorying in justification by faith) that one finds Paul directing his readers as the preface and prerequisite to deal with the suffering found in this world (Romans 5:3-5). Reiterating his initial comments, Paul concludes, "And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Romans 5:11). Peace, for humanity, is ultimately found in realizing (and re-realizing) the magnitude of this "reconciliation" with God.

Life is racing by, people are touched daily by the realities of suffering and sin, and solutions to stop the pain and suffering are constantly being sought. Although it is important to offer practical and specific counsel from the Word of God, biblical counselors serve their neighbors well to emphasize and reemphasize the "foreign" peace left to believers by the very person of Jesus: foreign simply because it is transcendent. It is not a product or native of this world (i.e., the latest counseling method, theory, or technique); instead, it is found in the everlasting work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. It is that which He accomplished when He uttered the words, "It is finished" (John 19:30). It is eternal life in Him (John 3:16). Additionally, the Bible clearly outlines that for those who have their minds set on the things of the Spirit (including the glory of God in His redemptive work of reconciliation) they will have "life and peace" (Romans 8:6). That is the case even when

COUNSELING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Seek to understand a counselee's paradigm of peace. In what is he or she hoping to find peace in this life? This will be revealed in his or her goals of counseling.
2. Reorient counsees to pursue peace in the Gospel of Christ. Have them read Romans 5:1-11. Highlight Paul's emphasis and excitement about God's reconciling man to Himself.
3. Ask counsees to journal on why their hearts may not seem as joyful as that of Paul's when they consider Romans 5:1, 2. This will further expose the origins of false peace found within the heart.
4. As such issues/idols are exposed, begin by teaching counsees the biblical view of repentance. Ask them to write a prayer of repentance to God for failing to find peace in Him alone, for ingratitude for what Christ has offered in Himself, and for other issues that may arise during the counseling process.
5. Help them write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for giving His own Son that all believers would be reconciled to Himself. Instruct them to read it frequently.

marriages are crumbling, life seems to have no significance, terrorists attack, or perceived emotional "needs" are not being met. Situations and life will fluctuate, but the work of God in the life of the believer stands forever. To ignore the peace left by and in Jesus is to ignore peace itself. To minimize this truth as too simple in addressing the "real" issues of the heart is to rob counsees from the only true peace there is to be found. In short, do not hesitate, especially for the sake of fearing irrelevance, to frequently bring counsees to the Cross of Jesus that they would repeatedly gain perspective of their lives, worship the living God for His goodness and love, and as a result experience His true peace which transcends human understanding (Philippians 4:7). ■

—Reprinted from www.christiancounseling.com.

The Joy of the Task

by J. B. Chapman

There are some callings in which a man may succeed while holding an aversion for his work, but the ministry is not one of them. The most useful ministers are those who are enamored of their work until they are inseparable from it.

The man who preaches just for convenience's sake and with whom the ministry is just "one way to serve his day and generation" is largely disqualified for his task. And a preacher who is blue and discouraged and fault-finding is a failure. The preacher must be a channel of spiritual inspiration, a means of staying others for the disagreeable tasks of life, and if he is indifferent in his own spirit he will fail.

Yesterday I heard a preacher who is in the eighty-third year of his life and the fifty-seventh of his ministry. He preaches with the vigor and positiveness of a man in his prime, and while the unction and blessing of God was upon him yesterday, he exclaimed, "I love to preach. I am glad I am a preacher. I am sorry for Henry Ford who seemed to be called to be a millionaire." And the people who heard him knew that he really felt this way about his work and calling.

There are inconveniences about the preacher's calling, there is no doubt about that. But there are also many immunities and privileges. And if the preacher must dwell upon one or the other of these, why shall he

not rather think of the latter? But what are conveniences and inconveniences, immunities and impositions compared with the joy of saving a soul and building a life? And the preacher has the best opportunity of anyone to go directly at the main task. The doctor, lawyer, merchant, or teacher must go indirectly in his quest for souls, but the preacher goes directly. And if the preacher is sincere in his profession that "one soul is more valuable than the whole world," then the joy of his calling should be full and constant.

The preacher who is "doing very well under the circumstances" is not really doing very well at all: otherwise he would not be "under the circumstances," but on top of them. It is every preacher's bounden obligation to keep a good state of grace on hand, and to "encourage himself in the Lord," so that his optimism will be religious and genuine and contagious. There is specific application of the promises to "the overcomer" in the preacher's life and calling. And there is no place where the words, "The joy of the Lord is your strength," have fuller meaning than when applied to the work of visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, encouraging the faltering, warning the erring, and preaching the Gospel of full salvation—all specific services involved in the preacher's task. ■

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THE END OF NORMAL . . . cont'd from p. 22

to live and work for Him. Our human tendency, however, is to become so preoccupied with the normal that we forget to focus on the eternal. The Scripture warns us not to fall asleep or to be ensnared with the cares of this world.

Brother, sister, be alert! Be aware of the lateness of the hour. Be sober and watch

unto prayer. Hold fast. Preach the Gospel to every creature. Work, for the night is coming when no man can work. Mind the signs of the times. The end of all things is at hand. Look up, for your redemption draweth nigh! Normal will end; eternity will ensue!

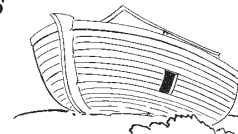
"Behold, I come quickly."

Even so come, Lord Jesus. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *The Pilgrim Witness*, Feb. 2010.



Beginning Issues



Are You Feeling the Heat?

by John Mullett

One of the hot-button issues of today is global warming or climate change. I'd like to address the topic from a biblical perspective. Perhaps you're wondering what climate change has to do with *Beginning Issues* as this little "corner" is called. The connection is perspective or worldview. I want to illustrate how our starting point affects our understanding of current-day issues.

This issue has been of great notoriety because of a number of high-profile people pushing their agendas in this arena. One example is Al Gore and his documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* in which he seems to believe every position of the radical environmentalists. Many of these radical reports and predictions have caused quite a stir, but with some time many are being exposed in scientific circles as having a tendency for the sensational with little scientific merit. It may be difficult to imagine based on the slant of the mainstream media, but many scientists either dispute global warming, or more commonly, believe there is not enough data to determine any imminent danger. Over 20,000 scientists signed the Oregon Petition Project (OPP) and

about 2700 of those were scientists in directly related fields.¹ The OPP includes the following statement: "There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane, or other greenhouse gasses is causing or will, in the foreseeable future, cause catastrophic heating of the Earth's atmosphere and disruption of the Earth's climate. Moreover, there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the Earth."²

Because of misrepresentation and a lack of trustworthy information in resources such as *An Inconvenient Truth*, it results in an emotionally charged debate in which it is increasingly difficult to discern and respond to truth. Often when faced with high-tension issues it is easy for us to respond out of reaction leading to camps forming in opposition to each other. On this particular issue, we have alarmists and doomsayers in one camp blaming man for the imminent destruction of the world, while the other camp tends to

1. Oard, Michael, September 20, 2006, Answers In Genesis, http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v1/n1/human-caused-global-warming#fnList_1_4.

2. Oregon Petition Project, <http://www.oism.org/pproject/s33p37.html>.

scoff and reject all talk of the subject at the first snowfall or cold snap. Frequently though, *neither* extreme is right. The truth usually lies somewhere in between.

So how do we discern what is truth regarding climate change? From a biblical perspective we are able to establish some truths to help us discern what is right in any issue, including climate change, and what our responsibility is in the issue. What foundation or parameters are we able to establish from Scripture to help us understand climate change?

In Genesis 1:28, the Bible tells us that man is to be fruitful and fill the Earth and subdue it and to rule over all living things. We are permitted, even commanded, to utilize the Earth's resources; but biblical authority always includes responsibility. We must use our resources wisely, or we will indeed reap what we sow. The consequences of irresponsibility are illustrated clearly in issues such as littering where the consequences of ugliness and environmental damage are readily apparent. So the first truth we can establish is that **we are free to use and rule over the Earth and its resources, but we have significant responsibility with that freedom.**

The second truth we can build on is found in Genesis 8:22, where the Bible assures us that as long as the Earth stands there will be seasons: planting

and harvesting, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. The Bible also tells us how the Earth will be destroyed (by fire—2 Peter 3) which allows us to know what won't destroy the Earth—that is anything outside of what is described in 2 Peter 3. The significance here is, that while global warming could cause change, it will not destroy the Earth as the alarmists would have us believe. In fact, there are a significant number of positives to consider should a warming trend continue, which is no certainty, as some studies indicate the trend may already have reversed itself. Fear marketing has long been used for personal gain and I don't think this issue is an exception. I believe many are using this issue to their advantage. If we have a biblical foundation **we do not need to respond out of fear or be victimized by any tactics based on fear.**

Here is the third truth that I want to point out. **A biblical view lends itself to understanding climate change and even expects it.** In light of sin and the fall of man, we can understand why destructive events occur in our world, both natural and otherwise. I believe with a proper perspective of the Great Flood and its implications for the Earth, it may help us understand why some of the natural phenomenon are occurring that we observe today. The Earth's environment almost certainly has never been as stable post-flood as it was pre-flood and it is doubtful that it ever will be. ■

"A man is never so tall as when he kneels before God; never more dependable than when he depends upon God; never so strong as when he draws upon God's strength; never so wise as when in his lack of wisdom, he seeks Divine Guidance. Truly, the man who most relies on God will be the most reliable man."
—Selected



Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

“... singing with understanding!”

O God, Our Help in Ages Past



Watts/Croft

Lyrics: During His time of ministry on earth, Jesus spoke often to the subject of worry. He knew that we humans have a tendency to get wrapped up in our little day-to-day problems and forget that God is in control and looking out for us. If God looks after the birds and flowers, He reasoned, won't He look after the people that He created in His own image? When we get bogged down with things like our financial woes, and fears for the future of our country, it helps to step back and look at our situation from an eternal perspective. Does my financial security ultimately change my eternal destiny? Does the future of American society really affect God's plan for His Kingdom? This month's hymn brings the "eternal perspective" to bear on these types of questions.

In overall form, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" is a prayer for protection, but the actual request does not come until the very last line of the hymn. The bulk of the text is spent praising God for His timelessness and the protection of His people throughout history. The poet (Isaac Watts) notes that God's people have always been secure when living "Under the shadow of [His] throne," and concludes that "our defense is sure" as well. He points out the fact that God was there "Before the hills," and concludes that God will be the same "To endless years" as well. He also reminds us of the often referenced verse in Psalm

90, where Moses compares a thousand years from God's perspective to a "watch in the night."

When viewed in light of God's eternal plan and perspective, many of the troubles and fears that we face seem more manageable. As this hymn points out, God has promised to be "our guard while troubles last," but most importantly, He has promised us an eternal home where everything is the way it should be.

Music: The accompanying music for this hymn has some aspects that are a little bit unusual for a short congregational hymn. The first item that sets it apart from others in its class is the unusual melody line. In most simple hymns of this sort, the melody moves primarily "stepwise" between notes (one degree at a time), with "skips" (more than one degree at a time) being the exception rather than the rule. In "St. Anne," there are actually more "skips" than "stepwise" movements, giving it a one-note-at-a-time feeling as opposed to a nice-flowing-tune type of flavor. The other contributing factor to the one-note-at-a-time feeling of the piece is that the chord changes on almost every beat, even the ones where the melody stays the same or moves stepwise. This constantly-changing nature of the music works well with the text that speaks of God's faithfulness in a changing world. ■

O God, Our Help in Ages Past

ISAAC WATTS, 1719

BASED ON PSALM 90

WILLIAM CROFT, 1708

1 O God, our help in a - ges past, Our hope for years to come,
2 Un - der the shad - ow of Thy throne Thy saints have dwelt se - cure;
3 Be - fore the hills in or - der stood, Or earth re - ceived her frame,
4 A thou - sand a - ges in Thy sight Are like an eve - ning gone;

Our shel - ter from the storm - y blast, And our e - ter - nal home.
Suf - fi - cient is Thine arm a - lone, And our de - fense is sure.
From ev - er - last - ing Thou art God, To end - less years the same.
Short as the watch that ends the night Be - fore the ris - ing sun. A - men.

5. Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

6. O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Wresting the Scriptures

by Larry Witmer

God's Word reveals His longing to communicate with mankind. God's faithfulness in providing His Word to fallen sinful creatures causes us to stand in wonder at the richness of this treasury—the Bible. But God provides no good thing that His archenemy will not molest. God's supreme and powerful Word holds high priority in Satan's attempt to destroy God's work. Satan has attacked it relentlessly ever since his first "Yea, hath God said . . .?" in the Garden of Eden.

Satan is busy today, vigorously attempt-

ing to minimize the effectiveness of the Scriptures. He does this by misrepresenting the Scriptures, "in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest [torture], as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Since God's Word is so rich and valuable and Satan's objective is to destroy it, we should carefully guard our understanding and teaching of it.

The authority of the Scriptures is attacked by critics who do not accept the

source of Scripture. The Bible is from God. Although we employ the use of logic and historical or scientific evidence in pointing men to God, the Word is His primary call to mankind (Romans 10:17). The Bible does not attempt to prove itself. And why should it? It comes from the One whose existence spans eternity. We dare not doubt His Word. A reverence for the One whom the Scriptures represent will prepare us to see the sin of wresting Scripture.

It is also important that we heed the contents of Scripture. We must take God at His Word. This is a defining point of every genuine believer (Romans 4:3). We view the Scriptures as absolute. God does not give suggestions or idle warnings. He does not overstate truth. God would minimize His authority by doing so.

Some have implied that when the Bible mentions a subject only once, it is not very important. They fail to recognize that every word of God is authoritative. He spoke the world into existence only once. Since all creation responded at His simple command, how much more should we heed every word? God's Word is seriously wrested if we read it with a take-it-or-leave-it mentality. Ascribing an allegorical meaning to clear teaching is one way this mentality is disguised. If God did not mean what He wrote, why did He write it?

Another very subtle danger is to know the words of Scripture but to miss its message. We do this when we read the Scripture but fail to allow the Holy Spirit to apply it to our personal lives. This is one of the most prevalent forms of wrested Scripture. God's Word is a very personal message that must be applied first to ourselves. Only then can we see its meaning for others (Matthew 7:5). God will judge us by how faithfully we apply Scripture to ourselves rather than how well we apply it to others.

When we refuse to allow our brother to apply the Scripture to our lives, we are also in danger of wresting Scripture. An individualistic approach to Bible study would lead us away from God. A Scriptural brotherhood gives broad exposure to truth that assists us in maintaining truth (1 Cor. 1:10).

To avoid wresting Scripture, we must emphasize all Biblical truth. If all Scripture is from God and all Scripture is profitable (2 Timothy 3:16), then we should regard all Scripture equally. God's love is often emphasized at the expense of His judgment. Foundational pillars such as compassion, equity, and brotherhood submission may be neglected when our focus becomes clouded with personal agendas of other good things (Matthew 23:23).

A broad-based knowledge of the Scriptures will help us to identify wrested Scripture. We must view the Scriptures as a whole and compare Scripture with Scripture. A proper understanding of the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant is important. The Old Testament beautifully pointed forward to Christ while the New Testament portrays to us the way of salvation. The Old Covenant is fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17-48; Galatians 3:24, 25). This understanding solves many difficulties that come from a "flat view" of Scripture. The errors of the union of church and state, the loss of nonresistance, the leadership of woman, and divorce and remarriage are clarified as we understand the progressive revelation of Scripture.

An important defense against wrested Scripture is a simple willingness to believe and obey it (John 7:17). The Scripture is God's message to us. If we search it to support our own idea, the words become a vehicle of deception and a tool of Satan. Many have tried to twist truth to fit themselves instead of submitting themselves to conform to truth. But truth is an immovable object. If we lean against truth and something moves, it will have been our own feet which slipped.

The Bereans exhibited a beautiful attitude when they "received the word with all readiness of mind" (Acts 17:11). Rather than leaning against truth, they rested in truth by searching the Scriptures daily. Wrestling does not bring rest. Instead of finding rest, those who wrest truth do so "unto their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). ■

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The Third Wing

by Marcus Yoder

The Reformation left a lasting impact on the history of the world. Its beginnings and principle figures are well-known to any historian who studies European history. What the Reformation began is still a part of religious life in many parts of the world today. Within the scope of the Reformation were a number of smaller groups that seemed to be neither Catholic nor Protestant. The most prominent of these groups were the Anabaptists. This was a loose-knit group of people who agitated for more change than either Luther or Zwingli allowed or proposed. What did these people believe? Are they Protestants? It certainly is clear that they were not Catholic.

It is this paper's intention to establish that inasmuch as Anabaptists differed from both the Catholics and Protestants in major theological ways, they must be considered the third wing of the Reformation. We will examine the question of Anabaptist identity and see whether it is fair to categorize them as Protestants. We will do so by examining the theology of the Protestants and Anabaptists. We will then examine the historical categories they have often been placed into and ask whether they are fair or even logical.

The question of who the Anabaptists were is a large question that may be answered from several different historical perspectives. If the question is whether they agreed with the Protestant reformers in their evaluation of the Catholic Church, then the answer is yes. What defines early Anabaptism? Another way to ask this question is to examine whether they disagreed in kind or in degree?¹ If they only disagreed

with the Protestant reformers in degree then it may be right to assume they were just radical Protestants. If they disagreed in kind then the issue becomes whether what they disagreed about is substantive enough to warrant seeing them as the "Third Wing of the Reformation."²

It is obvious as one studies the Reformation that the Catholics and Protestants were at substantial theological odds. This obvious difference led to very strained relationships where men literally called for the death of those on the other side. These differences are well-documented and led these two groups to acknowledge that they no longer belonged together. When it comes to the Anabaptists it seems harder to do. Who did they belong to? Without a doubt they were and are considered non-Catholic by all involved. Both Luther and Zwingli also considered them non-Protestant.

When one looks at the writings of both Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli it is clear that they felt that this difference was in kind not just degree. According to Luther, "They [Anabaptists] are at one only in regard to and in opposition to us."³ It would also seem that their standing in opposition to the Protestant Reformers posed a perceived threat to 16th-century society.⁴ It is this threat that caused so much persecution of the Anabaptists. It is important to also see that the opposition was theological in nature and therefore much more than just the degree of reformation.

Luther himself said of the Anabaptists, "However there have forthwith gone out from us Wiedertauffer, sacramentschwärmer, und andere Rottengeister⁵ . . . for

1. Verduin, Leonard. *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Sarasota, FL: Christian Hymnary Publishers, 1996): 15.

2. It is unknown who first coined this phrase. It carries with it the idea that the Anabaptists were a distinct wing in the Reformation. Anabaptist historians most often use it.

3. Lindberg, Carter. *The European Reformation* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1996): 200.

4. Ibid.

they were not of us even though for a while they walked with us.”⁶ This gives strong indication that Luther himself did not think these people belonged to the Protestants. It is also clear from the early Anabaptists’ writings which are still extant that they believed the same way. The fourth article of the Schleithem Confession of Faith of 1527 says that “all popish and anti-popish (Protestant) works and church services, meetings, and church attendance”⁷ are to be avoided. This strict view shows the level of difference that is there between the groups. These differences in the minds of the principal people involved are much more than perceived, they are theological.

The first and most glaring theological difference is without a doubt the Anabaptists’ view of ecclesiology. What is the church or the kingdom of God? Who is a part of it and who is not? Does it constitute a territory? Because of the political landscape of the era, these questions became front and central to all involved.

The traditional Catholic view (which became the Protestant view as well) is that the church is territorial, an entity where all are a part of the same church from birth to the grave. Therefore the sacrament of baptism is of utmost importance because it is the initiation into this body. When it should be administered is key because citizenship is also conveyed with it. This issue of baptism is bound up in what one thinks of the church. Both the Catholics and Protestants felt strongly that a territorial and magisterial church was essential to hold things together.

The Anabaptists differed in their view of this. They felt that the church should be made up of people who had voluntarily chosen to follow Christ and were committed to holy living. This then is where the Anabap-

tists’ view of baptism originated. “Infant baptism was not the cause of their disavowal of the state church; it was only the symbol of the cause.”⁸ This view of church was radical and affected many areas of life and practice for the Anabaptists. This view may be identified as the two-kingdom theory. This theology holds that the Kingdom of God is distinct from, and different than the kingdom of this world; therefore the Christian should not partake in the use of the sword because it is outside the kingdom of God.

This also led to their insistence of the separation of the church from the world. According to Bender, “The world would not tolerate the practice of true Christian principles in society, and the church could not tolerate the practice of worldly ways among its membership. Hence the only way out was separation.”⁹ One of the founding theologians of Dutch Anabaptism, Menno Simons, said, “The entire evangelical Scriptures teach us that the church of Christ was and is, in doctrine, life, and worship, a people separated from the world.”¹⁰ They viewed the church as a family or brotherhood where the Word is preached and obeyed.

Heinrich Bullinger who succeeded Ulrich Zwingli as a reformer in Zurich had extensive contacts with the Anabaptists and knew them so well that he published two treatises against them. His witness of the Anabaptist view of ecclesiology is negative but well understood. According to Bullinger the Anabaptists believed and taught that:

One cannot and should not use force to compel anyone to accept the faith, for faith is a free gift of God. It is wrong to compel anyone by force or coercion to embrace the faith, or put to death anyone for the sake of his erring faith. It is an error that in the

5. The literal translation of Luther’s German here is, “Anabaptists, sacrament swarmers, and other faction makers.”

6. Verduin, Leonard. *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Sarasota, FL: Christian Hymnary Publishers, 1996): 18.

7. Williams, George Huntston. *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000): 292.

8. Bender, Harold, “The Anabaptist Vision,” in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press 1957), 47.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, trans. and ed. Leonard Verduin, J. C. Wenger, and Harold S. Bender (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press 1956), 679.

church any sword other than that of the divine Word should be used. The secular kingdom should be separated from the church, and no secular ruler should exercise authority in the church. The Lord has commanded simply preach the gospel, not to compel anyone by force to accept it. The true church of Christ has the characteristics that it suffers and endures persecution but does not inflict persecution on anyone.¹¹

This view according to Bullinger was diametrically different than that of the Reformers. He reports their views not in commendation but rather condemnation and urges the rigid suppression of this view. He closes by saying that this is dangerous enough to warrant the hunting down and death of those who believed this idea.

The two views of church that were present during this time, the free church as advocated by the Anabaptists, and the societal church as advocated by both the Protestants and Catholics, are not at all cohesive. The two views cannot be combined even today. It is upon this view of the church that much of the rest of the theology of the Anabaptists was built. Baptism, nonresistance, their view of the clergy, and many other things were built upon the idea that the church is an entity set apart from society, and therefore part of another realm or kingdom. It is this view that makes these people in essence non-Protestants.

The second area of theology where there seems to be substantial difference between the Protestants and Anabaptists is Soteriology: how does one get saved? What role does salvation have in ongoing Christian life? While Luther and Zwingli advocated a strong view of salvation by faith alone, the Anabaptists agreed but insisted that that view did not go nearly far enough. They advocated a saving faith that acted or

worked itself out in the way one lived. They called this idea discipleship or following Christ. This is a different orientation than the one-sided Pauline view of justification that the Reformers adopted. This view pushes back to Jesus, emphasizing above all the commandments of *nachfolge*, or following after.¹² This idea of following (*nachfolge*) is essential to understanding the tension in Anabaptist soteriology. It was for them not merely a forensic understanding, but rather an intrinsic change that happens when a person voluntarily “joins” himself to Christ. In many of the extant writings of early Anabaptism this theme emerges over and over again. Menno Simons in his *Foundations* says that, “Whoever boasts that he is a Christian, the same must walk as Christ walked.”¹³

This moves salvation from merely being a possession to a relationship or a matter of discipleship. As Roland Bainton so appropriately put it, “The Anabaptists went back further than any of the other groups. They tended to neglect Paul and to push back to Jesus. That is why the ideal of Restoration tends to coincide now with the ideal of the imitation of Christ.”¹⁴ This theology of discipleship became the focus of their view of salvation. In this sense they were actually to the right of Luther if one thinks of it as a continuum away from Catholicism. Unconditional obedience for the sake of the Kingdom of God was their battle cry. This then was radically different than the reformers who accused them of being works based. This is seen at the very least as a redefining of salvation, if not a completely different view of it. George Huntston Williams says that, “Through their redefinition of discipleship the radicals thought of themselves as neither Catholic or Protestant but as disciplined believers in solidarity with Christ

11. Quoted in a translation by John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe*, 325, from Bullinger's *Der Wiedertauffern Ursprung*, etc. (Zurich, 1560).

12. Friedmann, Robert, “The Doctrine of the Two Worlds,” in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press, 1957), 106.

13. Quoted in *Anabaptism in Outline: Notes From Primary Sources*, ed. Walter Klassan (Waterloo, Ont., Herald Press, 1981), 99.

14. Quoted in a personal letter to Robert Friedmann in “The Doctrine of the Two Worlds,” in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press 1957), 106.

and his early band of disciples . . .”¹⁵

This view is dynamically different enough to warrant questioning whether it is in fact not just different in degree, but rather different in kind. Luther’s battle cry was faith alone, with which Zwingli agreed. The Anabaptists said faith is important, but what is just as important is *Bussfertigkeit*.¹⁶ This idea of repentance linked to salvation is at best a redefining, if not a substantially different, view of salvation.

The third area of theology that we will examine is epistemology. What is the truth? How is it known? In theology the question becomes one of how we know spiritual truth. How does one find out what the Scriptures say? It is obvious that how one interprets this question is important because it is in essence the basis for other views.

The Anabaptists joined the Protestants in rejecting the Catholics’ view that authority could be found with the pope, councils, and the Scripture. However, there does seem to be considerable differences about how the Anabaptists and the Protestants viewed the Scriptures. While both the Anabaptists and Protestants said that the Scriptures are the final authority for the Christian, the Anabaptists leaned much stronger towards a humanistic understanding of the Bible. This view espoused by many of the humanists was that Scriptures provide a model for both Christian teaching as well as church order and organization.¹⁷ This is seen most clearly in the writings of early leaders who over and over again say that the Scriptures are how one finds truth, and how one learns to live right as well. Therefore the Scriptures were their guide to life and lifestyle.

Along with that difference was also the idea that all could and should read and interpret the Scriptures to find the way of Jesus and of life. Therefore the loci of inter-

pretation was not found so much with the learned men or the councils; rather it was found in the brotherhood of the local congregation as the men and women themselves wrestled with the Scriptures. As the church body interpreted this way of life, those who were committed to that body could and should be bound by this interpretation of the truth. Therefore the Scriptures and the ethical practices it espoused should become a way of life for them. Pilgram Marpeck, an early Anabaptist leader, wrote,

We would sincerely admonish every Christian to be on the alert and to study the Scriptures, and have a care lest he permit himself to be easily moved and led away from the Scriptures and apostolic doctrine by strange teachings and understandings; but let everyone, in accordance with the Scripture and apostolic teaching, strive with great diligence to do God’s will, seeing that the Word of Truth cannot fail us nor mislead us.¹⁸

This view of Scripture and how one should follow it is also the reason that the early Anabaptists did not develop a systematic theology. To them the Bible was about a way of life rather than dogma. This same view of the interpretive circle being the local brotherhood also led to a tremendous diversity that they struggled with.

It is clear as one studies how the Anabaptists thought about this issue of finding religious truth that it was different than Luther’s. His view was that the Scriptures were to show us two things: law and grace. Therefore they are not so much a guide to live by; rather they show us our need of justification and the way that God met that need. The rest of the Scriptures that do not fit these categories are “indifferent.”¹⁹ This is a dynamically different view and it would be unfair to both Luther and the Anabaptists to say that the differences were just in degree. Along with the two other areas of

15. Williams, George Huntston. *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000): 1263.

16. This word translated into English is literally Repentancecompleteism. It has strong and close connections to the idea of *nachfolge*.

17. Quoted in *Anabaptism in Outline: Notes From Primary Sources*, ed. Walter Klassan (Waterloo, Ont., Herald Press, 1981), 99.

18. Wilhelm Wiswedel, “Bible” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 1st ed.

theology we have looked at, this is a difference in kind and not merely degree.

So then who are these people? If they are different in kind, what and how should we categorize them? Traditionally they have been seen as fringe Protestants. Is this fair to both them and the Protestants? There have been many attempts at categorization by historians, three of which we will examine in this paper.

The first of these is the idea that the Anabaptists were the “radicals” of the Reformation. George Huntston Williams, a professor at Harvard Divinity School, is the one who espoused this idea in his book, *The Radical Reformation*. Williams categorized the groups in the Reformation as either Magisterial Reformers or Radical Reformers.²⁰ While it may be appropriate to view the Anabaptists in such a light, it does raise the question whether their views were merely more radical or dynamically different. Again it raises the question of degree or kind. While the Anabaptists are seen as extreme or radical, is this the best term for them?

Another attempt at categorization has been the idea that they were the left-wing of the Reformation. This category was coined by Roland Bainton, another Yale professor in 1941. He saw this as a generic term using the political connotations of “left” and “right” to characterize groups. “Left” then means those opposed to the state-church idea. It appears that Bainton thought about theology in these terms as well.²¹ Again as with Williams’ “Radicals” the question becomes whether this is the best categorization of them. For instance, if we view them on a continuum, with Luther being on the right and Anabaptists on the left, what does one do with their view of works which seems to be far to the right of Luther? Have they “out-Luthered” Luther? The struggle becomes one of trying to fit something of a different kind and meas-

ure into degree. While it is true that there are parts of the movement that may be characterized this way it comes back to the fact that there are substantial differences in the theologies of the groups being measured.

The third categorization is that of Leonard Verduin, who calls the Anabaptists the “Stepchildren of the Reformers.” This is because he sees them as being treated as stepchildren often are, and because they are the victims of a second marriage.²² The first marriage is seen as the Reformers struggle with the Catholic Church, the second is seen in the Reformers “marrying” the magisterial system, and the Anabaptists are victims of this marriage. While this categorization is the most fair of the three we are examining, it still does not give a clear picture of the difference and impact they had.

While each of these three categorizations seems to have some credibility and value, quite possibly they are incomplete. In looking at the major theological differences, we must consider whether these men and women should be considered the “Third Wing of the Reformation.” This categorization seems to indicate a clearer definition of the differences. It is true that in the Reformation there were three viable solutions to the question of church: one could be Catholic, Protestant, or join, at the risk of life and property, another group—the Anabaptists. This third way had a distinct orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This difference is much more than a matter of degree. It is a difference in kind.

An accurate study of history would indicate that there were many that chose this way. From the outset the Reformers seemed almost more concerned about the opposition from this Third Wing than they were of the Catholic opposition. As early as 1525, Zwingli in a letter to Vadian said that the struggle with the Catholics was “but child’s play” when compared with the struggle from this

19. Dr. Richard Shiels, Class Lecture, *Reformation History*, January 23, 2007, Newark, OH.

20. Williams, George Huntston. *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000): xxx.

21. Robert Friedmann, “Radical Reformation” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, 1st ed.

22. Verduin, Leonard. *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Sarasota, FL: Christian Hymnary Publishers, 1996): 13.

Third Wing.²³ This opposition was not with swords and armies but with Scripture and lifestyle. Another opponent of the Anabaptists, Sebastian Franck, wrote in 1531, only seven years after the movement began, that, “the Anabaptists spread so rapidly that their teachings soon covered the land as it were. They soon gained a large following, and baptized thousands, . . . They increased so rapidly that the world feared an uprising by them though I have learned that this fear had no justification whatsoever.”²⁴ Another anonymous writer of the era wrote, “Anabaptism spread with such speed that there was reason to fear that the majority of the common people would unite with the sect.”²⁵ This seems to indicate that

there were substantial enough differences to make this the third possibility for the common people of the era.

History has demonstrated that for a large part the Third Wing was right. Little by little, part by part, Protestantism has come to endorse the idea of the free church. This, along with the missionary church, has become a part of the Protestant vision in the 21st century,²⁶ at the same time acknowledging that 16th-century Anabaptism and Protestantism were radically different on many fronts. At the very least the Anabaptists should be considered the second front or stepchildren of the Protestant Reformation, if not a separate and Third Wing of the Reformation. ■

23. *Ibid.*, 11.

24. Bender, Harold, “The Anabaptist Vision,” in *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottsdale, PA, Herald Press 1957), 30.

25. *Ibid.*, 32.

26. Although one could argue that any church which advocates the Augustinian view of just war is in its essence not a free church, but still a magisterial church, dictated not by Scripture but by the voice of the ones calling for war.

Art and the Church

by Philip G. Ryken

There are many reasons why some churches have a negative view of the arts. Art trades in images, and images easily lend themselves to idolatry. Artists know this from their own experience. In their work they encounter the glory at the foundation of things, and they feel its power over the heart. But the danger is especially acute when objects of art are brought into the church for religious worship. At various times in church history, such as during the iconoclastic movement of the eighth century or the Protestant Reformation in Europe, church leaders have tried to smash this form of idolatry by taking statues and other works of art out of the church and destroying them. Generally speaking, they were not opposed to the use of art, only its abuse. But some Christians failed to under-

stand the difference, and there was a lingering suspicion about the visual arts.

Other forms of art have come under suspicion for different reasons. Nearly all Christians acknowledge the worth of music in public worship, but some are skeptical of its value in other venues, where it is seen as unessential entertainment. The theater has long had an unsavory reputation for immorality; so, too, the cinema, with its dubious connections to Hollywood decadence. Then there is poetry, which is not so much opposed as ignored. Often the church’s antipathy betrays an underlying ignorance about the arts, but sometimes the suspicion is justified. Art is always tempted to glory in itself, and nearly every form of art has been used to communicate values that are contrary to Scripture. Art is as fallen as any