

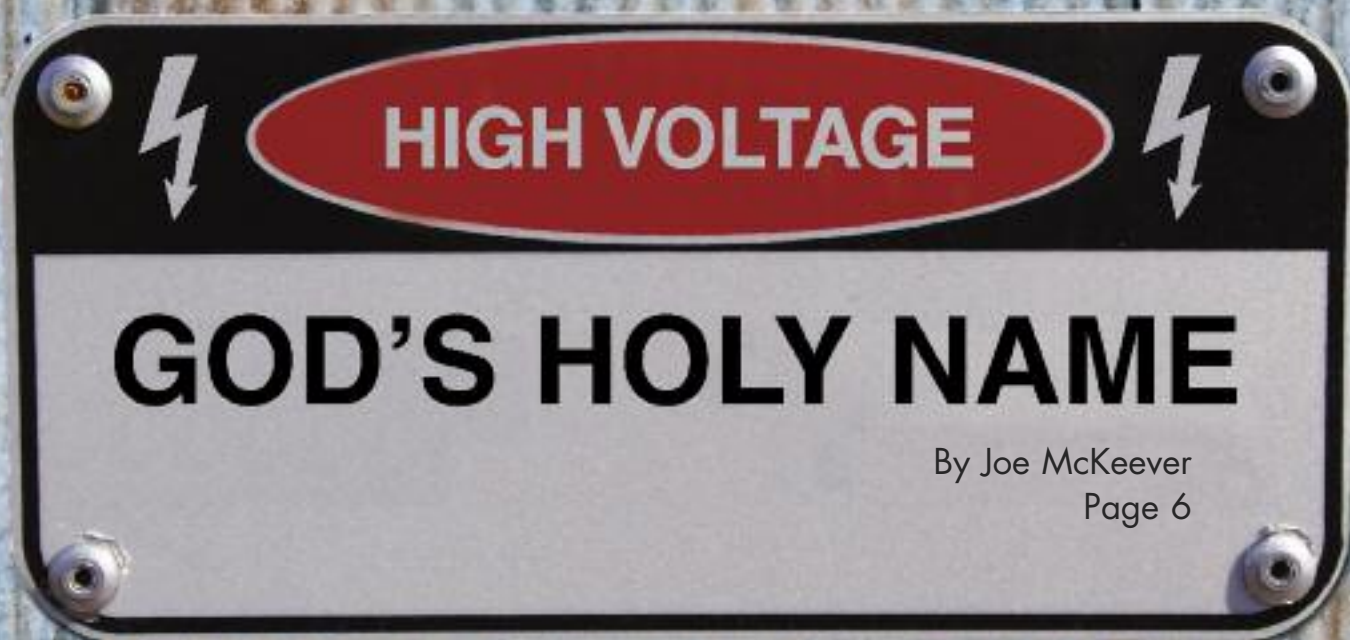
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Also in this issue:

**Biblical Worldview: What It Is,
and What It Is Not**

By John Stonestreet
Page 10

Leave the Boat Behind

By Joseph Kostelnik
Page 24

Tools for every teacher of the Word.

Featured Articles:



(Cover Story)
 High Voltage: God's Holy Name
 By Joe McKeever

10
 Biblical Worldview: What It Is, and What It Is Not
 By John Stonestreet



24
 Leave the Boat Behind
 By Joseph Kostelnik

- 23 Silence is Golden
By Shea Oakley
- 29 Worshipping Worship?
By Victor Knowles
- 30 Christ-like Tolerance within the Church: A Response
By David Olford
- 34 Ten Things to Know About Romans—Part 3 of 4
By Joe McKeever
- 36 Exchange Student Accepts Christ, Loses Family
By Charlie Warren

Regular Columns:

CHURCH BUILDERS

8 Charles Simeon: Pulpit Aristocrat
By Bernard R. DeRemer

POINTS TO PONDER

9 A Holy Desire—Satisfied
By David & Stephen Olford

STORY BEHIND THE SONG

12 He Stuck By His Friends
By Lindsay Terry

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

13 Success or Faithfulness?
By James Rudy Gray

FOLLOWING GOD

16 Walking According to the Spirit—Part 4
By Wayne Barber

MISSIONS SPOTLIGHT

17 Giving Beyond Ability
By Cornelius Pronk

ADVANCING THE MINISTRIES OF THE GOSPEL

22 On Being a "National Worker"
By Bob Gerow

EXEGETICALLY SPEAKING

26 John the Baptist
By Spiros Zodhiates

TRANSFORMATIONAL PREACHING

39 From the Pulpit to People
By John Meador

Departments:

Readers' Forum3	Recent Releases.....19	Praise & Prayer33
Editorial4	Off the Shelf20	Hidden Wisdom35
Father Abraham10	Special Announcement20	Marketplace37
Sermon Starters14	Illustrations28	Classifieds.....38
Bulletin Inserts15	Continuing Education31	
Pastors' Library.....18	News Update.....32	

6815 Shallowford Road
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Dr. Spiros Zodhiates
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JUSTIN LONAS - Editor-in-Chief
Email: editor@pulpithelps.com

DAVID RILEY - Circulation Manager
Email: circulation@pulpithelps.com

MARK LIVESAY - Advertising Sales
Email: advertising@pulpithelps.com

LISA BLUFORD - Graphic Designer
Email: lisab@pulpithelps.com

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Readers' Forum



Truth and Presentation

I Received my first "glossy" edition of *Pulpit Helps*! If you had a choice between more articles and "glossy", my vote would be for more articles. The Church is in serious decline—pastors are in serious trouble—the printed page is often the only source of help and encouragement for many.

In other words, reading the truth is more important than how the truth is presented or looks on the page. Keep up the good work!

Wayne J. Edwards
Mature Ministries
Martin, Ga.

Changes

I've seen some changes since I started receiving *Pulpit Helps*. There were those big loose two-page groupings from cover to cover (like newspapers) to the smaller magazine format and so on, until today, and what a wonderful surprise to get my *Pulpit Helps* with such a neat, high gloss, smooth cover page. I'm glad to see such changes in such a great publication.

Thanks again,
T. P. Sambrano
Clovis, N.M.

Dear Editor,

Greetings in His Name. Just a word to congratulate you and the staff for the great enhancement of your magazine this month, with better paper, better and useful articles for the ministry and missions. It stands equal to any other Christian magazine with its all around quality, forthright biblical message, and attractiveness in this highly competitive field.

In Christ Jesus,
William R. Le Roy,
Pres. of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions
Lancaster, Pa.

continued on page 5

Contact *Pulpit Helps*

The opinions and beliefs found in Readers' Forum are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent those of *Pulpit Helps*. We welcome and encourage signed letters with different perspectives. Please limit your letters to 250 words or less. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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Taken Captive:

Cultural Heresies and the Church—Part 8 of 10

By Justin Lonas

Editor's Note: This is the eighth of 10 articles on areas in which entrenched unbiblical attitudes tend to hold sway in the Church. We are seeking to encourage believers to live up to Paul's command to "see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

Tradition Number 8—The Bible and Orthodoxy

The inherent assumption behind this entire series is that the Bible is God's Word, that it is inspired, inerrant, and *"profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In short, God means what He says, and we have a responsibility to live accordingly.

Holding God's Word in proper esteem is absolutely integral to our identity as Christians. How we view and use Scripture speaks volumes about how we view God—if we aren't willing to take Him at His Word, then we cannot come to terms with His holiness, our need for redemption, or what it means to be the Church. Either God speaks through Scripture and defines our existence or we presume to dictate to Him "the way things are." A right understanding of the truth of Scripture and faithful reading, study, and preaching of it will allow it to shape our actions and give form to God's purpose for our lives.

Many who claim the name of Christ in America and around the world, however, want very little to do with His revealed Word. Mishandling or disregarding Scripture is nothing new; Paul warned Timothy that *"the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths"* (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Five primary ways in which people mistake the Word stand out in a wide range of Christian traditions.

1) Instead of reading Scripture themselves and allowing the Spirit to shape their hearts through His Word, many believers implicitly or explicitly allow others to handle the Word for them. Getting the Bible in the hands of the people was a rallying cry of the Reformation, and yet today many are content to let their pastor, teacher, or favorite author read and interpret it for them, taking whatever they're handed at face value without seeking the Lord's wisdom on a personal level.

While there are many faithful expositors in pulpits around the world, God clearly intends us to interact with His Word, internalize it, and live it out. The Psalmist's meditations in Psalm 119 do not come from a heart that has merely listened to good teaching but one that has been bathed in the Word. Christ sets the example in Matt. 4 for us to have the Word in our hearts and minds to turn away the enemy's attacks, reminding us that God's Word is the nourishment for our life in Him (quoting Deut. 8:3).

2) Others settle for a cursory exploration of Scripture and live by a set of "principles" drawn out by less-than-thorough exposition and often taken out of context. They often use Scripture to advance their own agenda or justify their own decisions instead of letting it speak. Such an attitude not only undermines the purpose of the Word but attempts to use it against God and His work—it is no better than Satan's temptation of Christ with "snapshots" of the Old Testament.

3) John 1 tells us that the Word is the very essence of God, and that it has been incarnated in Christ. 2 Tim. 3:16 states that *"all Scripture is inspired by God"*—literally "God breathed-out" (*thēōpnēustōs*), and 1 Peter 1:20-21 points out that none of it comes from man but that *"men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."* The primary work of God's Spirit, it is clear, is the revealing of His Word to men through Scripture.

Some, however, rely on a special "word from the Lord" in making life decisions,

determining right from wrong, etc. They wait for the Holy Spirit to speak directly to them and allow a "spiritual experience" to guide what they believe and how they live. Seeing the Spirit move, though, is not about witnessing something new and different but rather having Him call to mind the truths that are "ageless and new" and giving us the strength to live them out. Expecting God to speak over and above Scripture is arrogant and ultimately anti-spiritual.

4) Still others faithfully study and memorize the Word but fail to let it soak into their hearts, renew their minds (Rom. 12:2), and be lived out in their actions. God's Word is alive and active (Heb. 4:12), and if it is not having an effect in our hearts, it should serve as an indicator that we need to confess our sins and be restored to right relationship with the Lord.

5) Finally, there are those who live with total disregard for God's Word. They neither love nor study Scripture, and they turn the Church into a purely social institution, shutting God out of the exercise entirely. When a church ceases to be under the authority of the Word, it ceases to be a church.

The apostles were very clear in drawing a line from the Old Testament to the teaching of Christ. The epistles of Paul, Peter, James, and others are filled with references to and quotations of Scripture, pointing out unequivocally that Jesus was the fulfillment of all the prophecies about Messiah and showing that His words should be viewed as Scripture also. The doctrines we affirm are not special teachings but distillations of the same Word.

Every faithful church leader since that time, from Athanasius and Augustine to the Reformers of the 16th century to today has based their teaching in God's Word. Those who did not have led people astray and been rejected by true believers. While no individual is perfect in their interpretation of Scripture, we are to hold each other accountable to the word as the Body. The

Lord uses our collective study and meditation on the Word to maintain integrity in our application of it.

Adherence to the Scripture is the thread that ties together the history of the Church; the fact that the faith survives to this day is itself a testament to the power and vitality of the Word. We would do well to remember this in a day in which “truths” that people live by are selected from a buffet line of philosophies according to their self-serving preferences. If the Church fails in its commitment to Scripture, “Christianity” will become just another option (as it is already viewed by many) with nothing definitive to say about who God is and how we relate to Him.

If, however, we remain faithful to God’s Word and its proclamation, He will continue to use it to glorify His name and empower His followers to be the light in a dark world that He has called us to be.



Readers’ Forum continued

I like the crisp new look of *Pulpit Helps*. Kudos to your great graphic designer, Lisa Bluford.

Victor Knowles
 Founder & President, Peace on Earth
 Ministries (POEM)
 Joplin, Mo.

The new glossy design for *Pulpit Helps* looks great! I have but one regret, I did not send something to go in it.

Blessings,
 Franklin Kirksey
 Spanish Fort, Ala.

Postmodernism

This morning I just read your synopsis of postmodernism (“Taken Captive, part 6”, April 2009). Thanks for a clear and balanced view of the modernism/postmodernism and how we as the Church have Jesus to look to for truth. Appreciate you helping the Church to not just be reactionary on this one—something I unfortunately see time and time again. Now to just follow the Spirit as we navigate these interesting days ahead!

Peace to you,
 Duane Sherman
 Marengo, Ill.



There’s a lot to consider...

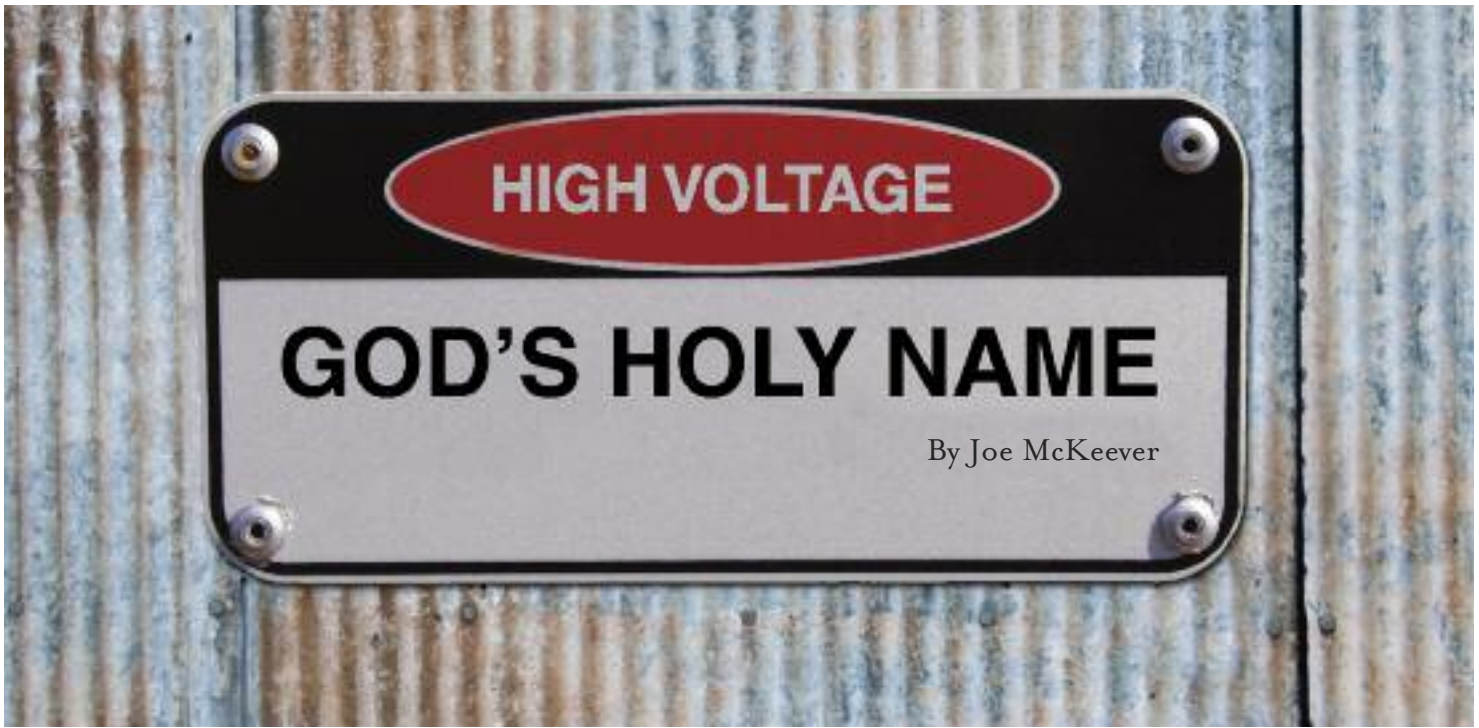
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“And David arose and went...to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by The Name, the very Name of the Lord of Hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim” (II Samuel 6:2).

You don’t have to read far in the Bible, particularly that portion we call the Old Testament, to observe that the writers seem to be bending over backward not to actually speak the name of God.

In Psalm 20, for example, we read this blessing: *“May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high.”*

That reads like they have left a blank for God’s actual name, under which they penned in tiny letters: “You know, the name of the God of Jacob.”

We could use some of that. We desperately need more reverence for the name of God today.

I read the other day that the Catholic Church has announced it will no longer be referring to God by the name “Yahweh.” That, to the best of our knowledge, is the proper way of spelling and pronouncing the YHVH or YHWH which is found in the Hebrew Bible everywhere the name of God is given. Not to belabor a point you probably know from having read it countless times, but the Jews would not pronounce that name, and so gradually lost the vowels that accompanied those four consonants. Instead of pronouncing the proper name (YHVH), Jewish worshipers would say

“Adonai,” meaning “the Lord.”

The Hebrew for “the Name” is *“Ha-Shem.”* A common expression was *“Baruch Ha-Shem”*: Blessed be the Name.

Somewhere along the line, transcribers took the vowel points from Adonai and stuck them under YHVH and gave us Jehovah (or something close to it). But that “name” was just an invention on their part.

In the 1960s, when I would try to dialogue with members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, they would insist how absolutely necessary it is that a church carry the proper name for God (that being “Jehovah”, of course). A dozen years later, by the time their leaders had learned their mistake, they changed their tune. Then, when we would “dialogue,” they would say, “It doesn’t really matter; it’s the spirit of the thing that counts.” To be sure.

I have a dozen or more books on the Ten Commandments. Almost all of them, on arriving at the third commandment—*“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain”*—they stress the many ways by which we misuse the Lord’s name. High on that list is attaching His name to anything He has not said, blessed, commanded, or called. If I say, “The Lord told me to tell you” and He didn’t, I have taken His name in vain.

I grant you those are ways of taking His

name in vain, but rather than going into all the secondary applications of the third commandment, could we just park on the primary application for a bit? We are not to misspeak His name, not to use it in any unholy way.

Rob Schenck explains that in the Hebrew language, the literal meaning of the third commandment is “No lifting up of the Lord’s name.” He quotes Everett Fox in translating it, “You are not to take up the name of YHWH your God for emptiness.” Schenck adds, “One way of interpreting this peculiar idiom is to say, ‘No stealing the Lord’s name.’” (Rob Schenck’s book is *The Ten Words That Will Change a Nation.*)

Joy Davidman, the wife of C. S. Lewis, also wrote a small book on the Ten Commandments. She says, “the third commandment is not just a nice-Nellyish warning against profanity. It is much more like the sort of warning you see around power plants: ‘Danger—High Voltage!’ For the ancient Hebrews seem to have thought of God almost literally as a live wire. 2 Sam. 6 relates how Uzzah, who touched the Ark unwarily while trying to keep it from falling, was struck dead by the indwelling Power. The implied moral seems to be: Be careful how you touch God—He’s dangerous!”

She goes on to quote her husband, who

Joe McKeever is director of missions for the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans.

said, “Those who think to make their concept of God larger by talking of ultimate principles and such in reality are only making it vaguer; they are reducing the good, wise, and loving Being to an abstraction incapable of goodness, wisdom, or love—and indeed of being too! Offhand, it would seem as if there were no harm in a man’s inventing his own name for the Almighty, yet in practice rejecting the word almost always leads to rejecting the reality. For words do have one sort of magic—they have a magical power over the operations of our thinking. When we drop the word ‘God,’ we are on the way to losing touch with the truth behind it. There is no virtue in not calling upon Him on the ground that he isn’t there to answer” (Her book is called *Smoke on the Mountain*).

In his outstanding book *The Ten(der) Commandments*, Pastor Ron Mehl talks about the common expression in which people call on God to “damn” this thing or that person. He says, “Why would God say, ‘Don’t take my name in vain?’ Because He loves you and me so much. The problem with most people is that they think they can get by with it because they say anything they want to and ‘nothing has happened.’ Yet

when you read the Scriptures you discover something about sowing and reaping, and it is this: you never, never reap in the same season you sow. But God’s Word is true. And using His name in vain will affect your life.”

In his book *God’s Ten Words*, Tuscaloosa’s Buddy Hanson quotes Presbyterian scholar Jack Scott: “The first commandment is concerned about the object of worship, the second commandment concerns the means of worship, and [the third] commandment concerns the manner of worship, forbidding all careless, or profane use of His name, and commanding a holy reverence from us in all our solemn addresses to Him, or ordinary mention of His name.”

It has long been observed that people swear by that they consider most holy. In an adventure novel set in the Far East, the author had one of his characters declare, “I swear by the name of the Christian’s Jesus.” I wanted to tell the novelist, “Cheap shot, friend. That

doesn’t work. No one talks that way.”

No Christian swears by Buddha or Krishna or Baal. No Buddhist swears by Jesus, no Muslim takes the name of Christ in vain. People swear by that they deem most sacred.

The next time you hear someone using Jesus Christ as a swearword, it might be interesting to ask him if you could test a theory with him. You’ve heard it said that people swear only by that they consider holiest, so, “I was just wondering if that’s true in your life, if you have that much reverence for Jesus’ name that He’s the One you swear by.”

At any rate, believers who take their faith seriously (are there any other kind?) should tread softly before calling out the holy name of our Heavenly Father. Choose your words carefully. Do not rush into His presence without thinking—we are entering high voltage territory.

We desperately need more reverence for the name of God today.



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Charles Simeon: Pulpit Aristocrat

By Bernard R. DeRemer

CHARLES SIMEON (1759-1836) PASTORED HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND FOR 54 YEARS.

Through much of his ministry, he faced “constant opposition, persecution, and harassment.” However, he highly regarded his calling and determined to do his best to be faithful.

Born at Reading, England, he grew up in a wealthy family, accustomed to affluence. He entered King’s College, Cambridge, in 1779, where he was not an outstanding student; he always managed “to enjoy a good time.”

Through his young adulthood, he fasted, prayed, and read religious books, but only as external religion; he remained unconvinced. Finally, he came under conviction and at last found the full assurance of salvation one Easter Sunday morning. Then he “attended chapel, shared in the communion service, and felt a nearness to the Savior.”

Quick to share his newfound faith, he attempted to witness to his family on numerous occasions despite their resistance. He kept growing and living faithfully. In fact, his evangelical zeal made him enemies—he still had much to learn about humility and service.

Simeon was appointed minister at Holy Trinity Church in 1783, in spite of opposition from those who did not appreciate his passion and doctrine. The church building would hold about 900, but early in his ministry, most members stayed home in protest. It was indeed a difficult time.

He took his ordination vows seriously and did all in his power to be faithful. One of his assistants was Henry Martyn, who later became one of the first missionaries to India.

God blessed Simeon’s ministry and the church soon began to prosper. He rose at

4 A.M. each day to devote hours to prayer and Bible study. He said, “My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there and not to trust in what I think may be there.”

In Simeon’s day, the great doctrinal controversy centered around John Wesley, an Arminian, and George Whitefield, a Calvinist. Simeon met with Wesley in 1784. After a long and friendly discussion, Simeon concluded that “instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those wherein we agree.”

Always burdened to help others preach the Word, Simeon published a book of 100 “skeletons” of expository sermons. Later this was increased to 500 outlines. Eventually his little book of sermon skeletons grew into a large set of books containing 2,536 outlines covering the

entire Bible. Critics called them a valley of dry bones, but Spurgeon recommended them: “Be a prophet and they will live!”

As he grew in grace and his ministry, Simeon had to battle his aristocratic nature and learn love and humility. “In his early years he was demanding and autocratic, but the Holy Spirit prevailed and he learned to minister in love.”

Simeon appointed Evangelicals assigned to the various churches and used his wealth to “buy up” benefices and give them to qualified men. In those days in the Anglican Church, the place and ministry of various churches were actually owned by wealthy patrons and the right to appoint the pastor could actually be purchased.

Simeon set up a patronage trust to oversee this special ministry, and as a result, godly Evangelicals were put into many churches, much to the regret of the opposition.

Simeon traveled widely in Great Britain,



Charles Simeon
1759-1836

preaching wherever doors were opened. He was burdened for missions and helped found the Church Missionary Society. He was also burdened for the Jews and founded a chapel in Amsterdam for witness to Jews there.

He died honored and full of days. The town closed all its shops for his funeral, and the university cancelled all lectures. Nearly 2,000 attended, paying tribute to a man who remained true to a difficult ministry for 54 years. The “aristocrat in the pulpit” was truly an ambassador from God.

Reference:

Victorious Christians You Should Know, by Warren W. Wiersbe; excerpts used by permission.



Bernard R. DeRemer has chronicled the lives of dozens of God’s choice leaders, across recent centuries, in more than a decade of writing for *Pulpit Helps*.

A Holy Desire—Satisfied

By David & Stephen Olford

Text: *“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled”* (Matthew 5:6).

Thought: Man’s natural inclination is to shut himself off from God. He is so full of himself and his sin that he desires nothing of God or His righteousness. Upon such fullness the Lord Jesus pronounced the word of solemn condemnation (Luke 6:25). On the other hand, when people are truly open to God and are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the same Saviour pronounces the word of blessing. Such openness for God represents:

Such a desire will be satisfied by our God.

Thrust: We must remember that this beatitude is declared by our Lord Himself, who modeled such a holy desire, and who God has made *“unto us”*...*“righteousness”* (I Corinthians 1:30). A true passion for righteousness will translate into a holy passion for Christ Himself and a desire to be like Him.



The Indication of Holy Desire

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst” (v. 6). We must understand these words in the context and climate of the day in which the Lord Jesus spoke them. Hungering and thirsting were indicative of an intensity of desire. The Psalmist knew something about this when he cried: *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God”* (Psalm 42:1-2).


The words before us also suggest an insatiability of desire. The verb is in the present continuous, literally: “Blessed are they that go on hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” This holy desire for God is represented here as something that goes on increasingly until the believing soul becomes desperate for God. Can you and I claim to have such a holy desire for God and His purpose of righteousness for our lives?

The Satisfaction of Holy Desire

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (v. 6). Some versions substitute the word “filled” for “satisfied”. God has pledged Himself to open His hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The God Who feeds the sparrow and hears the raven’s cry will never disappoint the soul that hungers and thirsts after His righteousness (and indeed after God Himself).



David Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University’s Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee



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Biblical Worldview: What It Is, and What It Is Not

By John Stonestreet

Editor's Note: In our previous two issues, John raised and addressed several issues with helping today's students "get" Christianity. In this article, he builds on that theme to lay out what it means to hold a biblical worldview and why that is so important.

A worldview is the framework of basic beliefs that we hold, whether we realize it or not, that shapes our view of and for the world. Everyone has a worldview. The question is not **whether** one has a worldview, but **which** worldview one has.

There has been a recent proliferation of camps, conferences, books, and organizations promoting the idea of **biblical worldview**. Whereas the word "worldview" would have in times past elicited a blank stare, many Christians today have at least some familiarity with the concept.

But familiarity can breed contempt. "Biblical worldview" is often thrown around today in a haphazard fashion, and it may no longer be clear what it actually means. Also, biblical worldview may be in danger of dying the death of the "been there, tried that, and we've moved on" mentality that is prevalent in so many contemporary program-driven

churches and denominations.

This would be tragic for two reasons. First, a biblical worldview is not a means, like a curriculum or a program. It's an end. Seeing God, others, the world, and ourselves as God sees them is a *telos* of the Christian life. Second, despite all the **rhetoric** of biblical worldview, it is not necessarily a reality. According to recent studies produced by the Barna Group, only 20% of those claiming to be born again and less than 1% of young adults in America can answer a basic set of theological questions according to the biblical worldview.

Biblical Worldview: What It's Not

Before looking at what a biblical worldview is, let's consider what it is **not**.

1) A biblical worldview is not merely holding to Christian morals. Certainly, Christian morals flow from a biblical worldview, but one could hold Christian morals

without having the biblical foundations to ground those morals. One can even hold to Christian morals for wrong reasons, including mere tradition, convenience, or a legalistic attempt at God's approval.

Unfortunately, it is common for students to be taught Christian morals without being taught **why those morals are true**. However, moral values not grounded in truths that transcend one's context no longer make sense when the context changes. This sort of faith is highly volatile, especially in today's

A biblical worldview is one that is grounded in the Bible, not just in biblical literacy.

world of ever-changing contexts.

The Bible grounds morality in God Himself. Because the biblical worldview begins with a Creator, we live in a world that was designed—not a random place with arbitrary rules. Moral norms flow from God's character, expressed in His design for His creation.

2) A biblical worldview is not just living life with Bible verses attached. Many Christians only know the Bible in bits and pieces. Verses and chapters are taken out of context to supplement or "Christianize" their life, and biblical narratives are only useful for finding that moral nugget to apply to our lives. In this approach, the Bible is merely a therapeutic tool and never alters one's orientation to life. These Christians view the Bible through the lens of their existent worldview, rather than having their worldview framed by the Bible.

3) A biblical worldview is not automatic from being "saved". One can be redeemed and yet not fully think or act like a Christian. The apostle Paul spoke to believers about taking ideas captive (2 Cor. 10), not being taken captive by bad ideas (Col. 2), being transformed by renewing of our minds (Rom. 12), and growing in discernment (Phil. 1).

4) A biblical worldview is not Christian reactionism. This is our reputation in culture, and it is well earned.

John Stonestreet is executive director of Summit Ministries in Manitou Springs, Colo.

Father Abraham's Question Box

By Mark A. Oshman

"Colors"

1. According to Job, what color is the hypocrite before the sun?
2. In Jeremiah 10, what color clothing is worn by Israel's idols?
3. What color stone will be given to those in Pergamos who overcome?
4. Complete this quote: "When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is _____"
5. What color clothing does "the virtuous woman" wear?
6. What color hair on a head or in a beard indicated the presence of leprosy?
7. What is the beauty of old men?
8. What color were the Israelites to make the fringes of their garments?
9. In his dream, what did the chief baker of Egypt have on his head?
10. What color robe did Pilate's soldiers put on Jesus?

Answers on page 38

Worldview rhetoric is often nothing more than code language for defensively reacting to all the bad things in culture. Rather than a view **of** and **for** the world, it becomes just a view **against** the world.

This is a truncated understanding of the Gospel and a poor definition of the term worldview that ignores the rich history of biblical worldview thinkers. Salvation is not just **from sin**; it is also **to life**. Because we have the capacity to know God's design for life, humanity, and the cosmos, as well as the impact of the fall on this design, Christians carry the capacity to contribute to the culture, rather than only railing against it.

Biblical Worldview: What It Is

While a full exposition is not possible here, I suggest that a biblical worldview is unique from all other worldviews in at least three ways.

1) A biblical worldview is biblically grounded. Jewish Rabbi Abraham Heschel once made the following comment about Christians:

"It seems puzzling to me how greatly attached to the Bible you seem to be and yet how much like pagans you handle it. The great challenge to those of us who wish to take the Bible seriously is to let it teach us its own essential categories; and then for us to think with them, instead of just about them."

A biblical worldview is one that is grounded in the Bible, not just in biblical literacy. It is important to memorize the Scripture, but memorization is not the goal; transformation is (Rom. 12:1-2, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). A consistent Bible study time is important, but it is a means to a greater end. Rather than just being informed as to what the Bible says, we are to think biblically about (and be biblically oriented to) **everything else**. The Psalmist's exhortation to hide the Word in our hearts is not just rote memorization, as Psalm 1 makes very clear.

One of the great barriers to thinking biblically is relegating Christianity to "spiritual things," rather than everything. This dichotomy is false and does injustice to the robust message of the Bible. The Bible is first and foremost a **metanarrative**, a grand, sweeping story that claims to be the true story of anything and everything that has ever existed. It begins with the beginning of all things, and ends with the end of all things. We, and all people, live in this story somewhere between Genesis and Revelation.

Thus, the Bible sets the stage for all aspects of life and culture. The assumptions we think and live by should be biblical ones, and we should build on these biblical assumptions when approaching theology, politics, economic theory, medical science, emerging technologies, the arts, human behavior, literature, criminal justice, international relations, or anything else.

2) A biblical worldview is culturally literate. Loving God fully by thinking deeply, discerningly, and truthfully about His world is essential to being a true disciple of Christ. According to the way the Bible presents the grand narrative of God's redemptive plan, Christianity is neither a religion of ascetic withdrawal nor a dualistic philosophy that denigrates certain human activity as less than spiritual. Followers of Christ are called to dive deeply—and hopefully **headfirst**—into the significant historical and cultural issues of the human situation. As G.K. Chesterton said, "If Christianity should happen to be true—that is to say if its God is the real God of the universe—then defending it may mean talking about anything and everything."

Jesus makes this clear in his High Priestly Prayer recorded in John 17. Jesus prays for two groups of people, his disciples (vss. 6-12) and those who would believe because of the disciples' testimony (vss. 20-22). For both groups, Jesus prays that the Father would be glorified as people came to know Jesus and thus received eternal life. Then, Jesus asks for an astounding thing: that his followers would **not** be taken from the world (vs. 15), but would be protected in the midst of the world by being oriented in the truth (vs. 17).

The biblical approach to culture is to understand it (2 Cor. 10; Dan. 1), confront it (Dan. 3-4; Acts 17), and contribute to it (Gen. 2; Jer. 29). The Bible transcends cultural trends and realities because **the Bible is the context of all cultures**. Therefore, we can speak truthfully and significantly to cultural trends and issues, blessing what is good and cursing what is evil.

3) A biblical worldview is defined by hope. Hope is a crucial aspect of the biblical approach to life and the world. Peter tells the persecuted church to "*always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for*

the hope that is in you" (1 Pet.3:15). Of all the reputations Christians have today, being hopeful is rarely one of them.

Culturally, hope is in need of re-definition as it has come to mean nothing more than wishful thinking. "I hope he gets voted off American Idol," or "I hope North Carolina makes it to the Final Four." Wishful thinking lacks certainty because it is a hope **for** something.

Biblical hope, however, is full certainty because biblical hope is not a hope **for**; it is a hope **in**. biblical hope rests squarely in and on Christ—the Creator (John 1), Sustainer (Col. 1), and Redeemer (Rev. 4) of the entire human story.

Christians often miss hope in one of two directions: optimism or despair. Optimism is the "feel good" expression of Christianity that is always positive, full of self-help advice, and offering "safe" Christian alternatives to all the evil stuff in the world. On the other hand, despair is the escapism that characterizes those who assume the world is headed straight to hell, and there really is nothing we can do about it. Politics, the arts, the courts, and the country are beyond influence and beyond change, and are therefore no place for the believer. We are only to wait for heaven, when we can escape this whole mess.

Because of Christ, neither optimism nor despair is an option for the believer. How deeply broken must the world and we be for God (the Son) to die! Of course, He did not stay dead. He has risen. Death, in fact, has died and nothing that will ever happen in the history of the world will alter this certainty. Thus, despair is no option either.

A biblical worldview explains the profound goodness and the profound evil that is found in the world and the human heart. No other worldview can do this. Further, the biblical worldview rests the story of the world and the human heart in the hands of a God who created and has invaded both.





He Stuck By His Friends

By Lindsay Terry

Song: “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name”

Scripture: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name, which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

I would rank “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name,” as the greatest song of worship and praise in the English language. Edward Perronet, the writer of the verses, was born in the town of Sundridge, England in 1726. He was educated for the ministry in the Church of England, following the examples of his father and grandfather. In modern terms, he was a PK—a preacher’s kid.

Perronet objected to many of the practices of the Church of his day, leaning strongly toward the teachings of John and Charles Wesley. He would listen as his dad, an older preacher, would counsel with the Wesleys. Although his admiration for them ran very deep, his association with them was not without persecution.

John Wesley wrote in his diary, “He (Perronet), was thrown down and rolled in mud and mire. Stones were hurled and windows broken.” Still Edward stuck by his friends, attending most all of the services where John Wesley was the speaker.

Perronet was a strong, impulsive, self-willed individual; therefore, he started an independent church in Canterbury, England. In 1780, shortly after he established his church, one of his poems was published in the *Gospel Magazine* edited by Augustus Toplady, author of the famous song, “Rock of Ages.”

A few years later those same verses appeared in a book of poems by an anonymous author. One of the poems was written as an acrostic, the letters of which spelled Edward Perronet. Most of his work was done under an assumed name, or he used no name at all.

The tune, “Coronation”, which is almost as popular as the verses, was written by one of America’s most noted hymn tune writers, Oliver Holden. He composed it during a time of great rejoicing. It is reported

that the four-and-a-half-octave organ on which he composed the tune is still displayed in the Old State House in Boston.

Holden was a carpenter by trade, and a self-taught musician who would take time out from his work on many occasions, play a melody or two and then return to the task at hand. One day he failed to show up for work and his friends went to his home to check on him. They found him perfecting a musical composition that he had written in celebration of the birth of his baby daughter. That wonderful occasion put a song in his heart.

Just short of his thirtieth birthday, he put the tools aside and began to deal in real estate. He also served for a time in the legislature, and built a Baptist church with his own money. Using the wealth he made from other enterprises, Holden published a hymnal which he titled, “American Harmony.” While searching for music for his book of hymns he came across Perronet’s poem in the *Gospel Magazine*.

Holden had no knowledge of the background of Perronet, he only knew that the poem would fit his music written in celebration of his daughter’s birth. The phrase “crown Him Lord of all,” in Perronet’s verses, gave Holden the idea of calling his tune “Coronation.”

In church services today, you may hear these verses sung to three tunes—“Coronation”, “Miles Lane”, or “Diadem”. “Coronation” is, by far, the most popular.

England and America

came together in the persons of Edward Perronet and Oliver Holden, and gave to the world this wonderful song of worship and praise to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

“Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball,
To Him all majesty ascribe,
And crown Him Lord of all.”

Reflection: Christ left His majestic position and condescended to provide salvation for lowly human beings. May He enjoy an exalted position in our hearts today. He and only He is worthy of our worship.



Lindsay Terry has been a song historian for more than 40 years, and has been published in a number of publications, including *Pulpit Helps*. He has also written some 34 books and church training manuals.





Success or Faithfulness?

By James Rudy Gray

WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY THAT PLACES A HIGH PREMIUM ON SUCCESS. IN FACT, WE ARE SO SUCCESS-ORIENTED, THAT MANY HAVE COME TO BELIEVE IT IS THE ONLY THING IN LIFE THAT MATTERS.

For God's people, however, success is not the question; faithfulness is. God's requires His people (as stewards of His blessings) to be trustworthy or faithful. When it comes to counseling, faithfulness is what separates compassion and care from manipulation and pressure.

A counselor's best counsel may be rejected. Our best endeavors may fall short. It is certainly possible that we will not see husband and wife reconciled. We might do our best and yet a drug addict or alcoholic still continues in their destructive cycle. We may pray diligently and work sincerely and yet see no real or lasting change come. That is part of life in a fallen world, and counselors must learn to accept the disappointment that comes with it.

Counselors often only get half of the story at best. What about the husband who seeks earnestly to reconcile with his wife? He seems honest and genuine, yet, when you learn more, you realize he has hurt her physically, been sexually unfaithful to her, and now she has a restraining order against him. She has an attorney and wants nothing to do with reconciliation. What can you do? Typically, when an attorney has been obtained, the hope of a marriage making it goes down considerably. These situations test us as counselors and demand the best from us, yet it is often not enough. The question to ask ourselves in

those trying circumstances is not how to succeed but how to do your ministry faithfully.

Counseling involves helping people. Some people want to be helped; others want to use you to get their way. A number of years ago, I agreed to counsel a young man who the judge believed was already an alcoholic. After three sessions he was to appear before the judge. I was asked to

write a report on how he was progressing. I did. I did not fabricate or falsify his condition and wrote the report with the understanding that he needed to stay in counseling. The judge dismissed his case, and the young man and his parents never attempted to get any more counseling for him.

I felt used. I asked myself if I had been faithful to do what God had given me the opportunity to do. I could not change this person—

only God can do that. I could not force him into further counseling—only recommend it was needed. What happened to him? Regrettably, he fell back into his old lifestyle.

A counselor must not only be faithful in the discharge of his responsibilities, but he or she must also be faithful to the truth of God's Word. We listen to a troubled heart in an effort to better understand the person. However, we listen to learn and to help, not to empower a person to continue wrong behavior or sinful ways.

If we have been faithful, we are not a failure, even if the desired outcome of our counseling has not been achieved.

As we analyze our work, we must also investigate our motives. We are people-helpers but we are not little gods or assistant gods. We will fail. When we fail because of our own mistakes, we can either pass them off or learn from them. The biggest mistake we often make is the fail-



ure to learn from the mistake. We should also examine the case and ask the important question, "Was I faithful to God, His truth, and in working to help this person?" If we have been faithful, we are not a failure, even if the desired outcome of our counseling has not been achieved.

Faithfulness is what God requires. It is the best we can give those who come to us for help. Faithfulness is the principle of sanity and the anchor of responsible intervention for those who counsel.

May God help us to have faithfulness to His Word and our calling as our primary goal.



James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He pastors Utica Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.

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Walking Through Tough Times

Nehemiah 4:1-21

Intro.: Nehemiah and his volunteers faced overwhelming opposition and discouragement in rebuilding Jerusalem, but God was faithful and gave them great success.

I. Realize that Tough Times Are God's Tools to Build Character (vv. 1-6)

A. The opposition has numerous weapons.

1. Complaint.
2. Criticism.
3. Intimidation.

B. But Nehemiah trusted God.

1. He prayed.
2. He built.
3. He ignored the critics.

II. Evaluate the Source of Your Struggle (vv. 7-10)

A. Know your enemies.

B. Be vigilant—Nehemiah “*prayed and posted a guard*” (v. 9).

C. Physical Struggle.

1. Fatigue.
2. Trust God for strength.

D. Emotional Struggle.

1. Attitudes.
2. Overcoming Faith.

III. Appreciate God's Incredible Grace in the Midst of Your Predicament (v. 14)

A. “*Do not be Afraid*”.

B. “Remember the Lord who is great and awesome”.

C. Nothing is impossible with God.

D. We need to act on His grace.

Conc.: God opens doors. We move. He confirms. He blesses.

David Alan Sylvester

1. Intellectualism

2. “*Faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26).

B. Teaching duty independent of doctrine.

1. False teaching.
2. Legalism.
3. Superficial growth.

II. The Constraint of a Worthy Life

A. “*Prisoner of the Lord*”

B. Passionate, loving appeal.

C. Compelled by the love of Christ.

D. The choice is ours.

1. “*Walk worthy*”.
2. Dishonor Christ in our lives.

III. The Characteristics of a Worthy Life

A. Examples.

1. Enoch (Gen. 5:22-24).
2. Abraham (Gen. 24:40).

B. It is heavenly (4:1).

1. High calling (Heb. 3:1, Phil 3:14).
2. Holy calling (2 Tim. 1:9).

C. It is humble (4:2).

1. Selfless (Matt. 11:28, Titus 3:2).
2. At God's service (1 Pet. 5:6).

D. It is helpful (4:2).

1. Patient (Col. 3:13).
2. Motivated by Love (Eph. 5:2).

E. It is hard (4:3).

1. Requiring diligent work and perseverance.
2. The goal is unity (Rom. 12:18).

F. It is holy (4:3, 17-26).

1. Enabled by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
2. Put off the old, put on the new.

IV. The Consummation of a Worthy Life

A. We will not achieve it fully in this life (4:13).

B. Continual striving for His glory.

Francis W. Dixon

Words of Life Ministries

www.wordsoflife.co.uk

B. For faithfulness to the call.

IV. **Direction** from the Lord (3:5)

A. “*Into the love of God*.”

B. “*And the steadfastness of Christ*.”

V. **Commanding** in the Lord (3:6)

A. In Christ's authority.

B. To faithful righteousness.

VI. **Exhortation** by the Lord (3:12)

A. To quiet work.

B. To diligence.

VII. **Peace** from the Lord (3:16)

A. Continually.

B. “*In every circumstance*.”

VIII. The **Presence** of the Lord (3:16)

IX. “*The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ Be with You All*” (3:18)

F.E. Marsh

1,000 Bible Study Outlines

Another Gospel?

Galatians 1:6-10

Editor's Note: In this series, Joe is building expositional sermons using the key word study method and referencing the KeyWord Study Bible © from AMG Publishers. Greek terms are marked with their corresponding number from Strong's dictionary.

Intro.: “The devil disturbs the church as much by error as by evil. When he cannot entice Christian people into sin, he deceives them with false doctrine” (John Stott—p. 24, *The Message of Galatians*). Galatians comes as a warning to us all (if a church which Paul taught can fall into error, so can we), and a call to Biblical discernment—deceiving doctrines and trapping teachers abound today.

Proposition: In Gal. 1:6-10, Paul responds to the deception of the Galatians in three ways.

I. Astonishment (1:6)

A. At quickness of desertion.

B. At who they deserted (“*Him who called you...*”).

C. At what they deserted—grace (“*...in the grace of Christ*”).

D. At what they turned to (“*...a different gospel*”).

Keyword: “*turning away*” (*mētatithēmi* [3346], “to transpose, to put in another place; metaphorically, to transfer to another use or purpose, to pervert, to abuse”). The term speaks of military or political defection; present tense indicates that they were in the very process of changing their minds.

II. Assessment (1:7)

Living Worthily

Ephesians 4:1-3, 17-26

Intro.: Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians are doctrinal, emphasizing our standing “in Christ”; chapters 4-6 are practical, emphasizing our role down here in the world. Who we are “in Christ” must be related to who we are in the world. Doctrine must always issue in duty, our creed must be seen in our conduct. We are called to “walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (4:1), showing our position in Christ by a different life.

I. Two Dangers to Avoid

A. Teaching doctrine without relating it to duty.

The Lordship of Christ

2 Thessalonians 3

Intro.: “*The Lord*” is mentioned six times in this chapter—vss. 1, 3, 4, 5, and twice in vs. 16—and “*Our Lord Jesus Christ*” is mentioned three times—vss. 6, 12, and 18.

I. “*The Word of the Lord*” (3:1)

A. Prayed for.

B. Glorified.

II. The Lord is **Faithful** (3:3)

A. To strengthen us.

B. To protect us.

III. “*Confidence in the Lord*” (3:4)

A. For obedience.

A. False teachers were those “*who are disturbing you.*”

Keyword: “*disturbing*” (*tarassō* [5015], “to stir up, to agitate, to trouble”). They were shaking things up—confusing people (at best) and seeking to destroy the church (at worst).

B. False teachers wanted “*to distort the Gospel.*”

Keyword: “*distort*” (*mētastrēphō* [3344], “denoting a change of place or condition; to turn from one direction to another). The false teachers were changing the truth to that which was false.

II. Anathema (1:8-10)

A. Call for God’s judgment (“*...let him be accursed*”).

Keyword: “*accursed*” (*anathēma* [331], “a gift given by vow or in fulfillment of a promise and given up or devoted to destruction for God’s sake”).

1. Universal application (“*...if any man...*”).
2. Unselfish motivation to preserve right doctrine.
 - a. God’s glory.
 - b. For the sake of men’s souls.
3. Unswerving dedication (“*...a bond-servant of Christ*”).
 - a. No man can serve two masters.
 - b. Who do you try to please, God or man?

B. A lesson for us—take the truth of the Gospel seriously.

Application: We should examine our understanding of and commitment to the Gospel!
Joe Fauth

The Love of Money

1 Timothy 6:10

I. The Sensual—“*for the love of money*”.

- A. Love for its power.
- B. Love for its provisions.
- C. Love for its partners.

II. The Sorrow—“*is the root of all evil*”.

- A. Evil to our decisions.
- B. Evil to our desires.
- C. Evil to our discipline.

III. The Separation.

- A. Desire—“*which while some coveted after they erred from the faith*”.
- B. Destruction—“*and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*”

Croft M. Pentz



Father’s Day

A child is not likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.

Austin Sorensen via Ted Matamis

What a father says to his children is not heard by the world, but it will be heard by posterity.

Jean Paul Richter via *Timeless Treasures*

It is easier to build boys than to mend men.

Timeless Treasures

One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.

George Herbert

A truly rich man is one whose children run into his arms when his hands are empty.

Anonymous

Father!—to God himself we cannot give a holier name.

William Wordsworth

My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, “You’re tearing up the grass.” “We’re not raising grass,” Dad would reply. “We’re raising boys.”

Harmon Killebrew

On Perseverance

By perseverance, the snail reached the Ark.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

No one would have ever crossed the ocean if he could have gotten off the ship in a storm.

Charles Kettering

The man who removes a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.

Chinese proverb

We conquer—not in any brilliant fashion—we conquer by continuing.

George Matheson

We are judged by what we finish, not by what we start.

These five via *Timeless Treasures*

In the world of men, we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus

spoke in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount.

A.W. Tozer

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger. Do not pray for tasks equal to your strength. Pray for strength equal to the task.

Phillip Brooks via *The Fountain*

A humble knowledge of yourself is a surer way to God than a deep search after learning.

Thomas à Kempis

There is a great man who makes every man feel small, but the real great man is the man who makes every man feel great.

G.K. Chesterton

These two via *The Missionary Evangelist*

The continuance of anger is hatred.

Frances Quarles

Many of today’s young people have little difficulty believing that God was in Christ. What they find hard to accept is that Christ is in the Church.

Ernest T. Campbell

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.

John Henry Jowett

These three via *The Topical Encyclopedia of Living Quotations*

Holiness does not consist in mystic speculations, enthusiastic fervors, or uncommanded austerities; it consists in thinking as God thinks, and willing as God wills.

John Brown, via Ted Matamis

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Walking According to the Spirit—Part 4

By Wayne Barber

CHRISt LIVES IN US BUT WE MUST REALIZE THAT WE ARE STILL SUBJECT TO SIN—WE'RE STILL CAPABLE OF SINNING. CHRISt GIVES US LIFE AND ALSO PROMISES US THAT ONE DAY WE WILL BE LIKE HIM, BUT THERE IS A RESPONSIBILITY THAT WE CANNOT IGNORE.

To walk according to the flesh is to act as if we owe it something. We must realize that we do not owe the flesh anything. Romans 8:12 says, "*So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*" The words "under obligation" mean to owe a debt to someone or something. For us to live according to the flesh is to choose to obey its lustful desires. Every time we choose the flesh we show that we think we are in debt to it. That's as silly as it would be to pay a car off and to keep sending payments even though it was already paid for?

We must also recognize that to live that way costs us—there are consequences to choosing to live after the flesh. Paul describes the consequences of that kind of living in Romans 8:13a, "*if you are living according to the flesh, you must die.*" The Greek word for "you must" is *mēllō*, meaning "you are about to." The present tense gives it the meaning that you are transitioning from one thing to another. Literally, you are experiencing death. When death occurs, something has stopped functioning or has ceased to operate. Once again, the present tense means that this death is happening in sync with your choosing to live according to the flesh.

But there is good news! Paul adds, "*if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live*" (Rom. 8:13b). You and I cannot put to death the deeds of the body alone, but the Spirit enables us to obey His will. Christ lives in us in the person of His Holy Spirit to enable us to accomplish anything He demands. When we obey His desires, we "*will not carry out the desire of the flesh*" (Gal. 5:16).

When we are living according to the Spirit of Christ, then we are being led by His Spirit. "*For all who are being led by*

the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom 8:14). Once again the present indicative active is used, indicating that when we are yielding to the Spirit, we are being led step by step by the Spirit. Doesn't that remind you of what it says in Proverbs 3:6 "*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*" This is the way the mature in Christ have chosen to live. The word for "sons" in this verse is the *huiōs*, referring to the mature sons whose wills are in sync with their Master's. Now, let's back up and make certain we "get the picture".

The announcer for the University of Georgia football team, Larry Munson, was the eyes for the radio listeners for years.

He would try to clarify what the listeners could not see that was happening on the field. He would say, "now, let's get the picture." Then he would put into word pictures what was happening on the field. In Romans 6-8, we need to get the picture!

These 3 chapters are critical to our Christian lives particularly in the difficult times in which we are living. Romans 6 tells us that we are indwelt by the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ at the moment of

salvation. Because of His presence in our lives, our lifestyle and behavior can and should be totally different than a person who does not know Christ.

Christ broke the power of sin, and as a result, we owe sin nothing. When we allow Christ to overcome us, we then experience His life living through us. But chapter 7 shows us that if we choose to be hardheaded and to live according to our own flesh, whether it is religious or rebellious flesh, we miserably fail and suffer the painful consequences. The flesh always produces failure, which is totally in contrast with what Christ does through us.

The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ living in us, motivates us to walk according to the Spirit. Chapter 8 tells us again that we know instantly when we are not walking that way! The moment we choose to walk according to our flesh we immediately experience a "death" to the joy and fullness that is ours in Christ and we become miserable.

Do you know any believers who are miserable? In this miserable condition that all of us have experienced from time to time, there is no longer a consciousness of being led by the Spirit. We are confused, bewildered, and miserable when we will not yield to the Lordship of Christ in our lives. We need to "get the picture."

You may say, "I'm daily seeking to surrender my all to Christ, but I'm being beaten up for it! Is there any hope for me?" Or you may say, "I've blown it big time; is there any hope for me?" The answer to both questions is an emphatic yes, and we'll talk about that in next month's article.

Because of His presence in our lives, our lifestyle and behavior can and should be totally different than a person who does not know Christ.



Wayne Barber is senior pastor of Hoffmantown Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico

June 2009



Giving Beyond Ability

By Cornelius Pronk

THE ECONOMIC DOWNTURN WE ARE EXPERIENCING THESE DAYS WILL LIKELY HAVE A BEARING ON THE AMOUNT PEOPLE WILL GIVE TO CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS.

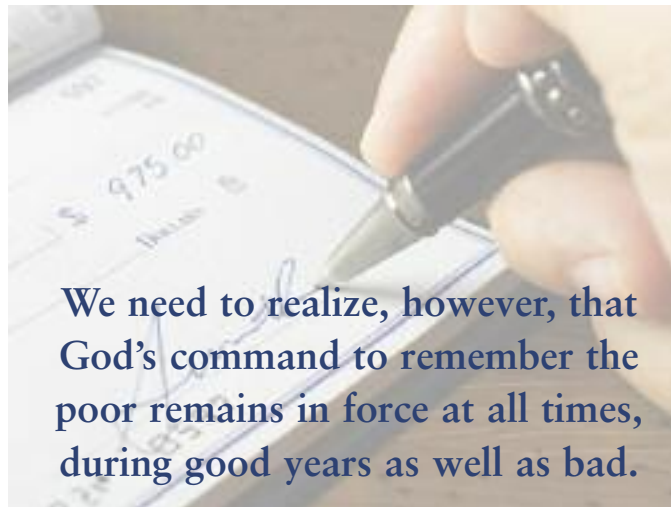
To be honest, we at Word and Deed (an international Christian poverty-fighting organization) are a bit apprehensive as to whether we will meet our budget projections this year. Will we be able to fund our existing projects, let alone, take on new ones? The needs of those whom we have been helping during our prosperous years remain the same and are becoming even greater because poor nations are less able to absorb higher prices for food and other basic necessities than we are.

We need to realize, however, that God's command to remember the poor remains in force at all times, during good years as well as bad. Maybe the time has come when we will no longer have the luxury of giving from our abundance but must learn to give beyond our ability (2 Cor. 8:3).

But even more is required of us; we are to give cheerfully and with compassion and sympathy. An example of this kind of giving is Job. We know him as a model of patience under extreme suffering. But he also serves as a model of sympathy for the poor. Before calamity struck Job, he was known as someone who truly cared for people in need. That's why it was so cruel of Eliphaz, the Temanite, one of Job's so-called friends, to insinuate that his suffering was partly due to the fact that he had neglected his duty with respect to the needy. "Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink," Eliphaz charged, "and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry" (Job 22:7-9).

This was slander, and Job, deeply offended and grieved, had to defend himself against this false accusation: "If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or

have caused the eyes of the widow to fail...if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering...then let my mine arm fall from my shoulder blade and mine arm be broken from the bone" (Job 31:16, 19-22).



We need to realize, however, that God's command to remember the poor remains in force at all times, during good years as well as bad.

Job was not boasting, but merely setting the record straight. We may do that too when falsely accused. If anyone should charge us with neglect in this area, I hope we can say with an appeal to God's omniscience that we have remembered the poor and needy in their affliction.

Yet it is not enough if we can prove to have done our duty here. We also need to examine our consciences as to whether our charitable deeds proceeded from a loving and sympathetic heart. Job could say, "Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?" (Job 30:25).

Whenever Job saw someone in need, he sympathized with him or her, and in a very real sense made that person's burden his own.

If even worldly people can show sympathy when they encounter misery, should we do less? Should we not excel in caring for the poor and needy wherever they live, in our own neighborhoods and cities or in far away countries?

Such care, born from love to God and our neighbour, brings rich rewards to both benefactors and beneficiaries. Showing sympathy is the best way to secure God's comfort in our own afflictions. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble" (Ps. 41:1).

Relieving the poor is also the best investment we can make. No bank pays interest like the bank of Heaven. "The liberal [generous] soul shall be made fat [rich]: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. 11:25). Scripture and experience teach us that we can't take our money with us when we die. But if we support the Lord's cause on earth generously and sacrificially, we will take our money with us into the next world, plus interest, because "he that hath pity upon

the poor lendeth to the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him back" (Prov. 19:17).

Of course, self-interest, though allowed, must not be our main motive for sharing with others what God has given us. It is God's plain command to do so. As Paul exhorts us: "Bear ye one another's burden, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Our obedience to this law is the touchstone of our sincerity and the evidence that our faith is of the saving kind because it is a faith working by love (Gal. 5:6) and not a dead faith devoid of works (James 2:17).

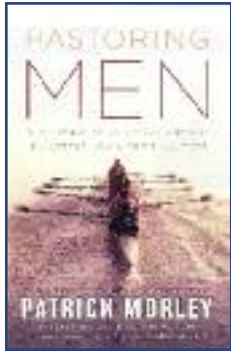
From the spring 2009 issue of *Word & Deed Magazine*



Pastor Cornelis (Neil) Pronk preaches at the Providence Free Reformed Church in St. George, Ontario, Canada

Pastoring Men: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why It Matters Now More Than Ever

Patrick Morley, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2008, ISBN 9780802475534, 237 pages, \$19.99, hardcover.



Patrick Morley dares to suggest that every pastor can and should engage in a successful men's ministry. Churches that are committed to making disciples are ripe for engaging in a successful men's ministry.

He states that church leaders must understand the forces that are moving—or failing to move—today's Christian men. First, today's men are tired. They feel pushed into a corner as they gain success in their job, raise a family, manage their finances, engage in community activities, and try to carve a little time for themselves. Many Christian men have a gnawing feeling that their spirituality is lacking.

Despite these inward doubts, most Christian men want a cause they can believe in and someone they can share their dreams with. What stops men from attaining their dreams? Morley thinks that many are caught up in the success race, thinking to themselves, "If I can get this possession, this job, this mate, I will be satisfied." Thousands of years of experience teach us that "success" does not bring satisfaction. It is when we have a true inner conviction that we are on a God-ordered course that inner peace and happiness are obtained. Discipleship, in the author's view, is the process by which men move from one path to the other.

Morley outlines a case study of successful discipleship and suggests that it can be replicated in other churches. His entire program centers on discipleship and its many facets in a Christian community.

In one of the final sections of the book the author lists seventy things that every man needs to know. A few of these "musts" are fellowship with God, evangelism, social responsibility, priorities, time management,

and family matters.

This manual encompasses many avenues of discipleship, and exhorts churches to begin taking seriously the need to build up men of faith.

Glen Jones

Target: Church Leaders
Type: Discipleship
Take: Highly Recommended

Should We Use Someone Else's Sermon?: Preaching in a Cut-and-Paste World

Scott Gibson, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2008, ISBN 9780310286738, 119 pages, \$14.99, softcover.



Plagiarism has a long history—Satan stole the words of God when he told Eve in the garden, "*You shall not surely die.*" Taking the words of another and claiming them as one's own is unfortunately pervasive

among pastors and others in speaking and writing ministries.

In this book, Gibson suggests that plagiarism is not just an irresponsible social faux pas but calls it out as sin. He says, "We sin against God and others when we neglect our responsibility as faithful servants to preach the whole counsel of God as the result of our work and study" (p.49). Stealing others' sermons, however, is often only the tip of the iceberg and may be indicative of deeper problems such as laziness, insecurity, and a perceived pressure to compete with other preachers.

Gibson states that one who wants to avoid plagiarism must be vigilant when he prepares his sermons. He must stay in the Word, read widely, take copious notes, and give credit where credit is due. If someone who becomes convicted of the sin of plagiarism decides to abandon intellectual stealing, he must confess his sin, repent of it, and start on the road to restoration. Where possible, he may need to go to the person whose words he has stolen and ask for forgiveness.

In the last section of the book, the

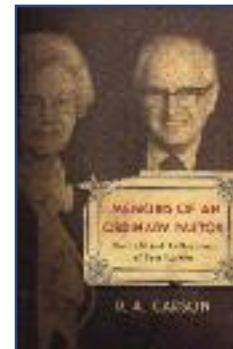
author gives several examples of plagiarism and how those who were involved handled it. Outcomes were not always the most desirable. Some denied they were stealing words, others rationalized that everyone else was doing it, but some saw their plagiarism as sin and determined to end it. He includes helpful advice for churches in how to deal firmly but respectfully with a pastor who has been plagiarizing and restore him to faithful ministry.

Glen Jones

Target: Bible Teachers
Type: Ethics
Take: Highly Recommended

Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson

D.A. Carson, Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., 2008, ISBN 9781433501999, 160 pages, \$15.99, softcover.



"Most pastors will not regularly preach to thousands, let alone tens of thousands. They will not write influential books, they will not supervise large staffs, and they will never see more than modest

growth. They will plug away with their care for the aged, at their visitation, at their counseling, at their Bible studies and preaching. . . Most of us—let us be frank—are ordinary pastors."

These words from the preface highlight the author's rationale for publishing the story of his father's life of faithful ministry in the hard field of French Canada. In collecting Tom Carson's letters and journals and filling in the gaps with memories from growing up in the home of one such "ordinary" pastor, D.A. Carson powerfully calls the reader to live out Scripture in the everydayness of difficult ministry.

Carson places his father's ministry in the historic and cultural context of the sweeping changes in Evangelicalism over the course of the 20th century and shows that the fundamentals of pastoral work (intensive study, prayer, and care for those under

one's charge) remain the same under any circumstances. He faithfully relates the power of small encouragements and the joy of seeing even a little fruit without sugar-coating the ups and downs, discouragements, battles, and doubts of ministry.

Anyone in ministry should find much in Tom Carson's story that parallels their own experience and draw encouragement for the faithful service to which they've been called. Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the book comes from the perspective that the author gives to his father's ministry, now nearly 17 years after his death. The outflow and ongoing impact of his faithful service is seen more clearly than he could ever have seen it in life, reminding readers that we may never see the results of what God does through us.

Justin Lonas

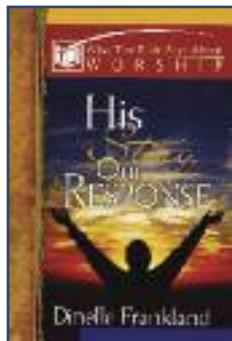
Target: Pastors

Type: Biography/Encouragement

Take: Highly Recommended

His Story, Our Response: What the Bible Says about Worship

Dinelle Frankland, College Press, Joplin, Mo., 2008, ISBN 9780899009636, 173 pages, \$22.99, hardcover.



College Press' "What the Bible Says about" series), she builds a comprehensive observation of worship as our part in the narrative of Creation.

She reminds us that we were created to love God and worship Him—in short, the story of the entire canon of Scripture. Sin's entrance into the world, however, distorted that relationship and made it necessary for God to regulate access to Him to preserve His holiness. The Old Testament used a variety of symbols and instructions to teach fallen humanity that God was displeased with their sin, but that He delighted to restore mankind to divine fellowship.

Frankland points out that worship in Scripture is never really defined, but it is often described or recorded directly (as in the Psalms). As such, she references numerous biblical examples to build her case. She shows how Exodus from Egyptian

Dinelle Frankland, professor of worship at Lincoln Christian Seminary, is someone who has thought very deeply about what it means to relate to and glorify God. In *His Story, Our Response* (part of

slavery demonstrated God's love for His people and how the Mosaic Law and the Tabernacle provided a visual outline for sinful humanity to be restored to God's favor.

She shows how Christ's coming changed the emphasis from a building to a Body, taking worship "away from a particular time and place to involve it in everyday life" (p. 111). Worship of God requires purity of heart, and Christ made clear that the condition of the heart far outweighs the form and place of worship. Frankland posits that true worship cannot occur within the heart until we realize the inestimable price at which Christ redeemed us—until we make the shift of focus from self to Christ, we cannot consider ourselves to have worshiped.

This is an excellent book to promote reflection on what worship is in God's eyes and how distorted it can become when it is tainted with our sinful motives.

Glen Jones/Justin Lonas

Target: All

Type: Worship

Take: Recommended



Recent Releases

Baker/Revell

Faith Set Free: Pray for Yourself with Reckless Abandon, Will Davis, Jr., 2009, 185 pages, \$12.99, softcover. Davis, author of *Pray Big for Your Marriage* and *Pray Big for Your Child*, challenges readers to trust God to lead them in His will for their lives. Though it seems selfish at first glance, the author suggests that praying for oneself is actually an act of humility, acknowledging our inability to live life on our own and our desperate need for God's provision and guidance in all things.

College Press

Listening to His Heartbeat, Harold Shank, 2009, 317 pages, \$28.99, hardcover. Part of the "What Does the Bible Say about . . ." series. Shank leads readers through an in-depth study of Scripture to

help them discover the heart of God—His character, His desires, His Passions, His glory. He proposes that all believers need an awareness of and connection with the **person** of God, not just a concept of Him.

Celebrating Holidays


Christmas: Celebrating the Christian History of American Symbols, Songs, and Stories, Angie Mosteller, 2008, 467 pages, \$24.99, softcover. Mosteller has compiled a very thorough volume describing the inescapable Christian background of even some of Western civilization's most apparently secular Christian traditions. She includes everything from holly to bells to "Good King Wenceslas" and grounds her discussion in the true meaning of Christmas, very clearly showing readers who Christ is and why He came.

Howard Books

The Blood of Lambs: A Former Terrorist's Memoir of Death and Redemption, Kamal Saleem (with Lynn Vincent), 2009, 335 pages, \$23.99, hardcover. Saleem (writing under a pseudonym to protect himself and his family from retribution) recounts his story of growing up in a Muslim family in Lebanon being taught the way of martyrdom, being indoctrinated and trained by terrorist groups, smuggling weapons into Israel, training international terrorists, promoting the work of the Palestinian Liberation Organization around the world, working to sway poor Muslims into radicalism, and, finally, the personal crisis and work of the Lord that brought him to faith in Christ and the renunciation of his old life.

continued on page 21

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Recent Releases continued

If God Were Real: A Journey into a Faith that Matters, John Avant, 2009, 224 pages, \$14.99, softcover. Avant, a Baptist minister, challenges “cultural Christians” to consider what their lives and churches would look like if they lived as though God were real—i.e. if they actually lived out what they say they believe in everyday practice—instead of the “practical atheism” that grips so many believers today.

InterVarsity Press

Together in Prayer: Coming to God in Community, Andrew R. Wheeler, 2009, 184 pages, \$15.00, softcover. Wheeler challenges churches and small groups to move prayer from a side-item in their meetings to a focal point and reason for gathering together. He attempts to lay the groundwork for establishing a responsible, meaningful prayer ministry, providing guidelines to help groups avoid pitfalls of communal prayer and suggestions to spur a growing desire to come before God together.

Kregel

Apocalypse Later: Why the Gospel of Peace Must Trump the Politics of Prophecy in the Middle East, Abdu H. Murray, 2009, 208 pages, \$13.99, softcover. Murray, formerly a committed Muslim who is now a Christian evangelist, challenges Western Christians (who primarily view the ongoing conflict in the Middle East as fulfillment of prophecy and a point of debate over eschatological issues) to recapture Christ's call to spread the good news to all nations, reminding them that only He can change the hearts of the Jews and Muslims living in the midst of this strife.

Zondervan

A Survey of the Old Testament, 3rd Ed., Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, 2009, 774 pages, \$49.99, hardcover. In this textbook survey of the entire Old Testament designed for college and seminary courses, the authors remind the reader that studying the Old Testament is key to understanding God's character, the Bible's redemptive storyline, and the New Testament. A thorough and informative reference book.

From
the
Staff

Two important items to note:

1) Times continue to be tough for businesses and ministries around the world, and *Pulpit Helps* is no exception. In addition, the U.S. Postal Service is raising its rates again this month.

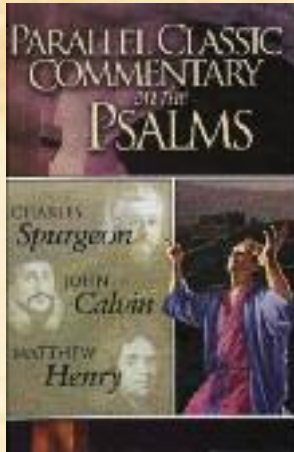
That said, **Effective June 1, 2009, we will be eliminating discounts for multi-year subscriptions.** Because we want to affect your costs as little as possible, **the base subscription rate will stay at \$25.00**, while 2-year and 3-year subscriptions will cost \$50.00 and \$75.00 respectively.

This will enable us to continue providing you with the same quality and frequency of content you've come to expect from us. Obviously, if you've already sent a multi-year renewal postmarked 5/31/09 or earlier, **nothing will change until your next renewal.** Multi-year renewals with the old price received after 05/31/09 will be prorated according to the new price.

2) For the past several issues, we have been advertising Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's **Kerygma Conference** for pastors. Unfortunately, the Seminary has recently informed us that they have **cancelled this year's conference** for a variety of reasons. We apologize for the disappointment.

They're classic for a reason

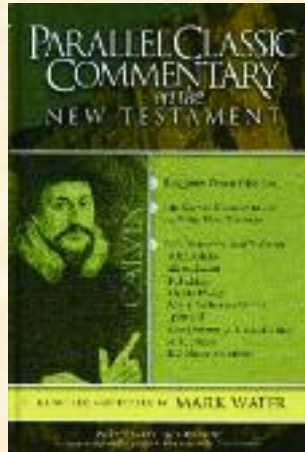
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On Being a “National Worker”

By Bob Gerow

NOT TOO LONG AGO I WAS ASKED TO REVISE AMG’S BROCHURE INVITING FOLKS TO SPONSOR A NATIONAL WORKER. AS IS MY CUSTOM, I STARTED ASKING QUESTIONS: WHAT DOES THE TERM “NATIONAL WORKER” MEAN? WHAT DOES A “NATIONAL WORKER” DO? WHAT DO WE WANT A READER OF THIS BROCHURE TO DO? WHAT CAN A SPONSOR EXPECT OF A “NATIONAL WORKER?”

My hope was that answering those questions would help order an informative presentation and call to action. Here’s some of what I learned by asking.

If you are familiar with the term “national worker”, a fairly predictable image comes to mind—someone in a faraway place riding a bicycle, or holding a loud-speaker, or handing out a tract or bible, preaching from a stump. The individual is a Christian believer bearing witness to the Gospel among his or her own people.

More often than not, when the ministry of this individual is presented, it is accompanied by an appeal to undergird their ministry through prayer and financial support. The sponsor’s participation provides for their daily and ministry needs in order that they might devote themselves fully to the proclamation of the Gospel among their own people.

To prevent the relationship from being one-sided, the sponsored individual is kept aware of sponsor prayer and giving, and the sponsor is provided regular prayer letters, photos, and ministry updates. Sponsorship becomes relationship. The cause of Christ is furthered in ways that would not otherwise be possible. A believer far away can fulfill their calling because of the generosity and prayer of another. The sponsoring individual benefits from a broadened view of God’s work, and of their own important role as a Christ follower.

Now it was time to expand on “What does a national worker do?” Here are some of the answers:

- Pastoral teaching and preaching (often for more than one church)

- Planting churches
- Directing and staffing childcare centers
- Writing and placing gospel ads in newspapers and magazines
- Providing follow up to respondents
- Holding Vacation Bible School sessions
- Staffing children’s summer camping programs
- Training believers and future Christian leaders through seminary, Bible school and Bible correspondence courses
- Providing disaster assistance
- Broadcasting biblically based radio programs

That’s when it occurred to me that I might still have a one-sided view of the relationship. While some are itinerant preachers, others are teachers, laborers, childcare workers, cooks, and bus drivers.

Some needed full support for an all-the-time ministry. Others only needed limited or occasional help to finish school, to meet a ministry need, or for a particular project.

What they held in common was that “national workers” are Christian people responding to the Great Commission by devoting what they **can** do and what they **like to do** to the cause of Christ.

My brochure project overlooked the fact that I am also a “national worker.”

Don’t worry. I’m not about to ask you to support me financially. Doing so would only perpetuate the stereotype. There is much more to it than that.

If we bear Christ’s name, we ought also to respond to the Great Commission by devoting what we **can** do and what they **like to do** to the cause of Christ. If we are both believers, the difference between the fellow on the rickshaw in Indonesia and myself should only be our location—not our devotion to God’s work.

This matter of following Christ is for any of us and for **all** of us who bear His Name. My (our) daily life and calling should be to bear witness of God’s love and calling where we are. What the brochure promises a sponsor, our lives should promise to other believers—far and wide—as a testimony to God’s work where he has placed me.

In my early years I sat through my missionary father’s sermons until I could almost deliver them myself. The years have erased much of it by now, but one punch line remains.

He poured out his heart for the people of northern Argentina, reporting their victories and challenges, and calling on God’s people in the US to continue to pray and give so believers in the other hemisphere might continue to grown in Christ.

“National workers” are ... devoting what they can do and what they like to do to the cause of Christ.

Then he added,

“You have just heard accounts of the courage, faith, service, and perseverance of your Christian brethren in North Argentina. I trust they have encouraged you and prompted you to continued faithfulness. My family and I will soon return to the field. What accounts of **your** courage, faith, service, and perseverance can I take back for their encouragement in their walk with God?”

A “national worker” is a Christian believer bearing witness to the Gospel among his or her own people through life and service. If that’s the case, we are **all** included.



Silence is Golden

By Shea Oakley

“**IT IS BETTER TO REMAIN SILENT AND APPEAR A FOOL, THAN TO SPEAK AND REMOVE ALL DOUBT.**” —UNKNOWN

We are told in several places in the Old and New Testaments that remaining quiet is often the better alternative to speaking. The wise are often portrayed as persons of few words and fools as those who do not know when to stop talking.

Despite the apparent clarity of scriptural teaching on the need to listen more than speak, we denizens of the 21st century Church do not seem to get it. In our media-saturated “talking-head” society everyone seems to want to make himself heard as often as possible. Perhaps this is connected with the “15 minutes of fame” idea. The more we talk the more chance we have to get our egos gratified in the public square.

As in so very many other of today’s crumbling personal disciplines, Christians are often indistinguishable from their secular counterparts when it comes to using their mouth more than their ears. (Before I come across as insufferably judgmental let me state for the record that I am terrible at keeping his mouth shut. I have somewhat improved in this area in recent years, but the fact remains that I love to hear the sound of my own voice. Call it “vocal narcissism”).

As the old folk proverb says, “we have two ears and only one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we speak”. It is probably safe to say that the proportion suggested here has been pretty effectively reversed in contemporary culture. In fact the two-to-one speaking/listening ratio is probably too conservative to describe many of us.

Beyond that, it sometimes seems as if the person who actually does hold their tongue for a time during polite conversation is not doing it to listen so much as to think about what they are going to say next. Truly attentive listening is a lost art.

This is spiritually dangerous for two reasons. The first is the aforementioned narcissism, also known as ungodly self-centeredness. The second is the fact that

children of God are supposed to hang on every word that comes from His mouth in order to live a life pleasing to Him. This is hard to do when we will not let Him get a word in edgewise!

Prayer, for instance, was always intended by God to be two-way communication. Our relationship with our Lord will be stunted if we speak our prayers without ever pausing to hear His reply. It is only in the quiet, which comes when we finally learn to shut up, that we begin to hear that “still, small voice” the Bible tells us is often God’s preferred means of contact with us. God will not shout to be heard over our verbal torrents and until we come to grips with that fact we will miss out on hearing from the One it is most needful for us to listen to.

I do not have any easy answer for this trend towards Christian verbosity. It is tempting to suggest that we need to take a page from the Desert Fathers of the early

church and go to some remote place for a good long while where we could be by ourselves. With no audience within 25 miles maybe we would learn to appreciate the quiet and make it our own habit to be quiet ourselves. But the world we live in today does not make that particularly easy to do. The vast majority of us cannot take a three-month sabbatical from human company. We have to find another way.

Perhaps the answer is to carve out times of solitude each day as a way to practice quietness. We might even do the unthinkable and actually ask our friends and family whether we talk too much and too foolishly. If they are honest with us we might just be shocked enough by their answer to consider the wisdom of silence. The revelation that our feet are regularly spending time in our mouths may actually be enough to make us keep those mouths safely closed.

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Shea Oakley has written for a number of Christian Web magazines. He makes his home in West Milford, New Jersey.

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Leave the Boat Behind

By Joseph Kostelnik

I'M TOLD THE CHINESE CHARACTERS FOR CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY ARE THE SAME. MY FRIEND, PASTOR JOSEPH PRINCE OF SINGAPORE'S 17,000 MEMBER NEW CREATION CHURCH, RECENTLY CONFIRMED THE TRUTH OF THIS STATEMENT TO ME (HIS WIFE, WENDY, IS CHINESE).

In other words, our perspective on our problems makes a great deal of difference in whether we emerge from a trial better or bitter. It's not so important what happens to us as much as what occurs in us.

Scientists who study these situations tell us an entirely different set of positive chemical reactions occur in our bodies when we view a stressful circumstance as a problem to be solved rather than a predicament to be shunned. We find a thrilling illustration of this phenomenon in a familiar story from Matthew 14 regarding the storm at sea.

You remember the situation. After the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 the Lord constrained His disciples to get into the boat and sail to the other side of the lake in advance of His arrival. Note the use of that word, constrained. Really, now, wouldn't all of us rather remain at the side of the powerful, compassionate Savior if given a choice?

Sometimes though He thrusts us out into

a place of service, usually something outside of our comfort zone. For example, just when I thought I was getting a handle on how to minister to a family member with health problems (my father died of heart disease, stroke and diabetes), my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and I became the primary caregiver for a number of years. Recently my wife of 31 years was diagnosed with breast cancer (thankfully a successful lumpectomy and a clear lymph node test offer an excellent healing prognosis). Couple this with ongoing financial challenges in the church and ministry and I'm sure you will agree my life is not much different from yours or the members of your family or congregation. Life in a fallen world presents challenges to us all.

In any case, the disciples obeyed and launched out while Jesus went up into the mountain to pray alone. Viewed correctly,

this is actually a comforting thought: He is making intercession for us continually at the right hand of the Father (Rom. 8:34). *"But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, being continually tossed around by the waves for the wind was contrary."*

Sometimes we mistakenly believe that encountering trials, temptations and tribulations is a sure and certain indication that we are out of the Lord's will. More often than not, these obstacles mean the opposite! If a trouble-free life and ministry indicate the Lord's hand of blessing, then the apostle Paul never did find God's perfect will for his life. As someone has said, when Paul entered a new field of ministry, he didn't ask what hotel he would be staying in but what jail!

What is your crisis? What is it that has you surrounded, confused, irritated, frustrated, aggravated, or hurting? Is the enemy taunting you with these words, "Where's your God, now?" If you have set out to obey the will of God for your life and are endeavoring to complete His assignment for your ministry, rest assured Jesus is well aware of your situation—He's interceding for you—the contrary winds of chaotic circumstances notwithstanding.

Joseph Kostelnik is pastor of White Oak Chapel in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Suddenly, at about three or four in the morning, when the disciples were farther from their destination than when they first set out, they saw someone “*walking around on the sea.*” We might mention two facts here. Some who doubt the miraculous in the scriptures say they were mistaken, that He was walking along the shore! However, the Greek preposition and case make it clear He was making actual contact with the sea (the Greek phrase, “*reign upon the earth,*” [Rev. 5:10] uses the same construction). The second fact—the really comforting one for our purposes—is that the inspired

text says Jesus was walking around on the “sea,” not the waves. **There is always perfect peace where He is.**

Then, there were two voices: one was their shriek of fear thinking He was a ghost, the other was His voice: “*Take courage.*” Of course, our response in such a situation would be, “Easy for You to say; I’m the one drowning in the sinking boat!”

The Master’s greeting was followed by a comma, not a period. There was a reason for His encouragement. His second statement was, “*it is I.*” The disciples knew exactly who He was identifying Himself with by that statement: the great I Am, covenant-keeping God of the Old Testament, Yahweh.

He has a name for every one of our needs. He is Yahweh-yireh, the Lord who looks ahead and provides (Gen. 22:13ff.); Yahweh-rophoka, the Lord our physician (Ex. 15:22); Yahweh-nissi, the Lord our banner of victory (Ex. 17:8ff.); Yahweh-shalom, the Lord our peace (Jud. 6:14); Yahweh-raah, the Lord our shepherd (Ps. 23:1); Yahweh-tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness (Jer. 23:6); and Yahweh-shammah, the Lord ever-present (Ezek. 48:35). No wonder He told his troubled protégés to cheer up! And then He followed this revelation of His person with the familiar advice “*do not be afraid.*”

I have read, studied and preached about this Bible portion for many years but only recently really understood Peter’s question of his Lord. Having discovered just who Jesus was declaring Himself to be, I assumed Peter’s request was a way of saying, “If You’re really Yahweh, then not only do

You do miracles, but You enable Your servants to do them also!” And there’s a truth to this interpretation. But have you ever really asked yourself **why** a fisherman, already in a state of panic and confusion would risk even further injury by moving “from the frying pan to the fire?”

By faith through spending time with Him, we must trade our problem for His Presence.

Recently, the Spirit of the Lord opened my eyes to the fact I mentioned previously. As Peter looked off from the boat unto Jesus, **he clearly saw that the only place of safety was with Him.** Use your imagination with me and visualize the darkness of the night, the wind and the waves crashing against the boat, the terrified disciples straining against the oars watching their craft move farther from their destination.

Now look off with Peter to the Lord Jesus “*walking around on the sea*” (not the waves), columns of water on either side of Him and a placid plank of tranquil liquid under His feet and stretching forth to the boat. Analyzing your options for survival, would you not, with Peter, say, “*Lord, if it is You, bid me come to You on the water?*”

In the midst of the contrary winds of life,

when it appears that all is lost and even our best efforts are coming up short in terms of stopping the storm, it’s best to **leave the boat behind.** By faith through spending time with Him, we must trade our problem for His presence (Ps. 16:11). As we turn to Him we discover “*times of refreshing from the Face of the Lord*” (Acts 3:19).

Admittedly, this will require a step of unconditional surrender. But is there any other sane and spiritual solution?

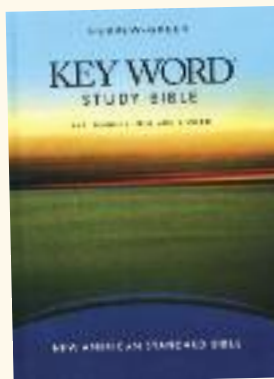
It is in His presence, in the light of His word, that He speaks to our hearts. His still, small voice quietly whispers, “*This is the way; walk ye in it.*” His Spirit acts as a divine umpire within, guiding us to the correct guidance for our particular problems (Col. 3:15). And when the storm has passed and we find ourselves safely on the other side, we shall find another opportunity for service in His name, just as the disciples did. Just now, turn from your trouble to His presence, believe that He is “I Am,” with a Name for your need. Commit yourself anew to Him unconditionally and watch Him be a rewarder of you as you diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

Leave the boat behind.



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John the Baptist

By Spiros Zodhiates

(Matthew 11:2–15; Luke 7:18–35)

Editor's Note: Dr. Zodhiates continues his exposition of Matthew's gospel.

[2] John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, was imprisoned with the prospect of death overshadowing him. The enigma of God's sovereignty is why He allows evil to coexist with and sometimes temporarily triumph over good in the world (Job 2:5-6; Dan. 8:10–14; Rev. 13:5–7).

The authorities were evil men who had attained civil power. During a visit to Rome, Herod Antipas of Galilee had seduced his brother's wife and married her. When John the Baptist condemned this illicit affair, Herod put him in the prison of Machaerus near the Dead Sea. John never showed any sign of fear that would lead him to compromise his ethical stance against Herod. He was a brave man, willing to face even death by condemning this common case of adultery.

[3] While in prison, John heard of Jesus' works, but Satan tempted him to doubt that Jesus was Israel's Messiah. Consequently, he dispatched some of his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are You the Coming One (*erchómenos*, the present middle deponent participle of *érchomai* [2064], I am coming), or (*ē* [2228], i.e., if You are not) *do we wait for* (*prosdokōmen*, the present subjunctive of *prosdokāō* [4328], to wait for) *another* (*héteron*, the masculine accusative of *héteros* [2087], another Messiah, another person [masculine gender] of a different kind)?" (a.t.).

John used this participial noun to announce the Messiah's coming in Matthew 3:11. He thought there might be a series of messianic appearances—one Messiah to redeem people from sin, another to rescue the redeemed out of this sinful world, and a third to create a new world where righteousness would reign unhindered. Jesus' disciples and John himself, hampered with persecution, looked primarily ahead to the victorious reign of Israel's Messiah.

[4] John had asked if he and his disciples should wait for another "Coming

One." To substantiate His messianic claim, Jesus told these disciples to tell John about His miraculous words and deeds: "Go (*poreuthéntes*, the aorist passive deponent participle of *poreúomai* [4198], having gone) and report to (*apaggeílate*, the aorist imperative of *apaggéllō* [518] from *apó* [575], from; and *aggéllō* [n.f.], to announce) *John again those things that you do hear and see*" (a.t.).

John's messengers were commanded to report directly to John from (*apó*) the things they had personally heard and seen. Jesus' words and miracles would give John assurance in the face of death that he had genuinely been the forerunner of Israel's Messiah.

[5] Jesus listed the proof that He was truly the Anointed One of God so John and his disciples no longer had to "wait for another one":

"The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor (ptōchoi, the plural of ptōchós [4434], helpless) have the gospel preached to them."

In Matthew 5:3, the "poor in spirit" (*ptōchoi pneúmati*) are the spiritually helpless. Because He knew their burdens, Jesus targeted these especially with the preaching of the gospel (*euaggelízontai* from *euaggelízō* [2097]). Since this list of miraculous events follows the prophecies concerning the Messiah in Isaiah 61:1–3, John would be encouraged to hear of Jesus' authenticity.

Suffering believers are tempted to think that God has either lost His power or changed His character. God is always the same, but He does sovereignly deliver each of us with perfect wisdom and timing. He especially blesses those who can accept suffering without complaining.

[6] Perhaps to preempt John's perseverance to the end, Jesus added, "And blessed (*makários* [3107]) is he, whosoever shall not be offended (*skandalisthē*, the third person singular aorist passive subjunctive of *skandalízō* [4624], to cause to sin) in me."

John was indeed blessed because he accepted martyrdom in lieu of compromising His Lord's ethics. He was not "offended" in Him, for he remained imprisoned because he defended God's law against adultery.

Makários is used in the plural throughout the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–11, but here it is singular and predicative, describing the full satisfaction of being indwelt by "the Blessed One" (*ho makários*). In the context of persecution, God's indwelling presence is particularly relevant because those fully satisfied in Him are not offended by circumstances controlled by Him. Had He chosen, Jesus could have as easily rescued John as personally come down from the cross. But John neither needed nor wanted rescuing because he was fully satisfied (blessed) with God's presence. When Jesus is our all (Col. 3:11), we have, as Paul says, "all things" (1 Cor. 3:21).

[7, 8] While John's disciples were returning to him, Jesus began to tell the "multitudes" (*óchloi*, the plural of *óchlos* [3793], crowd) around Him about John the Baptist.

Here we find the verb *theásasthai*, (the aorist middle deponent infinitive of *theáomai* [2300], to see with wonderment or amazement). This is the word from which "theater" is derived. Jesus asked the multitudes if they had come out into the desert to marvel at (*theásasthai*) or to be entertained by a reed shaken by the wind. In other words, was John the Baptist a spineless victim shaken by circumstances? If



Dr. Zodhiates is president emeritus of AMG International and publisher emeritus of *Pulpit Helps*.

they had known him before going out to see him, they would not have thought he delighted in a soft life. John ate what he could find in the wilderness and wore clothing made of camel's hair (Mark 1:6), which was spun into a coarse cloth used to make tents. Poor peasants used it also for outer garments, and some prophets of Israel may have as well (2 Kings. 1:8; Zech. 13:4).

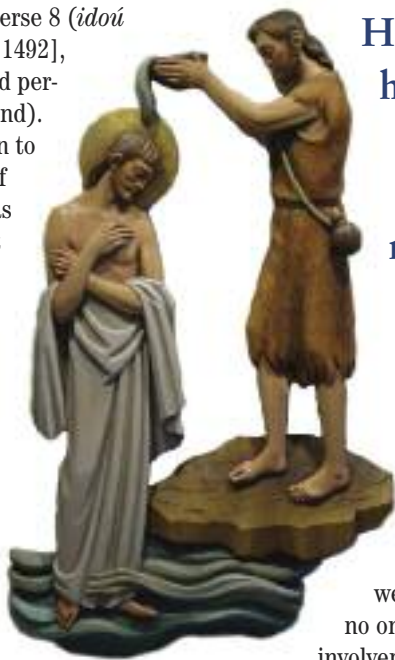
Jesus told His listeners that His prophets suffered discomforts and did not live soft, easy lives. He emphasized this with the word “*behold*” in verse 8 (*idouí* [2400] from *eidō* [1492], meaning to see and perceive or comprehend). He called attention to the full meaning of what a prophet was and that John met all the qualifications. John was self-effacing; he adopted the wilderness as his home, and he understood that Jesus was God who became man to save people from their sins. He preached Jesus' message that humanity's greatest need was repentance.

In Zacharias' song of blessing (Luke 1:67–79) for his son John, he cited the ancient prophets (Luke 1:70) and called his child “*a prophet of the Most High*” (Luke 1:76). John the Baptist was the transitional prophet between the Old and New Testaments, closing one era of history and introducing a new era with the coming of the Messiah.

[9, 10] Jesus confirmed this with the words, “*Yea, I say (légō* [3004]) *unto you,*” meaning, “I know what I am saying to you.” He then added that John was “*more than a prophet,*” quoting Malachi's prophecy of a “messenger” who would herald His coming: “*Behold, I send my messenger (aggelōn* [32], angel) *before thy face*” (see Mal. 3:1). A definite article before “messenger” means there was only one unique fulfillment.

Jesus urged the people to note that something extraordinary was happening. They were observing a miracle. The prophet who had been predicted hundreds of years

before the coming of the Messiah as His forerunner was now alive. God Himself had said, “*I send (apostéllō* [649], to send on a mission, akin to *apóstolos* [652], apostle, one who is sent) *my messenger,*” (meaning that this personally known prophet will carry the very words of God. John's specific mission is predicted)... *who shall prepare (kataskeuásei,* the future tense of *kataskeuázō* [2680], construct, prepare fully and make ready) *your way (hodón* [3598] *before You*” (a.t.).



Had He chosen, Jesus could have as easily rescued John as personally come down from the cross. But John neither needed nor wanted rescuing because he was fully satisfied (blessed) with God's presence.

[11] Jesus hailed John as the greatest of those “*born of women,*” a veiled pointer to the incarnation—easy to miss if we are not careful. Besides Christ, no one had been born without the involvement of a man (*anēr* [435]; see John 1:13). Of those born to women, Jesus said, none was “*greater*” (*meizōn* [3187], greater in character) than John the Baptist. Yet, He continued, the least person born into the kingdom of God is greater than John.

John the Baptist announced the coming of the kingdom or reign of heaven in Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:3). That era would see the establishment of a new order of things, and the common people misunderstood this. They thought that John's water baptism would spare them from the wrath of God. This superficial view of salvation precipitated a rush to be baptized. This is why John's message was, “*Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*” (Matt. 3:8).

[12] The people's haste to justify themselves through a physical action was nothing new. Jesus said it was prevalent “*from the days of John the Baptist until now (árti* [737], the present).”

Baptism by John was becoming a ritual, an easy way for people to assuage their guilt and fear of God's wrath. Since it was popular and did not cost anything, they

clamored for it. (The *entolē* [1785], commandment of God [Matt. 15:3]), was being replaced by another (*éntalma* [1778], a religious precept [Matt. 15:9]). This “now” of which Christ spoke extends to the present time, for humans have not changed.

“*Violence*” translates *biázetai*, (the present middle tense of *biázō* [971], to force, to violate, akin to *bía* [970], “violent force”.) Those who do not repent “*take* [the kingdom of heaven] *by force*” through self-righteousness, not submitting to the righteous-

ness of God (Rom. 10:3). They are like false shepherds who enter the sheepfold by climbing over the wall to steal or destroy the Great Shepherd's sheep (John 10:1, 7–18). These “*violent people*” (*biastai* [973]; found only here) force their way into the fold, though they are not sheep. They “take it by force” (*harpázousin* [726], sudden seizure as by a robber, appropriation) in their own way and time. But they are ultimate-

ly unsuccessful in fighting, as they are, the King of kings!

[13] Because Christ fulfilled the old covenant's Law and prophecies (Matt. 5:17), that covenant ended with the coming of the new Elijah, John the Baptist, according to Jesus: “*For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*”

[14] Here the word translated “if” is *ei* ([1487], the “if” of hypothesis). “To receive” the truth that John the Baptist was “Elijah about to come” was a matter of choice. To interpret this verse, we should keep in mind Gabriel's prophecy to Zacharias:

And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (cf. Mal. 4:5, 6).

[15] Not all would receive this truth, so Jesus reinforced it with the words: “*He who has ears, let him hear.*” This verb, *akouō* (191), carries the double meaning of both hearing and understanding. That Jesus intended the latter follows from the inference that some had ears and heard (i.e., understood), while others did not. Although they had physical ears to hear the sounds, they did not perceive for they closed their spiritual ears to the Lord's conviction of sin.



Subject: Father's Day
He Gave His Life

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13).

Fred and his two children hiked up Mount Rainier in Washington on Memorial Day weekend in 1968. A terrific late-season blizzard surprised the family. Gale force winds trapped them on the mountain.

Fred dug out a depression in the snow and spread a tarp over it. Placing his son and daughter in their sleeping bags, Fred laid himself over the youngsters to protect them from the howling wind. The next morning, a search party found the trio. The two children were alive; their father was dead. The children explained, "Dad gave his life for us."

Dear Friend, how well are you leading your pack? The Lord desires godly men who put their families before their own pleasures. Be an example of self-giving love to your wife and children. It's the best way to guide them to the Father Heart of God.

Ted Matamis

Subject: Worship
"Like a Dog"

One of our family's dogs taught me an important lesson about how we should relate to God.

This mischievous Irish setter was often in trouble. But whenever I would launch into a reprimand, she would tuck her tail, hang her head, and **come toward me**. The more intense my scolding, the closer she would come—until she was almost touching me. She knew that though I was angry about her "sin", my love would inevitably win out over being upset with her. She seemed to sense that the safest place she could find was to be face to face with me.

This is exactly the way we should view our relationship with God. When the Spirit convicts us of sin, and we recognize that we have trespassed against our holy Lord, guilt and fear are natural responses. But the Spirit doesn't leave us there. He draws us in and reminds us that God's wrath and His love both come from His holiness, and we cannot be at peace until we have come back to Him.

The Greek word translated "worship" in several New Testament passages (notably in describing the disciples' response to

Christ's calming of the storm in Matt. 14:33) is *prōskunēō*, meaning to prostrate oneself in homage. The word is formed from two others, *prōs* (a preposition of direction meaning "toward" or "with"), and *kuōn* ("dog"). The image evoked is that of a dog licking its masters' hand. What a portrait of true worship!

Bob Gerow

Subject: Faithfulness
The Cliff

Along the southern coast of England, the land drops dramatically into the ocean along a long line of strikingly white chalk cliffs. These cliffs that rear themselves hundreds of feet above the crawling sea beneath are made up of the minute skeletons of microscopic animals.

So life—mighty and awful, having eternal consequences—that towers over the sea of eternity, is made up of minute incidents, of trifling duties, of small tasks. If thou art not "faithful in that which is least," thou art unfaithful in the whole.

Alexander MacLaren
 via *MacLaren's 1,024 Best Illustrations*

Subject: False Teaching
**Keeping Your Heart
 in Tune with Christ**

Throughout the ages, men have attempted to improve the Gospel. Some call it old-fashioned. Others want to repackage it in order to make it "more relevant for today". There are some who want to change it by replacing it with something else altogether.

In composing a "new gospel", these people convince themselves that they are right on key. But to a trained ear, the obvious is apparent: this vain rendition is as flat as a pancake!

Maxie Dunham writes in *Jesus' Claims—Our Promises* that when Lloyd C. Douglas, author of *The Robe* and other novels, was a university student, he lived in a boarding house. On the first floor was an elderly, retired music teacher, now infirm and unable to leave the apartment.

Douglas said that every morning they would go through a ritual together. He would come down the steps, open the old man's door, and ask, "Well, what's the good news?"

The old man would pick up a tuning fork, tap it on the side of his wheelchair, and say,

"That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune, but my friend, that is middle C!"

The old man had discovered one thing upon which he could depend, one constant reality in his life, one "still point in a turning world."

We live in a world filled with a variety of noises. But there is still only one "middle C"; only one gospel of Jesus Christ. Make certain that your song is in tune with Him!

From *Practical Illustrations—Galatians-Colossians*
 Leadership Ministries Worldwide

Subject: Character
Thoughts form Character

Every traveler should visit a cave. There, one can see enormous pillars which have been formed from the roof of the cavern.

This masonry, formed of solid rock, made by the slow and silent progress of water, is truly marvelous. A single drop of water, finding its way from the surface down through the roof of the cave deposits its sediment and another follows it and still another, each adding its imperceptible contribution, until the icicle of stone begins to grow, ultimately reaching the pillar which has likewise been forming on the bottom of the cave. It becomes a massive pillar which will stand to the end of the world.

There is a process just like that going on in each of our hearts. Each thought that stirs for a moment sinks into the soul; as each little drop of water, with its limestone deposit, makes its contribution to the pillar in the cave. Other thoughts follow, and still others, until a habit of thought along a given line of reasoning, arousing similar emotions, is formed, erecting within our own hearts monuments of purpose or pillars of ambition that shape our character.

Character is the result of thought. Think high, and you will live high. Whether our lives shall be full and helpful or cruel and hurtful depends upon our thoughts. As believers our thoughts must be grounded in Scripture and bathed in prayer, for we know the heart shapes our actions. Carefully read and study God's Word, and wait before Him, letting the Word grip mind and heart.

Knight's 3,000 Illustrations

Subject: Giving

Harvest Time

On June 21, 1834, Cyrus Hall McCormick received a patent for his reaping machine—he was just 25 years old. Actually, his father had almost invented the mechanical reaper by himself, but gave up the project and turned it over to young Cyrus.

Even though his reaper harvested 22 acres a day, as compared to the half-acre that could be manually harvested in the same time frame, sales were slow. When Cyrus moved from his hometown in rural Virginia to metro Chicago in 1847, his distribution and marketing took off. By 1850, he was selling more than 5,000 reapers each year. Thanks to the McCormick genius, at the time of his death in 1884, enough grain was being shipped from Chicago each year to bake 10 billion loaves of bread.

But that is just half of the story. Cyrus, having been nurtured in a Christian home, also knew a thing or two about sowing and reaping in life. He was exceedingly generous with his time and finances to many in need. Evangelist D. L. Moody once asked him for \$1,000 for his Bible school—McCormick doubled the amount.

McCormick's success hung on this truth: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously" (2 Cor. 9:6). Go ahead; try it. What are you afraid of?

J. Kenneth Bassett
Timeless Signatures

Subject: Christian Life

Seaweed

I'm told that a certain kind of seaweed that grows at the bottom of the ocean will, when its flowering time comes, elongate its stalk to reach the light, and float upon the top. After it has flowered and fruited, it sinks again into the depths. Our Christian life likewise grows up slowly, reaching upward and opening its flowers to the light of heaven. There, though, it should stay with its blossom for our Lord and all eyes to see.

Alexander MacLaren
via MacLaren's 1,024 Best Illustrations



Worshipping Worship?

By Victor Knowles

Do you ever go to church and feel that what is going on is not really the worship of God, but rather the worship of "worship" itself, or am I the only one who has ever felt this way? Somehow, I think that I am not alone in this observation.

I do not mean to be overly critical in what I'm about to say. I know that people "do church" (not a great phrase in its own right) in different ways, and that there are a variety of ways in which we all worship our Lord. Sometimes, though, I think that our worship gets misdirected and we wind up worshipping our style of worship rather than the object of our worship—Almighty God.

A big mistake that most of us make is that we automatically think of praise (singing) when we mention the word "worship". Yet worship is never defined only as singing in Scripture. Singing can be a part of our worship (both public and private), but it is never the sum of worship.

Worship, we should all know by now, is not something that we do only when we are meeting on a certain day at a certain time in a certain building. We do not turn worship on and off like a computer, radio, or television set. Worship is 24/7. We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, which is our "*spiritual service of worship*" (Rom. 12:1).

But when we assemble together for what some call "corporate worship", we sometimes go right into "worship" without much thought. The actual reading of Scripture is rare in many churches, and, when it is done, is often read without much heart. Prayers are seldom thought out ahead of time, and the Throne of Grace is often approached without much reverence. I sometimes wonder if we realize we are addressing Almighty God Himself when we pray. If you were in a receiving line to greet the President of the United States or another public figure, wouldn't you think about how you would address him?

What I am most concerned about lately, however, is how we have fallen into

the habit of worshipping our style of worship. In this instance, I am referring to the way we worship in praise or song. In some congregations (and entire fellowships of congregations) the attitude is projected that "our way of worship is the only way to worship." We elevate our way of worship and denigrate that of others.

Some congregations think they have to use instrumental music in every song of every service. Other churches think that the amps must be turned up to the highest level, and will not turn them down, even if they turn some people away. I know there are some churches that sing a cappella and truly believe that it is the only style of worship that God accepts or appreciates.

After a while, these churches may subconsciously start to put their style of worship on a higher pedestal than the object of their worship. We may sing "It's all about You, Lord" while we are so fixated on our way of worship that we might as well be honest and sing, "It's all about us, Lord." Instead of worshipping the Lord in the beauty of His holiness, we worship our worship in the spirit of our ugliness. And even—God forbid—consign to hell those who don't sing about heaven just like we do.

A congregation of believers in Africa who meet under a jacaranda tree may include a form of dancing in their exuberant worship of God. Should these precious brothers and sisters be disdained or disowned by a church in Alabama who quietly sit in their pews and sing from hymnbooks?

The cherished principle of congregational autonomy should surely apply here. Let us not "Americanize" our African brethren by imposing upon them our particular way of worship.

Think about this next time you are in church. Are we truly worshipping God, or are we merely basking in the glow of our own "worship"?

Victor Knowles is president of Peace on Earth Ministries (POEM)



Christ-like Tolerance within the Church: A Response

By David Olford

I WANT TO THANK MICHELE RYAN FOR READING THE FEBRUARY “POINTS TO PONDER” AND FOR HER VALUABLE AND THOUGHTFUL RESPONSE PRINTED IN THE APRIL EDITION OF *PULPIT HELPS*. THE “POINTS TO PONDER” ARTICLE THAT CAUSED CONCERN WAS TITLED “TOLERANCE WITHIN THE CHURCH.”

I admit willingly that a more specific definition and explanation of the word “tolerance” would have been helpful, especially in light of our contemporary moral malaise. Tolerance is not a valid Christian response to one’s own personal sins, nor is it the right response to known blatant sins practiced by other believers within the church. Such matters must be dealt with directly by believers before the Lord, and church discipline may be necessary as well. Sin and sinful practices are not to be tolerated in the life of the church.

The February column was not addressing the attitude or response of individual Christians or local churches to sin and sinful practices. The reason for this silence or omission on our part was that the Apostle Paul was not addressing sinful behavior in Romans 15:1-3, the text under consideration (as Michele Ryan noted). The Apostle is dealing with potential and actual relational problems due to differing opinions, convictions and practices that are within the realm of Christian freedom and personal conscience. These differences are specifically related to the “strong” and “weak” in the faith (as Paul labels them), and in the

immediate context the strong are to “*bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please [themselves]*” (Rom. 15:1 NKJV).

The Apostle Paul presents specific examples of the types of issues demanding tolerance of differing opinions and convictions: foods to be eaten or not eaten, and the recognition or non-recognition of special “religious” days (14:1-6). The “weak” had more scruples concerning these matters than the “strong.” And such differences could have caused tension, and lack of real acceptance of one another in the life of the church. It needs to be said that these practical matters were extremely important in the life of the church at that time. Thus, acceptance within the church of great differences was absolutely imperative if unity, harmony, and mutual edification were to be realities.

In writing this article we could have used a word other than “tolerance,” but

actually “tolerance” is an appropriate word. In order for there to be acceptance, harmony, and ministry within the local church, we need to respect and bear with one another’s consciences on non-essential matters, even if we don’t agree. In my understanding, this is what tolerance means. It involves the willingness to graciously endure non-essential convictions (and the people who hold them), even when you don’t agree.

We are told in Romans 14:1-15:13 not to judge one another, not to despise one another, and not to pressure one another (14:1, 3, 10, 13). Rather, we are to promote individual accountability to the Lordship of Christ (14:6-12), pursue peace and edification (14:19, 15:2), and receive or accept one another even as we have been received or accepted by Christ (15:7). It is within this framework that we used the word “tolerance;” allowing other believers to view some non-essential matters differently than we do.

There should be a level of general tolerance as it relates to matters that are ultimately between individual believers and their Lord. In fact, to be intolerant in this context can lead to sin either by developing sinful attitudes towards others, or by



David Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University's Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee

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causing a believer to sin by encouraging them to do something against their conscience so that it is not done "from faith" (Romans 14:23). If you'd like to drop the word tolerance and use another word in this matter that is fine, but certainly an allowance for or an endurance of opinions or behaviors that you don't personally prefer or even like can be spoken of as Christian tolerance.

The article should have been titled, "Christ-like Tolerance within the Church." That would have been more accurate and to the point. The example of Christ Himself is used in Rom. 15:3. The fact that Christ did not please Himself, but bore reproach is our ultimate example for dealing with relational differences. Our Lord Jesus Christ tolerated things he did not enjoy as an aspect of fulfilling His ministry and doing His Father's will. True Christian tolerance reflects the attitude of Christ, and follows His example. In this way we honor Him, and express His life in the church. We are demonstrating His love and Lordship when we unselfishly and patiently accept one another when it involves tolerating different personal convictions on non-essential matters.

I hope this response helps to clarify what was meant in the February article. I don't believe that our article misrepresented the Apostle Paul's teaching in context. Certainly the meaning of the word "tolerance" could have been clarified and freed from its present connotation in the culture

wars of today. Maybe the February article raised similar concerns in other people's minds as were expressed by Michele Ryan. If not, I wanted to write this response anyway for her sake, and because this is such an important practical matter.

I have been involved in ministry with pastors, preachers and the preaching ministry for over twenty-three years. I am totally committed to local church ministry, and I have a passion for the local church. At this point in time, few church problems, disagreements, conflicts, splits, or crises surprise me. I know that there are often legitimate issues at stake in these matters, but the question is, how are these matters being approached by the people involved?

Is Christian tolerance being expressed in interactions concerning matters of personal disagreement or dispute? Are these matters and the relationships involved being approached in a self-centered manner or selflessly? Do the parties involved have a passion to be Christ-like in attitudes towards one another? Is the primary concern the edification of others or the maintaining of a personal preference? Are the differences between these believers graciously tolerated in order to promote peace, and unity in the life of the church? Is the love of Christ dominant in the midst of these disagreements, and is there really a mutual surrender to the Lord and His priorities for the church?

The Apostle Paul did not want self-centered arguments, hurt feelings, judgmental

attitudes, demeaning words, selfish decisions, or a church split to result over such matters as what you eat or what days you observe. His instructions and exhortations were given so that the Lord would be glorified through a united Church, with Jews and Gentiles, praising God and placing their hope in Him (15:8-13). For this to happen, mutual surrender to the Lordship of Christ and a demonstration of Christ-like love were necessary, which would involve the type of Christian tolerance we have discussed above.

Such Christian tolerance is needed just as much in our own day. It is so easy for serious conflicts along "strong and weak" lines (or along other lines) to take place in church life over the smallest matters of personal preference; and now we have the luxury of leaving churches, going to other churches, starting our own, or just staying at home when disagreements, conflicts, controversy, or crises arise.

It is surrender to the Lordship of Christ and a demonstration of the love of Christ that are needed in the midst of these situations regardless of the specific issues or outcomes. This will call for true Christ-like tolerance, recognizing that each person is accountable directly to the Lord, and that each person is to be received with the love of the Lord, allowing for differing views on matters of personal conscience.

In Christ,
David Olford
Stephen Olford Professor of Expository
Preaching Union University



Taliban attack Christians in Karachi

Armed men yesterday attacked a group of Christians in Taiser Town, near Karachi, Pakistan. They set ablaze six Christian houses and injured three Christians, including an 11-year-old boy, who is in critical condition in the hospital, Fr. Richard D'Souza told *AsiaNews*. Taiser Town, is home to about 750 Christian families.

Two police officials, who spoke to *AsiaNews* on condition of anonymity, said that Qudoos Masih, one of the people injured in the incident, filed an initial report at the Sarjani Town police against unknown persons.

The police confirmed that seven suspects were arrested with heavy weapons on them. Police are still conducting their investigation and does not know who is behind the violence.

A policeman said that only three Christians were injured, including the minor who is in critical condition. A Muslim from the group of attackers was also hurt.

Fr Pervez Khalid, assistant parish priest at St Jude's Parish Church, told *AsiaNews* that no one was killed in the attack but that six people had gunshot wounds.

Father D'Souza, parish priest at St Jude's, visited the area where the attack took place. There, he saw graffiti on the walls of the area's two churches, saying 'Taliban zindabad' (Live long Taliban), 'Islam zindabad' (Live long Islam), 'Christians Islam qabol karo' (Christians, convert to Islam).

Institute on Religion and Public Policy

North Korea's Missile Launch Reveals Inside Oppression

Open Doors and *Mission News Network* report that North Korea's missile launch is only the public face of oppression.

"What is forgotten in all of the controversy surrounding the rocket launch is the treatment of the suffering people inside North Korea and the horrendous human rights record of Kim Jong-II," says Open Doors USA President/CEO Dr. Carl Moeller. "The litany of abuses is well-documented: forced labor, political prisoners tortured in prison camps, sex trafficking. And the abuses are increasing while the government sets its sights on developing a nuclear program."

Open Doors' Jerry Dykstra says the group's field reports show a "war-like buildup by the government," which aims to show impoverished North Koreans that leader Kim Jong-II remains fully in charge.

Religion Today Summaries

Vermont and Iowa Latest States to Condone Homosexual "Marriage"

Vermont's House of Representatives accrued just enough votes on April 7 to overturn Gov. Jim Douglas' veto of Vermont's same-sex "marriage" bill. The vote made Vermont the fourth U.S. state to extend the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, days after Iowa's Supreme Court imposed same-sex "marriage" in the Midwestern heartland state.

The State Senate voted 23-5 to overturn the veto, and the House voted 100-49, achieving the two-thirds majority needed to push the new definition of marriage as "the legally recognized union of two people" into law.

Vermont is the first state to approve same-sex "marriage" through the legislative process, as opposed to activist court rulings.

"The decision by Vermont legislators to attempt to redefine marriage creates an urgency for other states and officials to protect marriage," said Concerned Women for America President Wendy Wright.

Iowa's Supreme Court Friday set off a firestorm after it unanimously agreed that Iowa's Defense of Marriage Act "violates the equal protection clause of the Iowa Constitution."

The imposition of same-sex "marriage" may also be drawing near in New Hampshire, where it has passed the House, as well as in Maine and New Jersey, where similar legislation is under debate.

LifeSiteNews

Dominican Republic Enshrines Right to Life in its Constitution

The Dominican Republic has voted to approve language in its new constitution protecting the right to life from the moment of conception.

Article 11 of the new constitution, which was approved by a large legislative majority of 167-32, states that "the right to life is inviolable from conception until death. The death penalty cannot be established, pronounced, nor applied, in any case."

The approval of the article came in the wake of a series of massive campaigns by the Catholic bishops of the Dominican Republic, led by Cardinal Archbishop Nicolas de Jesus Lopez of Santo Domingo.

The nation's Evangelical Protestant churches have also had a major influence on the outcome. Organized by such leaders as Dr. Gene Antonio, they have succeeded in playing video of abortions on national television and have distributed tens of thousands of flyers to Dominicans.

"We are thrilled that the protection of human life from the moment of conception is now established into the constitution in spite of fierce international pressure to legalize abortion," stated Antonio. "This overwhelming victory serves as an example to the other Latin countries fighting to protect life, that we can win and we must win because the lives of little people are at stake."

LifeSiteNews

Hitchens, Craig Debate God's Existence at Biola

During a season when many celebrated Jesus' resurrection, two men debated whether there is even a God.

A prominent atheist and a Christian apologist clashed April 4 in a debate titled "Does God Exist?" at Biola University, an Evangelical school in La Mirada, Calif., near Los Angeles.

Christopher Hitchens, regarded as a leader of the "new atheism" movement, went head-to-head with William Lane Craig, a Biola professor regarded as one of the world's leading religious philosophers. About 4,000 people watched the debate in the university's gym while an estimated 6,000 others watched it online or from satellite locations around Southern California.

While Craig had the home court advantage, Hitchens didn't hold back, exhorting listeners to, "Emancipate yourself from the idea of a celestial dictatorship and you've taken the first step to becoming free."

But Craig had his rejoinders. "The fruit of the naturalistic worldview is that mankind is reduced to meaninglessness, valuelessness

and purposelessness,” Craig said.

Both debaters placed the burden of proof on their opponent. Craig said Hitchens would have to explain how the universe could create itself out of nothing, while Hitchens said Craig would have the formidable task of proving God’s existence in the absence of complete knowledge about biology and the universe.

Neither was convinced at the end of the debate that his opponent had met those demands.

Baptist Press

Most U.S. Christians Don’t Believe Satan, Holy Spirit, Exists

U.K.-based *Christian Today* reports that six out of 10 American Christians believe Satan is a “symbol of evil” rather than actual “living being,” a new Barna study found.

Only 35 percent said they believe that Satan is a living and real force of evil. Similar numbers said the Holy Spirit is a “symbol of God’s power and presence” but not a “living entity.” “Most Americans, even

those who say they are Christian, have doubts about the intrusion of the supernatural into the natural world,” said George Barna, founder of The Barna Group.

“Hollywood has made evil accessible and tame, making Satan and demons less worrisome than the Bible suggests they really are,” he said. “It’s hard for achievement-driven, self-reliant, independent people to believe that their lives can be impacted by unseen forces.”

Religion Today Summaries



Praise and Prayer

Pray: Drug Violence Halts Church Trips to U.S.-Mexico Border

Christianity Today reports that short-term mission trips to a once-popular destination have begun to dry up. Trip coordinators for Juarez, Mexico—just two miles south of El Paso, Texas—have canceled planned trips due to the sharp spike in violence from a drug-cartel war.

More than 1,800 people in the city of 1.6 million have been killed since January 2008, some in public shootouts, and thousands more have been threatened. “Ministry partners have experienced threats of extortion,” said YouthWorks regional director Jason Atkinson in a memo. “Our own staff were victims of armed robbery and carjacking.”

Peggy Kulesz of First Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, said her church has been sending members to the city for 30 years, but cancelled this year’s trip. “When you feel a real sense of calling and then the door is shut, you... wonder what God has in store and how he is going to work in this time of crisis with Christians in the area.”

Religion Today Summaries

Praise: America’s “Oldest” Abortion Centre Closes Forever

What is believed to be America’s longest-running abortion facility, the Women’s Choice Clinic of Oakland, Calif., announced last Wednesday that it was forced to close thanks to shortages in taxpayer funds from the financially strapped state.

The centre ended 36 years of abortion procedures after delayed reimbursements from Medi-Cal, California’s Medicaid program, made rent payment impossible. Medi-Cal funds comprised 90% of the clinic’s income. The abortion facility first opened in 1972, and had seen over 64,000 customers, according to the Oakland Tribune. It was known for catering to teen, low-income, homosexual, and Spanish-speaking customers in the Bay Area.

“The state had been bailing out this abortion mill for years. Finally, when the economic crisis hit, there just was no more bail-out money and they were forced into financial ruin, something that should have happened naturally long ago,” said Operation Rescue President Troy Newman last week. “It looks like the financial crisis has forced California to do the right thing in halting payments for abortions, even if it is for the wrong reasons. We pray that California will learn its lesson and terminate all future funding for abortions in that state.”

LifeSiteNews

Praise: Pastor Jailed for Pro-Life Witness Gets Early Release

Oakland pastor Walter Hoye, who was sent to jail on March 23 for peacefully counseling and picketing at a local abortion facility, has been released after serving 18 days of his 30-day sentence (see April and May editions of *Pulpit Helps* for earlier details on his arrest and conviction).

The California Catholic Daily reports

that Hoye’s sentence was reduced by 10 days for “good behavior,” plus additional credit by the sentencing judge, Stuart Hing, for the time Hoye spent confined in a patrol car after his arrest.

Hoye was sentenced to 30 days in county jail by Judge Hing of the Alameda Superior Court, who found him guilty of unlawfully approaching two persons entering an abortion facility in Oakland and offering information about abortion alternatives.

LifeSiteNews

Pray: Pirates Attack 2nd Ship Carrying Food Aid

The Christian Post reports that pirates mounted an unsuccessful attempt in late April against another ship carrying World Vision food aid off the coast of Somalia. The *Liberty Sun* continued to Kenya under naval escort, laden with supplies destined for Rwanda.

“We’re relieved that no one was hurt in this attack and that the ship was able to continue to its destination,” said World Vision spokesperson Amy Parodi. “This food is critical to our efforts in Rwanda,” she added. “Farmers as well as malnourished children and people living with AIDS all depend on this product. It’s vital that we’re able to deliver this food as quickly as possible.”

This is the second attack that also threatened a World Vision project—the *Maersk Alabama* was carrying 320 metric tons of vegetable oil for a project in Rwanda when it was captured and retaken earlier in the month.

Religion Today Summaries

Ten Things to Know About Romans

—Part 3 of 4

By Joe McKeever

Editor's Note: In this series, Joe encourages and challenges pastors to take on the message of Romans in their churches by laying the groundwork for study, application, and appreciation of this most intense of Paul's epistles.

6) If You Like Pure Logic and Solid Reasoning, You'll Love Romans.

As we said previously, it's left-brain stuff. Romans is sound thinking and square shooting. No mushy sentimentality, no appealing to our emotions or feelings. You want the facts? Sit down and pay attention!

Apparently, this approach was characteristic of Paul from the beginning. He was orderly in his thinking and disciplined in his study. When you went up against him for verbal battle, you had better be prepared or you would soon have your head handed to you.

After Paul came to know the Lord, he spent time in the Arabian desert re-thinking all that he had learned from the Old Testament scriptures. Then, when he re-entered society and began to interact with his old friends in synagogues and marketplaces, they were stunned at the transformation of his character and the power of his speech. Luke tells us, "*Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ*" (Acts 9:22).

Paul was so strong in his impact and so persuasive in his reasoning that his opponents soon decided to shut him up any way they could. "*And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews, but they were attempting to put him to death*" (Acts 9:29). The disciples in Jerusalem decided the only way to save Paul's life was to sneak him out of town. Thereafter, Luke writes, the church enjoyed peace.

What followed for Paul was an uncertain

period in his hometown of Tarsus as he practiced his tent making trade. We may assume that the Holy Spirit was mellowing him and tempering his abrasive edges and that Paul was continuing to reflect on what the Lord was teaching him. Later, in Acts 11, when Paul is brought to the church at Antioch of Syria, he seems to have become a softer, gentler person.

Still, he retained the steel-trap mind and never lost it. We see that in Romans as clearly as anywhere in the Word.

Take the matter of salvation and the question whether one has to be a practicing Jew in order to be saved. That is not an

issue we deal with today, but apparently it was a major thing in the church at Rome, perhaps causing internal division and prompting Paul to write this letter.

Romans can roughly be outlined as follows: 1:1-17—The Gospel; 1:18-3:20—Our Sin; 3:21-8:39—Our Salvation; 9:1-11:36—The Jews; 12:1-16:27—The Church. This is the simplest outline we could

ask for, but it works and seems to agree with most commentaries I've checked.

Under the third section, "Our Salvation", Paul has five main points to make. 1) Our salvation was achieved by Jesus' death on the cross. 2) We access this salvation simply by faith. 3) Thereafter, we live by a higher standard. 4) Our struggle with the old sinful nature continues, however, for the rest of our lives. 5) Even so, through salvation God has done some amazing things in us.

Under the second point—access to salvation by faith—Paul has several solid sub-points to make to anyone who believes they have to become a Jew in order to be saved. To reinforce the fact that salvation is by faith, Paul builds on the example of the patriarch of Judaism, father Abraham himself.

Abraham is the father of the Jews, but he was saved by faith. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 three times in chapter 4 to get this point across. 1) He was not saved by works. His faith saved him. 2) He was not saved by circumcision. When God declared him righteous, he had not been circumcised. 3) He was not saved by the Law. The Law was not given until Moses, hundreds of years later.

Solid reasoning, right? It's all fact, not opinion and not argumentation.

Later on, in chapter 9, when he again picks up the question of the Jews, Paul employs unanswerable logic in responding to those who thought being a child of Abraham somehow guaranteed them solid standing before God. Notice how he does it:

A) Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. So, you could be a son of Ishmael (which is what the Muslims actually claim) and be a child of Abraham, but not be in the chosen line.

B) If one says, "Okay, I'm a descendant of Isaac," then the question becomes, "Of which son?" Isaac had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Only Jacob's sons became leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel.

C) Paul's point then becomes, "We see then that God chooses whom He pleases," and gives several instances. God is free to show mercy on whomever He will, and who are we to criticize Him?

7) It's Not All Doctrine. Romans Climaxes with the "How-to" of Christian Behavior.

I ran into an old friend at a restaurant in Birmingham. We had known each other 30 years earlier when we were both beginning preachers. He had always been bi-vocational, whereas I had gone on to seminary and served full-time churches. I asked if he was presently pastoring a church.

"I have a little group that meets in a home," he said. Then he laughed. "You'll never guess its name." He was right. I never would have. "I let them name themselves,"

Paul was strong on doctrine, clearly, but doctrine was not an end in itself.

Joe McKeever is director of missions for the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans

he said. "And they chose Doctrinal Studies Baptist Church." Apparently, they loved to study doctrine so much, that was their very identity.

Paul was strong on doctrine, clearly, but doctrine was not an end in itself. The purpose of right teaching was true worship and righteous living.

Now, if the Jewish believers were arguing that one had to be circumcised and keep the law to be saved, the Gentile believers at Rome were evidently insisting the opposite. They were holding that we are "law-free" to the extreme of becoming what today we call "lawless."

In chapter 12 and following, Paul drives home the ethical obligations which this new salvation imposes on believers. It is clearly not enough to be saved; one must then live a new life with one another and before the world.

Some of the commands Paul uttered to those believers stand out. "Do not be conformed to this world," he commands in 12:2. "But be transformed..." "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (12:9). "It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles" (14:21).

Bible students will recall Paul making a similar point in Ephesians 2:8-10. Verses 8 and 9 establish that salvation is by "grace through faith, not of works lest any should perish." So where do works come in? Verse 10 provides the answer.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus that we should bring forth good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

You don't become a member of the military by donning the uniform and saluting

officers. You join a branch of service by going through the application process, then taking the oath of allegiance. Then and only then do you wear the uniform and salute officers. You do so not **in order to** join up but because you **have**.

One last note on this point. Pastors are frequently looking for texts to help their congregations understand what it means to be a healthy church. The pre-eminent text for that is Romans chapter 12. That is as beautiful and complete a photo of a healthy congregation as we will ever need. It starts with complete commitment in verses 1-2, goes on to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in verses 3-8, and then describes the kind of behavior that kind of redeemed, committed, Spirit-filled believers should engage in.



HIDDEN WISDOM

Solve the acrostic by using the clues listed below to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, instruction, or promise. When read vertically, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. All quotations are from the KJV.

1F	2I	3D			4J	5K	6L	7C	8F		9H	10L	11G		12I	13B	
14H	15A	16F		17G	18K		19D	20E	21C	22F	23K	24L	25A	26J	27G	28H	
29D	30C		31F	32K	33I	34J			35B	36D	37G			38E	39B	40F	41D
		42C	43H	44F	45J		46I	47K		48G	49A	50C	51I	52K	53D	54B	
	55G	56A	57L		58J	59E	60C		61B	62H	63F	64E		65A	66D	67I	
68L	69G	70J	71D		72A	73E	74F		75I	76L	77C	78J	79K	80E	81G	82F	83D
		84J	85C	86I		87D	88K	89L	90G	91F	92J	93A					

CLUES

A. "A dreadful _____ in his ears"

65 15 25 56 93 49 72

B. A slight odor

61 35 39 13 54

C. How long Christians should rejoice

42 77 85 7 50 30 21 60

D. They went with David as he fled from Absalom

19 41 53 66 71 87 36 3 83 29

E. Bray

73 64 80 59 20 38

F. "He that wrought _____ with Peter... was mighty in me"

44 63 40 74 82 22 16 91 1 31 8

G. A Levite in Nehemiah's time

37 69 11 90 27 81 17 55 48

H. What Solomon's throne was made of

62 43 9 28 14

I. Moslem physician and philosopher (1126-1198)

46 33 2 86 75 12 67 51

J. He led the tribe of Issachar during the wilderness wanderings

92 34 58 84 70 45 4 78 26

K. Memento

47 32 88 5 52 18 23 79

L. A downward slope

57 6 89 24 76 10 68

Answers on page 38

Exchange Student Accepts Christ, Loses Family

By Charlie Warren

SHERZOD ODILOV, AN EXCHANGE STUDENT FROM UZBEKISTAN, DID NOT ANTICIPATE THE HIGH PRICE HE WOULD PAY FOR HIS DECISION TO FOLLOW CHRIST, BUT KNOWING THE PRICE CHRIST PAID FOR HIM, HE STANDS FIRM.

When Sherzod, who recently graduated from Jacksonville (Ark.) High School, telephoned his Muslim parents in Uzbekistan to tell them of his newfound faith, his father disowned him, making it clear he was no longer welcome in his home and was never again to speak to his mother or his siblings. He withdrew all funds from Sherzod's U.S. bank account, arranged to cancel his son's U.S. sponsorship and college scholarship, and even drew up legal papers declaring Sherzod is no longer his son.

As devastating as that must be for an 18-year-old, Sherzod remains strong in his commitment to Christ. He faces his uncertain future with confidence that God will lead him.

Sherzod was led to faith in Christ by Kari Hand, 16, who befriended him and introduced him to the Savior. "I was strictly Muslim," Sherzod said. "All I knew was Islam, and I believed in Islam. I really prayed. I thought all religions except Islam were wrong."

Then he met Kari at a basketball game. "After that, whenever I talked to her, she always talked about Christianity and her faith and about Grace Baptist Church [in Scott, Ark.]," Sherzod recounted. His initial reaction was anger, but as time passed, Kari's testimony and witness began to reach him. "I asked a lot of questions of her, everything about Christianity. I asked them on purpose to see if she could answer or not. She did. Then he began to read the Bible and explore the difference between Islam and Christianity. "In Islam we have to pray five times in a day, and it is not guaranteed that you go to heaven. It is not guaranteed that all your sins are going to be forgiven," he said. "But when I read the Bible, I began to realize I had been following

something that was wrong all my life." He began attending Grace Baptist, where Kari is a member.

Then one day while Kari was on the phone with him, she asked if he was ready to accept Christ. He was, and she guided him through what it means to confess sin, repent, and place his trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. He responded by praying to receive Christ. In conversations with the church pastor, Jerry Terrell, about seeking baptism, they decided he should share his decision to his parents.

Sherzod said his parents had always shown their love for him, met his needs and supported him in every way. He thought they would support his decision. Then he phoned his parents on his dad's birthday, and his father responded by disowning him.

Sherzod was scheduled to return to Uzbekistan that summer. They contacted Homeland Security, explaining the situation. Their contact said, "Do not put him on that plane!" Terrell noted if Sherzod returned, he would have no place to go, he might not be able to get out again and as a former Muslim converted to Christianity, he could be in danger.

Terrell baptized Sherzod June 24, 2007, and Grace Baptist has made a commitment to assist the young man with financial and legal responsibilities as he seeks religious asylum in the United States. Linda Hand, Kari's mother, is helping with all the paperwork challenges.

They have filed for an F-1 visa, which will allow him to stay as a student. He had already been accepted at the University of Central Arkansas at Conway, where he will major in international relations and political science. But without his Uzbekistan scholarship, the university needed a guarantee regarding his financial support,

because an F-1 visa does not allow him to work. Doing so would mean deportation.

Terrell presented the need to the church and they voted to sponsor Sherzod for tuition, room and board, books and spending money. Yet, such a small church (about 150 resident members) knows they will need help. "I told them if we could get 100 churches or individuals to put up \$200



Sherzod Odilov with Kari Hand.

Photo by Charlie Warren, courtesy of Baptist Press.

each, we could collect \$20,000," Terrell said. "We felt that would be enough to take care of him for a whole year." At that service, members gave almost \$2,000.

"Religious asylum is the ultimate goal," Terrell said, but many people are filing for those and they are difficult to obtain. Also, the cost is about \$4,000. "But we believe with God's help, anything is possible," Terrell said. "So far the Lord has really inspired everything that has taken place. I believe God is in this.

"I've been really proud of Sherzod," Terrell said. "Even after these things have all taken place, he continues to say, 'I believe I've done the right thing. I stand by my decision. This is what I believe.' He's been strong in that. It has really been an inspiration to our teenagers, and our adults also, to meet someone who stands strong, realizing the price he has had to pay. God has really blessed us by bringing him to us. He'll be a real blessing to the Lord."

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- L. Descent

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1. Green (Job 8:16).
2. Blue and purple (Jer. 10:9).
3. White (Rev. 2:17).
4. Red (Matt. 16:2).
5. Purple (Prov. 31:22).
6. Yellow (Lev. 13:29-30).
7. The grey beard (Prov. 20:29).
8. Blue (Num. 15:38).
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10. Scarlet (Matt. 27:27-28).

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Going Expositional: From the Pulpit to People

By John Meador

THE CHALLENGE FOR EVERY PREACHER WHO HAS STUDIED THE TEXT THOROUGHLY IS FINDING A WAY TO BEST COMMUNICATE THE AMAZING TRUTHS HE HAS DISCOVERED TO THE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO HEAR A WORD FROM THE LORD.

How we get that truth from the study to the pulpit—and then to the people—is our focus here. How do we introduce, organize and communicate the thoughts that gripped our hearts so powerfully in the study? Several things come to mind.

First, the preacher must “be himself.” As one old preacher said years ago with a gravelly voice and country jargon, “you must be who you is, because if you ain’t who you is, you is who you ain’t!” I agree!

The strangest and most ineffective thing I can do is try to mimic some other preacher’s approach. God will work through my voice, my personality and my thought processes. In a similar way to how the Holy Spirit used the personalities of those who penned the original texts of Scripture, He will use us. At one church I pastored, I followed a man who’d been there for 18 years and who was one of best communicators I’d heard. It would have been a bad approach to duplicate his style. Instead, it was important that I believe God would use how he’d made me to get the truth across.

Second, the preacher must desperately desire to see transformation take place. If I don’t believe the Word will transform, my manner will belie that fact. My approach may become more informational than it is transformational—giving the impression that God’s truth is optional.

People can sense our confidence, our zeal for the Word—I know—I’ve heard it in the voices and in the demeanor of other preachers. Let me ask you this question: “Do you believe what you share this Sunday will change someone’s life?” If not, why do we preach? This spiritual expectation and intensity comes through in Paul’s admonition to Timothy: *“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus,*

who is to judge the living and the dead ...preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2a). We need to solemnly hear this charge.

Third, the preacher must consider his audience and know his flock. As I am among the people I preach to every weekend, I get a sense of what they deal with and how the Word can meet them in the middle of their daily lives. Interacting heavily with people forces me to be simple, practical and relevant. Hebrews 13:7 reminds us that the people ought to also see the lives of their teachers being lived out, and they are urged to follow our faith as they see our conduct. When people become aware that I “get” what is happening in their lives and that I care about them, the Word has a much more fertile soil in which to be planted.

Fourth, we must keep the message simple enough and clear enough to be understood. I recently heard a man who seemed fairly impressed with his vast knowledge. Truthfully, he was a brilliant individual who knew the Word well, but his approach was so wordy and complicated that it had the effect of losing the proverbial needle in the haystack. I needed the needle, and I didn’t need to wade through the haystack of words to find it. He lost me long before he finished.

Fifth, the preacher should keep his language in sync with his people. Every church culture is unique and we must be sensitive to the ordinary language of those we lead. Dip deep enough into the language of the

young people in your church to stay relevant, but remained tied enough to the older members of your congregation to avoid becoming overly trendy. A good balance here is essential.

Sixth, devote great time and energy into introducing and illustrating the text. This is always the most challenging part of my sermon preparation—it just takes time. Jesus is always the Master and example, and His teaching was filled with the kind of things you and I need to implement in our own messages.

It is an eye-opener to read through the gospels and ask yourself, “Could I be so bold as to do that, or to say that?” While some of his statements seem radical, they were very much the language of the day. We must be willing to be relevant in the same way. While God’s Word alone transforms, **your** words may need some help.

Lastly, prayerful preparation has amazing power. There have been times when I’ve prayed through every point of what I am about to preach, and the Spirit of God grips my heart in an amazing way, giving me even more insight about that text or message. When I get to that point in the actual preaching of the message, there is an unusual anointing—as though God Himself is emphasizing this. It is one of the peaks of preaching for me. It has the effect of helping me realize that I am not just saying some things about what God has said to people, but that God Himself is speaking through me. I am His ambassador.

Preacher, God will use you. Expect Him to take you and use you in the unique way He’s made and developed you. Stand on that stage in the realization that someone’s life is about to be changed. After all, yours already has been!



John Meador is senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas.

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