

PREACHER'S

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"Speaking the truth in love . . ." Eph. 4:15

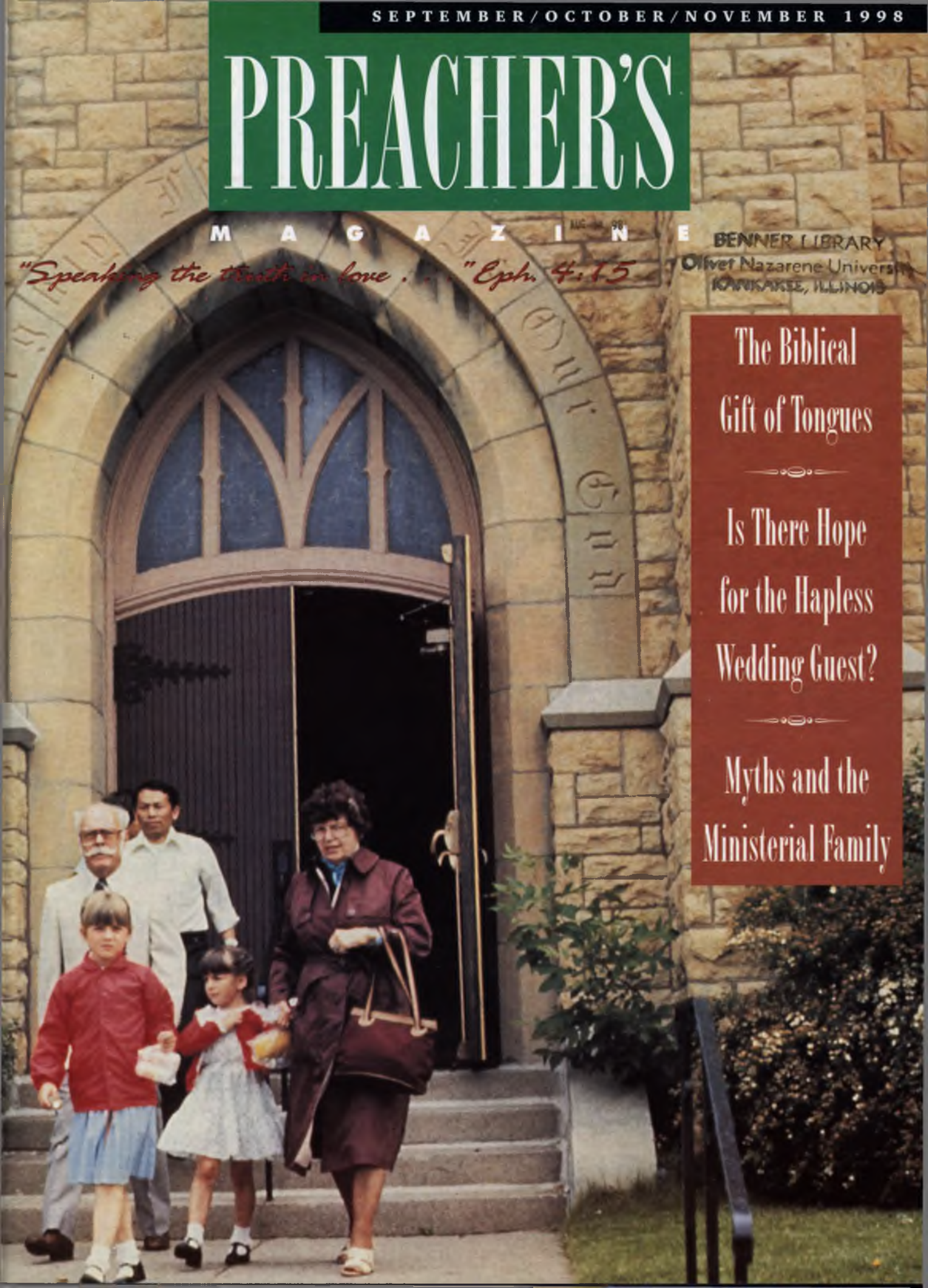
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The Biblical
Gift of Tongues

Is There Hope
for the Hapless
Wedding Guest?

Myths and the
Ministerial Family



PREACHER'S

M A G A Z I N E

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An Unfaltering Faith

Daniel 3 stretches my concept of God. Nebuchadnezzar erected an image and ordered everyone to bow down to honor it. Three Hebrew fellows possessed faith in a great God who “quenched the fury of the flames” (Heb. 11:34). They refused man-centered worship. The Bible says, “We must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29).

Pastors, keep an unfaltering faith in God’s power. The trio declared their faith in God: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king” (Dan. 3:17). They trusted God’s power to deliver. God **is** able to deliver.

Our pastoral journey is not always comfortable and convenient. Tragedy strikes without favoritism. Yet, our God has power to deliver.

Martin Luther, living under threat, drew from Ps. 46: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (v. 1).

Pastors, keep an unfaltering faith in God’s wisdom. The men replied: “The God we serve is able to save us . . . But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold” (Dan. 3:17-18). They trusted God’s wisdom.

Our God can deliver if He chooses, “but if not” we will remain faithful. God works out His purposes in ways He chooses, not in the way we would choose.

What happens to us when our prayers *seem* unanswered? Can we trust God’s wisdom? So often we barter with our prayers: “If the Lord does this, then I’ll serve Him.” We get so used to telling God what to do that we find it difficult to trust Him to use His wisdom.

I looked into the newly made grave at a pink and white casket. That baby only lived six weeks. The cause of death was unknown. My eyes focused on the young couple. Tragedy had ripped their hearts. Hopes and dreams lay shattered. What could I, a student pastor, say? My only answer sounded trite: “Trust God in spite of it!” I had to trust God’s wisdom. “But if not—!”

Now, 39 years later, with the recent loss of our unborn twin grandsons, I still say, “Trust God in spite of it.” I still believe in God’s wisdom. I’ve discovered we aren’t free until we can say, “But if not . . .’ Even if You don’t deliver me, Lord, I will trust You!”

Our faith does not rest in deliverance, but in God! By trusting God’s wisdom, I have learned from personal experience that, out of our greatest hurts, God can bring our greatest ministry.

Pastors, keep an unfaltering faith in God’s presence.

In anger, the king ordered the furnace “heated seven times hotter than usual” (Dan. 3:20). Guards tied them and threw them into the furnace: “Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, ‘Weren’t there three

men that we tied up and threw into the fire? . . . Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods” (vv. 24-25).

God’s presence makes a difference! God goes with us in the furnace of our testings! That fourth One looks familiar: “Immanuel”—which means, ‘God with us’” (Matt. 1:23). More than solutions and answers, we need Him! The Lord promises we will “find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16). God doesn’t deliver us *from* the flames, but He delivers us *in* the flames. Pastors, Divine Presence walks in our midst.

Throughout your pastoral career, learn to trust God’s power, God’s wisdom, and God’s presence. God’s deliverance is always complete: “So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the . . . prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was *no smell of fire on them*” (Dan. 3:26-27, emphasis added).

What a way to come through a fiery test! If they could go through the fire and come out without the smell of smoke, surely God can bring us through our fiery trials without the stench of resentment, without a vengeful spirit, without blaming someone, without criticizing or whining or feeling bitter.

Only God can deliver from life’s fiery furnaces without the lingering hint of our trials—and bring glory to God! No one is promised a fire-free existence, but God protects us even in the midst of the fire.

Pastor, face your fire! Leave the results to God! Expect His presence in the midst of the fire! “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

BY RANDAL E.

DENNY
Editor

SPokane, Washington



The Limits of Plagiarism

Editor's Note: *J. B. Chapman, general superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, was the founding editor of The Preacher's Magazine. His first issue began in January of 1926. Dr. Chapman served as editor for 22 years, until his death. He was known as a beloved preacher and leader and a prolific writer. We are honored to bring this requested article from J. B. Chapman's pen, first published in August 1926.*

I am not as old a preacher as I hope to be sometime, but I have been paying pretty careful attention to preaching now for twenty-seven years, and time has not served to give me any greater respect for the man who makes loud profession of being "original" in the substance and arrangement of his preaching material. Not that I would question the preacher's veracity who claims that he takes nothing consciously from others, but that I feel sure he would have had a much more effective ministry if he had done so. For in most instances the preacher who boasts of his originality could sign his name to John B. Culpepper's confession. Culpepper said that when he started out as a young man to be a preacher, he determined to be original or nothing, and he soon discovered that he was both. Revising his theories and tactics, Culpepper later said that he proposed to use at least as much judgment as an old sow, and he had observed that when someone throws corn over the fence the old sow hastens to get as much of it as she can.

And come to think of it, what is

there that a preacher can claim as original, anyway? If his doctrines are orthodox, it is because he has drawn them from the Bible and from the interpretations of the fathers; and if he got them there, they are not his own. If he is expert in logic and rhetoric, he learned these arts from teachers and from books. If he is adept in homiletical arrangement, someone showed him how to do it. If he is a master of language and diction, he owes his accomplishments to others.

Plagiarism as a fault and a crime is possible only to one who makes profession of originality, for he alone attempts to take to himself credit which should at least be shared with others. If a preacher appropriates the material and arrangement of others and then claims exclusive right, he is both a thief and a liar. But if he makes such use of the work of others as he can in his effort to be an effective preacher and makes no superior claims regarding the matter, but rather confesses himself debtor to all whom he has ever met, and special debtor to those who have contributed directly to his store of things old and new, he is both honest and truthful.

Why do men write books and publish papers if one is not to be permitted to use the gold that he digs from these mines? Why do men waste their time and mine in talking, if they do not want me to remember what they say? And do men who write and speak expect me to believe that they did not learn what they are saying from someone else? Do they expect me

to believe that wisdom was born with them? They may not always be conscious of copying, but I can find the most of what I hear them say in books and in magazines, or I can find them others who said in substance the same things they are saying and said them before the present speaker ever said them.

I have heard many a holiness preacher preach on "Christian Perfection," following exactly the outline which Ralston gives in his "Elements of Divinity." And you know that chapter was made up from Ralston's sermon outline on the subject. It is possible that many whom I have heard did not get their outline right from Ralston, but they got it from someone else who got it from him. And my own personal belief is that these preachers did well to use this outline, for it covers the ground and is better by far than the majority of us could make for ourselves.

There should be no dodging of the issue involved here. There should be no "soft pedaling" and white lying. There should be no false standards uplifted for the hindrance of young preachers and for the hurting of older men's consciences. The right and sensible thing, we believe, is for the preacher to make all the use he can of everything that comes to his hand for making him a more effective preacher. When he hears someone say a good thing, he should try to remember it and say it himself sometime. If he reads a good thing in a book, he should "run it through his own mill" and make it his own. If he finds a sermon outline which suits his mold, or if he finds in it a single point that will work into his own processes, he should appropriate it. The business of disseminating the truth of the gospel is not a commercial affair, and there is no place for patents and copyrights. If the preacher goes about trying to be "original," passing up material and methods which would help him in his work, he is the slave of artificiality and the morbid victim of the shallow criticisms of pretentious theologues. **PM**

BY J. B. CHAPMAN
Founding editor, The
Preacher's Magazine,
KANSAS CITY



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I Want to Know Christ

Enriching Our Worship—
Deepening Our Holiness

The resources available to us pastors, teachers, and spiritual leaders in the Holiness tradition are much richer and more diverse than we sometimes suppose. We draw from a broad and ancient heritage. Our familiarity with that heritage can enrich our own lives. Our use of that heritage can resource and enrich our practice of ministry. *Holiness Teaching—New Testament Times to Wesley* is volume 1 of the Great Holiness Classics series. In it we find insights into the understanding and practice of holiness in pre-Wesley church history. This rich historical heritage offers a quarry that can be mined to resource ministry. What follows is a sample exercise drawing from this heritage to prepare for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We will draw from one of the sources in *Holiness Teaching*, François Fénelon. His work, *Christian Perfection*, is a devotional and practical treatment of the holy life. John Wesley valued it enough to include it in his *Christian Library*. We would not agree with everything Fénelon writes, and we would ultimately find his theological understanding inadequate from our perspective. Nonetheless, we may draw from the well of his spiritual journey and find refreshment.¹ What follows is not expected to be used as it is, but will hopefully stimulate your thoughts and provide some

starter ideas for your development and application.

Text: Phil. 3:7-11

Introduction

We live in a culture of mission statements. Our schools, businesses, and stores have them, often prominently displayed so that we will know what they are about. Popular writers like Stephen Covey encourage personal mission statements to keep us focused. They remind us of the importance of a clear sense of purpose. When we know who we are and what we most want to do, we can come closer to attaining those goals. We are better able to understand our life experience and how to respond to it in ways that serve our chosen purposes. Without a clear understanding of purpose, we tend to drift and wander, moved by circumstance and environment.

While our popular culture celebrates mission statements, it did not invent them. In fact, in this passage from Philippians Paul writes a first-century personal mission statement. He wants to express clearly the priority of purpose in his life. He wants to invite the readers of his letter (both the Philippians and us) to share his mission commitment.

As we prepare to share the Lord's Supper together, we want to review Paul's personal mission statement—and ours. To share at the Lord's table is to publicly declare a personal mission statement commitment. Fidelity to

the meaning and purpose of this sacrament calls for us to search our hearts and examine our lives to be sure that our private commitment matches our public profession.

To help us in this time of self-examination and preparation, we will draw from the writings of François Fénelon. This 17th-century Christian devoted much of his life to the pursuit of holiness. His writings reflect the searching heart of one who can help make our journey today.

To Know Christ

We must imitate Christ. This is to live as He lived, to think as He thought, to conform ourselves to His image, which is the seal of our sanctification. . . . [Lord], I make Thee the entire sacrifice of my pride, of the vanity which possesses me up to the present. . . . "Turn my eyes that I see not vanity," that I see only Thee, and that I see myself before Thee. It will be then that I shall know what I am and what Thou art.²

The cry of the consecrated heart is to know Christ. It is not enough to work on His behalf. It is not enough to accomplish great deeds for the Kingdom. So long as our focus is on what we can do and the accomplishments and trophies we can offer to Christ, we are settling for the scraps from the table. We have not discovered the feast. We risk entrapment in a holiness of works. The culmination of our spiritual life is what we are able to do, but not a discovery of who He is.

Paul has declared that the discovery of the knowledge of Christ is beyond the boundaries of my achievement, however nobly intentioned. To know Christ requires that I go beyond myself. I must leap beyond the limits of my abilities, my worthiness, and my holiness to a place where I come to rest in Christ alone. I cannot clearly see Christ as long as my gaze is directed toward myself.

BY CARL LETH
Senior pastor
RALEIGH,
NORTH CAROLINA



The cry of the consecrated heart is "I want to know Christ."

Suffering and Knowing

Once our focus is directed toward the discovery of Christ we find that our path leads away from our spiritual success to the shared experience of His suffering. Paul explicitly links knowing Christ and sharing His suffering. Somehow knowledge of Christ is discovered through suffering with Him. I wish this were not so. I would much prefer to know Christ through His revelations of power and demonstration of victorious Lordship. And it is true that knowing Christ includes all of these. Yet, to fully know Him leads me beyond these to find Him in His suffering.

Consider that

Jesus Christ is born in a stable. He has to flee to Egypt. He passes thirty years of His life in the shop of a craftsman. He suffers hunger, thirst, weariness. He is poor, scorned and abject. He teaches the doctrine of heaven, and no one listens to Him. All the great and wise pursue Him, take Him, and make Him suffer frightful torments. They treat Him like a slave, make Him die between two thieves, after having preferred a thief to Him. That was the life that Jesus chose, and we, we have horror of every sort of humiliation! The slightest contempt is unbearable to us.³

We prefer to suppose that Jesus came to free us from suffering. We are quick and persistent

in our pleas to heaven for deliverance from suffering. We are aggrieved when relief from suffering comes too slow or seems not to come at all. We are indignant when we are treated as slaves, or scorned or rejected. We are persuaded that the obvious result of the exercise of divine power on our behalf will result in our escape from suffering.

Yet Jesus willingly chose suffering. "Let us compare our life to that of Christ. Let us remember that He is the master, and that we are the slaves; that He is all-powerful, and that we are only weakness. He lowers himself, and we raise ourselves."⁴ If we would know Christ, our path must surely wind its way through the valley of His sufferings. This is no detour. It is not to be regretted or avoided. We dare not be so anxious to escape it that we fail to discover its lessons. To know Christ is to share in the fellowship of His sufferings.

It is through finding Christ in the midst of our sufferings that they are redeemed. It is through finding and following *His* way through our sufferings that they are transformed into a means of grace to us. When we share fellowship with Christ in suffering, we come to know Him in a new and fuller way. "Let us commence to walk on the road which Jesus Christ has marked for us, since it is the only one which can lead us to Him."⁵

Invitation

As we come to the table, let us

bring our lives and the circumstances of our lives into Christ-centered focus. Let us remember and reaffirm the priority of our lives to come to know Him. Let us not bring our triumphs as an offering to the table, but rather our submitted willingness to share in His sufferings. Let us bring our sufferings to Him—not to plead that He would deliver us **from** them, but rather that He would meet us **in** them. To share in the bread and cup of this feast declares that I want to know Christ, willingly sharing the victory *and* the suffering of His cross.

Let us not pretend to be able to reach this state by our own strength. Everything in us resists it. But let us console ourselves in the presence of God. . . . Let us find, then, all our strength in Him who became voluntarily weak to strengthen us. Let us enrich ourselves by His poverty, and let us say with confidence, "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." I want to follow, o Jesus, the road which Thou has taken! I want to imitate Thee; I can only do so by Thy grace.⁶ **PM**

1. Paul M. Bassett, *Holiness Teaching—New Testament Times to Wesley* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1997), 327-31.

2. François Fénelon, *Christian Perfection* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 43; *Holiness Teaching*, 331.

3. *Christian Perfection*, 43; *Holiness Teaching*, 331-32.

4. *Christian Perfection*, 43; *Holiness Teaching*, 332.

5. *Christian Perfection*, 44.

6. *Ibid.*

Pontius' Puddle



Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary Heritage Day

November 23, 1995

"Bresee's Mission and Ours"

Are we keeping the mission of the church or have we departed from it?

Bresee's Church of the Nazarene and his early followers entered the foreign mission field slowly. They wanted first to "Christianize Christianity" in America by setting up centers of holy fire in its great cities. As long ago as 100 years, Bresee perceived the creeping decadence of American society and sought moral reform for it through the outpouring of the purifying Spirit upon the Church. He did not seek to be divisive, but rather to conserve, consolidate, and propagate the message and experience of perfect love that he inherited from John Wesley through both Methodism and the American Holiness Movement. Bresee could have easily applied to the Nazarenes what John Wesley wrote about why God raised the Methodists: "Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land" (*Works*, 8:299).

The decade of 1890s, when the Church of the Nazarene began, was one of great change in American society. Christians placed much faith in progress and reform, but no longer in what one historian called "boundlessness." Some other Holiness groups, particularly the Churches of God, founded in the 1880s, rejected denominational structure altogether. But Bresee did not. He believed in superintendency. The frontier days were over. There was during these times, as

another historian put it, a "search for order." Bresee and other simultaneously organizing holiness churches throughout the country were part of that search for order. They intuited that consolidation would be the best way to sustain the vitality of the movement into the 20th century. Rather than continuing to be an increasingly marginalized group within Methodism, many Holiness people decided to maintain the "yeast" and "leaven" of holiness within Christianity by organizing separately. Even more so in the first decade of the new century, they saw the extremes of fanaticism on one side and ritualism on the other. This pushed them faster toward one another in various unions. It became even clearer in this decade that the Church of the Nazarene represented a middle way as Pentecostalism emerged.

"Centers of holy fire" must be the base of the church. Holiness and nothing else was the reason to be. From the National Holiness Association and from his own Methodist background, Bresee possessed strong aversion to any other doctrinal or experiential emphasis.

At about the same time, A. B. Simpson was building the Christian and Missionary Alliance upon the four-pointed platform of justification, plus divine healing and the premillennial second coming of Christ. Bresee squarely rejected the latter two emphases. He believed in divine healing but feared emphasis upon it. He believed in the Second Coming but was not dogmatic enough to

push for a particular version of it. Even theologies and practices of baptism, long divisive in Protestant history, did not concern him. The church he founded intended to gather up all of what was best in the Holiness Movement. He did not found the Church of the Nazarene to be only a mission to the neglected poor, for the Salvation Army was doing that, though urban missions were dear to his heart and integral to the message of holiness.

Bresee did not intend for the church only to represent certain political convictions, though he had firm ones regarding the prohibition of liquor. He did not found the church to be only another evangelical Methodist group. He did sense the growing formalism and coldness of Methodism, but that alone was not central to his concern. He did not intend that the Church of the Nazarene be a sect. That was one reason why he and others did not all enter the Wesleyan or Free Methodist denominations, even though they clearly taught holiness. They had become, for Bresee, too sectarian, too aligned with one particular section of the country and political party; and they were strictly organized and controlled to embrace the dynamics of the movement. He intended for Nazarenes to be a church, not a sect.

What did being a Holiness church mean for Bresee? A Holiness church was once filled with the glory of God. That describes what I have read of the Los Angeles church under Bresee, as well as what he tells us, especially in his Isaiah sermons, about the church. God manifested His holy presence, and the people experienced the Spirit of God. The Spirit came in the music, prayers, and preaching until there could not help but be deep emotional response—so much so that visitors came out of curiosity to hear the loud and spontaneous "amens" and "hallelujahs," to see men and women become so blessed that they could not help but shout, stand, wave their arms and handkerchiefs, and

BY FLOYD T. CUNNINGHAM
Academic Dean



laugh and cry for joy. Some people today would describe it as Pentecostal, even though there was no speaking in tongues.

In the best sense, it was a place where the purifying and empowering Spirit of Pentecost descended upon God's people again and again. More than emotion, it was just like the first Pentecost. The experience of God was life-transforming. Broken lives and homes were fixed. Men and women and young people repented and found Jesus Christ as Redeemer. Believers found cleansing from their deepest depravities and freedom from their self-willedness and pride. They found Christ as Sanctifier. The saints went on to perfection, not because of Bresee, not because of anything but God's marvelous and wonderful descent upon His people.

A Holiness church to Bresee was one in which believers were sanctified wholly. Justification changed one's life destiny, true; and process was as much a part of conversion as crisis; but he, along with others in the Holiness Movement lured, invited, even pressed believers toward a second crisis experience in their spiritual journeys. Bresee described this experience in a plethora of biblical terms, images, and metaphors: entire sanctification, baptism with the Holy Spirit, Pentecost, perfect love, Christian perfection, cleansing from Adamic sin, purity of heart, the fullness of the Spirit, Christlikeness, Canaan. It did not matter so much what you called it, as long as you had it. Preachers and people alike expected the Holy Spirit to instantaneously sanctify wholly, just as the Holy Spirit worked in conversion. It did not mean that ones so sanctified did not need to continue to grow in grace toward fuller Christlikeness; but the experience was supposed to issue in a people and a church that were uniquely God's, separated from the world while at the same time enabled and empowered to witness within it.

What were the marks or the characteristics of such a people to

Bresee? To him a Holiness church was a doctrine to be defended. Wesleyans have always criticized Calvinists for their doctrinal rigidity—for their allegiance to creeds. This was not what Bresee and others meant by holiness, just a doctrine others forgot that ought to be preserved. Holiness was a life lived with utter love toward the lost and needy. Holiness was antagonism to formality and worldliness, and opposition to the social sources of poverty and injustice. There was a pure and common drive among early Holiness people to demonstrate righteousness by self-abandonment.

Once Bresee preached, "Men and women of pride and place, who scorn the drunkard, and who gather your robes about you in the presence of a harlot, your pride, your worldliness, your hatred to holiness, is as soul-destroying as . . . the viler sins of your sisters and brothers" (*Isaiah*, 118). That speaks of a dynamic love rather than reclusion and moral smugness, which would be, for Bresee, evidences of unholiness rather than holiness.

Inviting parishioners into the experience of entire sanctification, Bresee preached: "You dedicate your wealth, much or little. It seems as though it will be taken away. Well, it is not yours, and if the Lord sees fit to give it to some other servant, you should be able to say, 'Thy will be done.' You give up your family, your all. I resign my will to be impelled by His will" (*Matthew*, 75). He also told them, "Only the heart that is melted with the most intense love, that is heated with divine fire in the furnace of the most holy affection, is in condition to be a channel of the holiest and fullest love to men" and women (*ibid.*, 131). He did not believe that any truly beneficial service to humanity could be sustained without perfected love, and that the fruition of perfect love would be service to both the spiritual and physical needs of humankind. Bresee had concern for both the crisis and the content of sanctification. He was not after

the experience only for the sake of testifying to a second crisis. It was the fruit of the sanctified life that was of the essence.

A Holiness church was one empowered by the Spirit. No doubt to Bresee a people filled with the Holy Spirit would burst forth from the church just as the disciples had at Pentecost, with the message of salvation on their lips and the marks of His purifying grace in their lives. They would no longer be timid, but bold; no longer stammering, but, like the early disciples, given words to say by the Spirit. A Spirit-filled church was an evangelistic church, spontaneously going out to the street corners and slums, the "highways and byways." They reached out and witnessed to all what God was doing. There was no conflict between a Spirit-filled church and a growing one. The two were inseparable.

A Holiness church was a purified church. Bresee intentionally talked in moderate ways about "standards." He preferred that the Holy Spirit deal directly with converts about remaining sin. He preferred not to list and legislate. But in the 1908 union, he accepted the necessity of spelling out some rules.

Later Nazarenes, particularly those living between the World Wars, added rules that would separate the way they looked and acted from the rest of the society. Yet, when the church was its most legalistic, its growth rate was the fastest. If there is some connection, it would confirm what analysts of church growth conclude as to why conservative churches grow: people want and need to commit themselves to a cause that demands sacrifice. Anything in life that comes cheap is worthless. Forefathers and mothers in the Holiness churches knew that discipleship was costly. Historically, churches that have demanded little of their members have declined.

Whether Bresee would have appreciated the addition of more rules in later decades is doubtful, but he certainly understood that

"Centers of holy fire" must be the base of the church.

following Christ demanded much. He wanted holy people to be different in observable ways from others in their social environs.

What happened to missions?

There is a tendency in any type of organization to assume that it can be improved by more efficient management. Increasingly there has been a tendency in the church toward "bureaucratization." It is almost inevitable given institutional structure as well as the trends in society to assume that greater planning, control, and conformity to denominational standards will produce a more efficient and, hence, growing church. The goal is to conserve and propagate holiness by greater consolidation—the same goal that Bresee hoped the Church of the Nazarene would fulfill. The problem is that when movements institutionalize, they lose the very characteristics that made them dynamic and alive. Pioneers with charisma were replaced by responsible managers when millions of dollars were at stake. It is as though the Spirit is being "domesticated" or "tamed." The majestic glory of God coming spontaneously and serendipitously might be crowded out of the way. How do we keep the glory down? Not simply by "keeping the tempo up." The second generation, as Timothy Smith says, tried that. Not by more efficient management. The post-war generation initiated that, adopting corporate ways of administering the denomination. All this may have been necessary, even good, for it is important to the mission of the church to have competent administrators. We needed our contributions managed properly.

It seems sometimes as though historical forces are inevitable. When any religious movement institutionalizes, it rapidly loses its dynamic character. During the fourth or fifth decades of its existence, new reform movements arise. It appears that God keeps raising up people among whom He is able to work, ones among whom He is able to pour out His Spirit, as Mendell Taylor likes to say. Whenever the Spirit's blessing is blocked

or thwarted by institutional structures, God forges another path. Within a few years after Luther broke from the stifling structures of Catholicism, Lutheranism itself was growing cold, and Anabaptism spread. Within Reformed or Calvinist churches, Pietism arose. Puritanism and later Methodism developed as revival movements within the Church of England. The Holiness Movement within American Methodism and Protestantism as a whole arose.

Has institutionalism thwarted the mission of the church or furthered it? Are Holiness people still able by establishing centers of holy fire in the great cities of the world to Christianize Christianity and bring holiness within God's church? Is there still a way in which Holiness people can, by well-proclaimed doctrines and by Christlike living, bear the message of sanctification to God's people and to the world? Is the sun setting on the Holiness Movement, or can it be dynamic as a reform movement within the church? Can Holiness churches be revived, or must they stand aside while God raises up others? Finally, are we content being small but holy sects within Christianity, but without much interest in its broader reaches, without anything to offer the world, without any influence within the Christian world?

As I travel around on deputation tours in local churches—one of the privileges of being a missionary, I find many alive and growing groups with pastors and laypersons dedicated not to the institution of the church alone, but to its mission. Many churches have dynamic worship services, whether traditional or contemporary in style. At times God's glory descends. Holiness is preached. More important, perfect love is manifest. Exciting, innovative evangelistic programs reach into inner cities and other communities. Our deeds may not be well known, but there is a revived and dynamic compassion, and a deep desire among many to return to our doctrinal and experiential roots.

Many congregations are intentionally broadening—not theologically but socially and ethnically. We see a revived interest in John Wesley as the theological mentor as well as model evangelist and organizer. We could still learn much from how Wesley managed over several decades to keep Methodism a growing and influential "church within" the Church of England. We are finding new ways of evangelizing modern suburbanites, a people who are much farther away from Christian values, norms, and language than many in Bresee's time. Although institutionalism looms over the church, God's Spirit nevertheless breaks through in new ways and words even amid structure.

God can sanctify and use humanity, individuals and structures, whether churchly or social. An optimism of grace is implanted in the theology, an optimism of the ability of God to re-form human beings into the likeness of Christ. We can enjoy dynamic inward growth within Christian perfection. We hope not only that God does and will continue to pour out His Spirit on us but also that we become conduits of the Spirit, agents of the Spirit within the world and the church. Is it too radical to say that God will seek reform in and through the structures? Will God keep the church returning to perfect love as the great mark of holiness? To use perfect love as the dynamic of perpetual change and outreach until Jesus comes?

Let's pray: "While on others You are calling, while on others You are pouring out Your Spirit, O God, do not pass us by. O Lord, we want our church to be true to our original mission. We want to preach holiness and to live holy lives. We want a church filled with compassion. We want to be empowered by Your Spirit, O Lord.

"Even so, Lord Jesus, come upon us. Re-form us. Keep us as Your people. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from us. Keep the joy of salvation among us. Melt us. Mold us. Fill us. Use us, now and forevermore. Amen." **PM**

Preparing Your Attitude for Sunday

These faith declarations and statements I want to make on Sundays.

SUNDAY REVIEW. Pastor, before you walk out to preach to your people on Sunday, read the following out loud and see the difference it makes inside of you!

This is Sunday! This is the day Jesus rose from the dead. This is Resurrection Day! This is Victory Day. This is Celebration Day!

This is Sunday! This is the day that God's kingdom will grow and expand like no other day of the week. Today hundreds of thousands of people will leave the kingdom of darkness and enter the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Satan will watch his kingdom hemorrhage and be decimated in unprecedented numbers. This is the day that Satan dreads the most.

This is Sunday! This is the day that millions and millions will give great worship to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our King must live for Sundays!

This is Sunday! Today the gospel will be preached and proclaimed by millions of pastors and evangelists and missionaries and lay preachers. People will get saved, marriages will be touched, families will be restored, bodies will be healed, hopes will be realized, and millions of prayers will finally be answered today!

This is Sunday! This is our Big

Game Day! Today we will lead over _____ (your worship attendance) people in the worship of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will bring God great pleasure today! What a thrill to be in His presence and to experience a fresh embrace of His grace!

This is Sunday! This is the day I have waited for all week long, the day I have anticipated to come. This day I have the privilege of "washing [God's people] with water through the word," so Jesus might present them "to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:26-27).

This is Sunday! Today I get to greet God's people and bless them for Jesus, to love them and make them feel important, and to treat them like Jesus treats them. He treats them as being so very important.

This is Sunday! Today I get to preach God's Word to God's people! I get to exhort and encourage and challenge Jesus' Bride to love Him more! I get to open God's Word and to teach His precious children about how much the Father loves them. They are "precious and honored in [His] sight" (Isa. 43:4).

This is Sunday! I get to love my Heavenly Father exuberantly today! I get to listen to inspiring music today! I get to pray for people today! I expect to see signs and miracles and wonders and fabulous answers to prayer

today! I get to hear God from His Word today! I get to praise my God with joyful songs of thanksgiving and praise and gratitude from my heart (Col. 3:16).

This is Sunday! Today I get to love God's children for Him. Lord, help me to do that today and to do it well!

This is Sunday! Today I get to be a blessing and an encouragement to _____ (your worship attendance) of God's hurting children. Help me, Lord, to treat each person as though he or she is dying of a broken heart. For too many of them, this will be exactly the case.

This is Sunday! Today I will have the unbelievable privilege of literally representing the Living God to His people. God will use me to speak to them! He will actually use my voice and my personality and my choice of words to speak to His children, to call them to experience His grace.

This is Sunday! Today God's Spirit will fall on our Church and He will fill us afresh and anew. God has prepared me for this day and I have come to

_____ (name of your church) Church and to the Kingdom "for such a time as this"! (Esther 4:14). God's Holy Spirit is going to clothe himself with me, to anoint me, to bless me, to fill me, and to use me in thrilling ways today. I live for Sundays!

This is Sunday! Today I will watch God save people from an eternal hell. People will make an eternal choice to go to heaven forever because of what God does through our church today.

This is Sunday! Today I will get to greet and meet people that God has hand-picked and drawn to our church who will be an incredible blessing to God's kingdom and who will help us reach _____ (your community) for Jesus.

This is Sunday! Today millions and millions will pray powerful prayers that will bring devastation to Satan's plans and destroy

.....
BY CRAIG RENCH
Senior pastor
MEDFORD, OREGON

his demonic forces all over the world. Satan's army will lose on every front. They will lose fighters and we will gain all of his losses for our King and for His side.

This is Sunday! Today God will dispatch angels to watch over us and protect us and fight for us. Today angels will sit in our sanctuary and listen to me preach. That's hard to believe, but it is true! Today I will probably shake hands with angels in disguise. Lord, help me remember this today. Help me greet each person I meet today as if he or she were an angel, an angel that I will see face-to-face in glory someday. We may even talk one day about how I greeted him or her today.

This is Sunday! Today I get to encourage God's faithful workers. Those saints serve Him faithfully week after week. What I say to them could make all the difference between defeat and victory in their lives today. I will make a positive impact on people today. I will be a high-impact player and make a difference. I will do that today not because of who I am but through the grace and power of God working in me.

This is Sunday! Today we are one week closer to the massive revival God is sending our way. Today could be the flash point day. God could choose to use _____ (your church), and we will give God great glory today.

This is Sunday! Today we will bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and God will pour out His blessings on us in an almost unbelievable fashion. God is going to meet our financial needs today. Thank You, Lord. You are Jehovah-Jireh, our Provider.

This is Sunday! "This is the day

the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24).

This is Sunday! It will be the greatest day of harvest for lost people that the world has ever seen. It will surpass last Sunday's record-setting day, and it will be only eclipsed by next Sunday's tremendous day of harvest worldwide.

This is Sunday! This is the day that makes Satan shudder and tremble. Why? Because thousands and thousands of pastors will mount pulpits in all kinds of places, all over the world. Well over 200,000 people will make a profession of faith in Christ today! Thousands and thousands of people's lives will be changed, homes will be mended, relationships will be restored, sins will be forgiven, spiritual commitments will be made, churches will move forward, the influence of demons and the influence of darkness will be driven back, Satan's legions will be dealt a crushing blow. Why? This is Sunday!

This is Sunday! This is the day that 2,000 years ago Jesus rose from the dead. This is the day that begins the first day of the week. This is the day Christians put God first by giving Him the first part of the week, the first hours of the week, the first part of their income, and the first allegiance of their lives. Because this is Sunday!

This is Sunday! And we are one day closer to Judgment Day and one day closer to the day when Jesus will come back for us. In fact, this could be the day!

This is Sunday! Don't let me forget that today, in addition to the many people who will hear me preach and the angels who are in the audience, help me not forget that there are a great cloud of witnesses who are rooting me on, a great cloud of wit-

nesses peeking from the grandstands of heaven who have run this race before me. Abel is there, Enoch is there, Noah is there, Abraham is there, Jacob is there, Joseph is there, Moses is there, Joshua is there, Gideon is there, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Job, Ezekiel, Daniel, Mary the mother of Jesus; Jesus is there, Peter is there, Paul is there, Martin Luther is there, John Wesley is there, Phineas Bresee is there, Charles Strickland is there, Ralph Earle is there, _____ (personalize) is there. They are all there cheering me on. They are watching today, surrounding me, rooting me on. They are saying to me today, "Preach, _____ (your name). "Preach the Word . . . correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Tim. 4:2). Therefore, I will "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and . . . run with perseverance the race marked out for [me]" (Heb. 12:1).

This is Sunday! Today I am trusting You, Father, to set a guard over my heart and to cover my mouth so I won't say or do or think anything that will grieve You or quench Your Spirit.

This is Sunday! Today I have the opportunity to respond with grace and forgiveness and to act Christlike toward people who may criticize me or say hurtful things. I have the opportunity to grow in grace and Christlike love today to all the people I meet.

This is Sunday! It is going to be an unforgettable day! I can't wait to see what God is going to do through me, in me, for me, and to me. God is going to melt me and change me today—and I need it! I am ready for Him to do whatever He wants to do in me and in my heart today! AMEN! **PM**

The Biblical Gift of Tongues

We are to test the spirits and know if they are of God or from some other source. If you have been given the gift of languages, then use your gift to bring glory and honor to our Savior and to build the kingdom of God. Please, do not look down on a brother or sister whom God has gifted in another area. After all, "tongues" is the least of the gifts. Paul said: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:18-19). Having said this, let's look at what the Bible has to say about the gift of tongues.

The Case

Paul said,

Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly *there*

If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?

BY B. D. WEBB

Pastor

MURPHYSBORO, ILLINOIS



are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning.

If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, **try to excel in gifts that build up the church** (1 Cor. 14:6-12, *emphasis added*).

The Conclusion

Therefore, it must be concluded, at least according to the teachings of Paul, that there are no languages (tongues) without meaning. To be without meaning excludes it from being classified as a language (tongue). How can we come to any other conclusion than the one presented by Paul that all languages or tongues have meaning?

However, let's not get carried away and throw the baby out with the bathwater. We certainly would not want to say that there is no gift of speaking in "tongues/languages." That, of course, would not be biblical.

Paul's Radical Claim

Paul said that he spoke in tongues more than any of those to whom he was writing. "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1 Cor. 14:18). It is well known that Paul was a highly educated man. The tongues he used were either languages that he had been educated in or languages

that God had given him as a "gift" so that he might be more effective in spreading the gospel. These were not languages without meaning.

As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?" "Do you speak Greek?" he replied. "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?"

Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense" (Acts 21:37-22:1).

In this passage of Scripture, it is indicated that Paul spoke Greek. It is also stated that he addressed the crowd in Aramaic. Of course Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, so he spoke his native tongue. It is believed that Paul spoke as many as seven different languages.

What Really Happened

On the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), at the house of Cornelius (chap. 10), and at Ephesus (chap. 19), the gift of language was given to facilitate the



spreading of the gospel. These were gifts of identifiable, understandable language used to bring forth saving faith. These were not languages without meaning.

The Problem Revealed

The problem in the Corinthian Church seemed to be centered around carnal believers who were anxious to display their "spirituality." They were, in fact, engaging in the dangerous, carnal game of one-upmanship; that is, they were trying to better one another in the area of spiritual gifts. This tends to happen in the church when there is the absence of love. To further complicate this matter, some had brought into the church questionable practices from their pagan religions. "You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols" (1 Cor. 12:2).

Paul's Solution

In an attempt to free the Body of Christ from this erroneous teaching, "speaking in languages without meaning," Paul insisted that any manifestation of an unlearned tongue be also accompanied by an interpretation so that all might be edified. "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. **All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.** If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, **and someone must interpret.** If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God" (1 Cor. 14:26-28, emphasis added). A language that is *unknown* can have no interpretation and is, therefore, a false gift and not to be practiced. Interpretation of what is being said validates the speaker and the language, enabling all present to compare

the message with the written Word of God. Any verbal message from God can be validated by the written Word of God. God will never contradict himself.

The Exception Rather than the Rule

This is not an attempt to limit the power of God, nor the gifts He bestows. Some believe that their gift is a higher gift, that they, in fact, speak in a heavenly language, a special gift from God. Paul said, "**If I speak** in the tongues of men and of angels, **but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal**" (1 Cor. 13:1, emphasis added). Paul did not say that he spoke a heavenly language. He said, "if" I do. He is not advocating this gift. He is denouncing it. If, however, you insist that you have the gift of "heavenly language," then the burden of providing an interpretation rests with you. To be biblical, all public tongues-speaking must be interpreted. With this gift, you must also provide a heavenly being to translate what you are saying. Can we really expect mere humans to interpret a heavenly language? It definitely takes a tremendous amount of faith to believe that sons or daughters of Adam could interpret a heavenly language, a language that they have never heard, nor do they, or could they understand.

Even if God did give someone a gift of "heavenly language," it must be spoken from a heart of love to be valid. Otherwise it would be no more than an irritating noise like "a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." A heart filled with God's perfect love will produce a heavenly language no matter what the dialect. A heart void of God's love cannot produce a language of love regardless of how otherworldly it might be.

A Logical, Orderly, God

Is it logical for us to expect

God to give us a gift that we cannot understand or use, unless He gives us another gift to explain the first gift? Especially when we know that God has the power of communicating in a language (tongue) that we understand.

God's Language

In every case in the Word of God, where God speaks directly with man, you will find that He spoke in the language that was understood by the person he was speaking to. (Abraham receiving the covenant, Moses at the burning bush, Moses receiving the Commandments, Balaam's donkey, the baptism of Jesus, the transfiguration of Jesus, Saul on the road to Damascus [Acts 26:14 identifies the language God used], John receiving the revelation, etc.)

Check It Out

If you believe that God has given you the gift of languages, may I suggest that you make a recording of your gift and take it to a linguist? There the language could be identified. If your gift is found to be a valid language, then you will know with whom, where, and possibly how to use your gift. The message could also be translated by an unbiased party and validated by the Word of God. If what you are practicing is found not to be a valid language, or the message is not consistent with the Bible, then a child of God would certainly want to pray for deliverance from a practice that is not harmonious with the Word of God. To speak a language without any knowledge of what is being said certainly poses a grave danger to the one speaking.

Some Warnings

"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets

An
UNKNOWN
language
can have
no interpre-
tation
and is,
therefore, a
false gift.

have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

To practice speaking a language that is not understood is a very serious matter, even a "prayer language" where one does not know what he is praying for. Why do we need a prayer language? God knows what we need before we ask. If He knows our hearts, why do we need some "language" that we do not understand? This seems to me to be a very dangerous practice, particularly if the practitioner has not been sanctified wholly by the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. (Speaking from a pure heart, controlled by the love of God.)

Counterfeit Gifts

If this gift can be counterfeited, and I have been assured by those who practice speaking in tongues that it can be, how can we be sure that what we are hearing or speaking is from God? Unless, of course, it is interpreted and agrees with the written Word of God? As a matter of fact, Paul issues a warning that deals with this problem: "Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, *Jesus be cursed*, and no one can say, *Jesus is Lord*, except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:1-3, emphasis added).

Praising God or Promoting Darkness?

Therefore, it is imperative that we know what we are saying, even if we are using a language that we do not understand. I certainly don't think for one moment that a child of God would want to say, "Jesus be cursed," and not be aware of what he or she has said.

Paul said, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful" (1 Cor. 14:14).

A heart void of God's love cannot produce a language of love.

If God knows our heart, why do we need some "language" that we do not understand?

Why Bother?

This brings us to the point of asking, "If this is a valid gift, then what is it for?" I want to assure you that this is a valid biblical gift, but it might be well to remember that "tongues" are not for the benefit of believers, but for unbelievers.

"Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers" (1 Cor. 14:22). We are given the gift of tongues (languages) so that we might proclaim the gospel to those of another language, to a person that might not otherwise have an opportunity to hear the Good News. Prophecy, or preaching, is for believers. It is the mighty Word of God proclaimed in a language that the assembled church understands. What need is there in the Body of Christ for a language that is not understood? "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Cor. 14:23).

Paul's Conclusion

If God has given you a gift of a language and you practice it when there are those present who do not understand, then they will think you are out of your mind to waste time on something that has no relevance. If we come together and we all speak one language, does it make sense to think that our Heavenly Father who speaks our language will send us a message in a tongue that no one understands, and then expect that tongue to be interpreted by a person who does not speak the language, and then ask us to believe that all of this is done so that we might be enabled to understand the word He wants us to have? Does God work like that?

A Gift Made Void

If you are practicing tongues-

speaking simply because it gives you a superior feeling of spirituality, then the gift has been made of no value and is a false gift to you. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the common good**" (1 Cor. 12:7, emphasis added). God does not give gifts simply to make one feel good. We are saved by faith, not by works, or gifts, or feelings.

Inauguration Day

Before writing this off as heresy, I want to state that I believe in the biblical gift of languages (tongues). In Acts, we have the account of the 120 disciples in the Upper Room. When they received the fullness of the Spirit, or sanctification, some of them (but not all of them) received the gift of languages. The Scriptures indicate that all who spoke in "languages" were Galileans. It does not say that all 120 spoke in "languages" that they had not learned. However, it is clear that some of them did.

Utterly amazed, they asked: **"Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"** Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:7-12, emphasis added).

The Question

The question that was asked on the Day of Pentecost by those who heard the message in their own language is still a pertinent question today. **"What does this mean?"** To us it means that the inauguration of the

Church Age and the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world was ushered in with signs and wonders just as the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai was ushered in with signs and wonders. The power of God, seen in both instances in the wind, signified the great power of God for life and service. The power is seen in the fire, symbolizing purity of heart and life. The voice of God (tongues) signified the universality of the gospel for all men, regardless of color, creed, or nationality.

What Do We Expect?

Do we expect these manifestations of the Spirit of God to be displayed when we come to an understanding of God's Law? Absolutely not! Wouldn't it then be logical for us not to expect the signs—wind, fire, languages—to accompany the giving of the Holy Spirit, to the penitent seeker, when he or she is born from above and receives the Holy Spirit, resulting in salvation. If we expect these signs to accompany the giving of the Spirit, then maybe we should expect our loving Savior to be crucified afresh every time a sinner comes to repentance. But, of course, we don't.

The Unfortunate Word

It is unfortunate that the translators commissioned by King James used the word "unknown" in an attempt to aid our understanding of this subject of tongues. To my way of thinking, the word "unlearned" would better convey the desired message. God gave men the gift of speaking a language that they had not learned. Although they had not learned the language, they were understood by those that heard the message. As evidenced by Acts 2:11, "(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" On the Day of Pentecost, Peter did not preach the same message 16 times in a lan-

guage he did not understand, with his "mind unfruitful." He preached the message once, fully aware of what he was saying, and 16 different nationalities all heard in their own languages.

The Clear Word of God

Brothers and sisters in Christ, "tongues" are given to clarify the message of Christ, not to cloud or distort the message. It also might be well to remember that the Bible clearly indicates that not all will speak in "tongues." Therefore, this cannot be the evidence of the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says,

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:27-31).

The evidence of the Spirit's infilling is a pure heart. Peter said:

God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are (Acts 15:8-11).

Paul admonished us to live in the spirit of love, worship in the spirit of love, and eagerly desire the greater gifts—the gifts that serve God and His Church. **PM**

"If this is
a valid gift,
then what
is it for?"

"Tongues"
are given to
clarify the
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Christ, not
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distort the
message.

NOTICE TO READERS:

We regret that in the editorial process an error was made in an article appearing in the December/January/February 1997-98 issue titled "A Wesleyan View of Scripture" written by H. Ray Dunning. A portion of text was omitted from page 15, the third column. The column should read as follows:

... As Paul Rees wrote,

What is at issue here is not evangelical commitment but evangelical comprehension. There is a difference of understanding as to the way and form in which God has worked to give us the mystery and the majesty, the humility and authority, of the Word made word—a wonder scarcely less baffling than that of the Word made flesh.²

There are two ways of conceptualizing the authority of Scripture, each doubtless having subtle nuances within them. One is to emphasize its form and the other its function. Up to and including the classical reformers during the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century (Luther and Calvin), the emphasis was upon the function of Scripture. Scripture was authoritative because it led one to Christ.³

John Calvin articulates this position clearly and straightforwardly in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In rejecting the traditional view of the Catholic Church that it is the church that authenticates the validity of Scripture, as well as rejecting the inadequacy of rational argument, he says:

But I reply . . .

Our deepest apologies to the author, H. Ray Dunning.

Now Hear This . . .

The Worship Hour's Primary Purpose Is Worship

Pastor, we've really got to start pushing church camp, we've spent a lot of money renting the cabin and if you don't push it, we won't have anybody come." "We need to recruit people for the church choir." "We're starting a new class in discipleship training, can you promote it this week?" "Why didn't you say anything about the mission offering this morning? People aren't going to give if you don't say something!"

Enough! People were bombarding me, sometimes right before I went into the pulpit. I want to help promote the ministries of the church, but I can't spend 20 minutes a week.

How many things are the *most* important thing? That is not a simple grammatical question. It is a mathematical problem with the formula $O \times T = MIT$. You take the number of opinions (O) and multiply it by the number of things (T). This results in the potential number of *most* important things (MIT).

Can the pastor emphasize every "Most Important Thing"? How often can the boy cry "wolf" before the people stop listening?

BY JIM L. WILSON
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ALBUQUERQUE,
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Do you agree that time is a valuable commodity and some things are more important than other things? If so, how do you adequately maximize the church's ministries without minimizing worship?

The worship hour's primary purpose is worship. The leaders use music, Scripture readings, prayer, drama, and public speaking to usher the participants into consciousness of the presence of God.

Worship changes people's lives. Ordinary people who get discouraged, frustrated, and hurt comprise your congregation. People attend the services who are in deep need of God's grace and forgiveness in their lives. The people you face may be on the verge of divorce, murder, or suicide. Their worship experience may make a tremendous difference in their life situation.

How much is 30 seconds worth? It seems like an insignificant amount of time, but under the right circumstances it is quite valuable. How much money do advertisers pay for a half minute during the Super Bowl? Will you ever forget the brief exchange of vows at your wedding? Do you

remember the very moment when you held your first child for the first time?

Announcement time is not ordinary time. It is a few brief moments in the midst of a transforming worship experience. It is valuable.

How much time does a one-minute announcement take? If you say one minute you are only partially right. If there are 60 people in the audience, each minute announcement takes one hour of the congregation's time.

Every second counts. Before you spend valuable worship time making an announcement, ask yourself these questions:

Does this announcement apply to the entire church or to just a few people?



There is no need to discuss the importance of a committee meeting in front of the entire congregation. Speak privately to the three involved people, and not publicly to the entire church.

Is the time right to make this announcement?

Vacation Bible School is an important church-wide event, but a January announcement for a July school is premature. An August announcement is too late.

What else is going on in the church?

Sometimes the church calendar gets log-jammed. There may be five important events happening within a short period of time. The pastor cannot emphasize all these events. Time is too precious, and people's attention spans are too short.

Is there another way to promote this event?

Consider mailing a flyer, doing a phone blitz, or placing an announcement in the bulletin.

A few years ago we decided to have an all church camp-out over the Memorial Day weekend. The year before we had less than 200 attend worship over that weekend. We had over 200 people drive to the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountains, a 120-mile trip, for the weekend. We had 90 people stay behind at the church building and worship. Our attendance increased by 100 over the previous year. There were six additions by transfer and one baptism over the weekend. The camp-out was such a success that the church made it an annual event.

How did we promote it? The coordinator began working with his ministry team two months in advance. They met weekly to iron out the logistics of setting up camp, feeding, showering, worshiping, and so forth. Their excitement spilled over to their friends. We began announcements in the newsletter and bulletins.

We pitched a tent in the front lawn of the church a month before the event with a sign that said, "Sign up for the Memorial

Day Camp-out today." The drama group did a few minute-long skits during the welcome time. We placed sign-up sheets on the bulletin board and distributed them through the Sunday School departments.

Momentum built, people came, and God ministered to His people. The ministry was an unqualified success.

Our staff promoted our Father's Day pie social this year by making a colorful overhead cell and projecting the announcement on the screen before and after the worship time. We also placed the announcement in the bulletin and briefly mentioned it from the pulpit.

Sometimes pulpit time or office assistance is necessary to promote an event. Train your people to do the following things:

Give the staff plenty of lead time.

Five minutes before the start of the service is not a good time to ask the pastor to announce something. It takes time to design flyers and produce mailings. Newsletters have deadlines, time pressures, and space constraints.

Communicate their expectations.

They may assume the staff knows what they want. Ask them to put their ideas in writing and discuss them with the responsible staff person in advance.

Trust their leaders.

They may not like what you decide to do with their announcement. They may feel it deserved a passionate plea from the senior pastor and all it got is a small notice in the bulletin. Help them not to lose their enthusiasm in their disappointment.

The church camp was twice as big as the year before, the choir is slowly growing, the discipleship training class was a success, and we exceeded our mission offering goal.

Why? Did I announce everything that Sunday? No, we paced the promotion and prayed for God's blessings, and He brought the results. **PM**

The Need to Feel Unstrung

BY DOUG BARNETT

Free-lance writer

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The story is told of a king who, despite the fact that he was an effective ruler, was being talked about. His advisers approached him one day and said, "Your majesty, people are talking. They don't think it's a good idea for the king to tell funny stories and look so relaxed. The king should always be on his throne since he's the symbol of the kingdom, and he should always conduct himself in the most dignified manner possible."

The king, though, had a deeper wisdom. He said, "When an archer goes into battle, he strings up his bow until it is taut. If the bow is not taut, the arrow will not fly to its target and the battle will be lost. But an archer is not in battle all the time. In fact, battles are much more infrequent than times away from combat. During those times, the archer unstrings his bow because he knows that should the bow remain strung all the time, it will lose its snap. Then it wouldn't be any good to him when he needed it in battle." The king then waved off his advisers and went off to laugh.

Spencer Tracy was once asked what he looked for in a movie script, and the actor replied, "Days off." In a world that enshrines workaholicism, Tracy's response may be more wise than flippant. Reduced activity, times of vacation, times of Sabbath, all work together to help us rest, find re-creation, and "unstring our bows" so that when the test comes later, we'll have our "snap." Enjoy the time off. Use the reduced activity to recenter yourself. Find God in the quiet. After all, I can guarantee you that the battle is coming. **PM**

How do you
adequately
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without
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Hymn Story of the Month—Part Two

This is the second article in a series of four in which I provide a hymn story for each month of the year. For a more complete introduction to this series of articles, see “Hymn Story of the Month—Part One” in the June 1998 issue of *The Preacher’s Magazine*. All hymns listed in this series of articles are found in the *Sing to the Lord* hymnal, and hymn numbers are provided in parentheses following the title.

After telling the hymn story, I offer ideas for creative worship, often linking the hymn story and hymn with other songs, Scripture, testimonies, and/or prayer. If a particular suggestion isn’t a good fit with your congregation, use it as a catalyst for your own creative thinking. If you like one of the ideas, use it with other songs of worship not discussed in these articles.

At the end of each monthly section, I list a few sources that may be consulted for more information on the hymn story. Bibliographic citations of these resources appear at the end of the articles.

SEPTEMBER— “JOY UNSPEAKABLE”

HYMN STORY—Camp meetings and revival services were nothing new to Barney Warren. From the time he was 18, he had traveled as a singer and preacher with an evangelistic team. Since he was always with other mem-

bers of the team or folks from the communities in which they ministered, Barney knew there were times he needed to be alone.

Such was the case when Barney served as one of the workers at a camp meeting in northwestern Ohio. So he left the campgrounds in search of a quiet place where he could be alone for prayer and meditation. As he walked through the woods, he came upon a pipe that had been installed in an artesian spring. “The water was flowing with great force in a stream the full size of the pipe. I threw a chip into the pipe, but the force of the water was so great that it carried the chip away. I then picked up a large stick of wood about a foot in length and forced it down the pipe, but the powerful stream quickly brought it up and carried it away.”

Barney thought about Jesus’ words concerning “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14, *KJV*), which Jesus spoke during His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. He thought about Peter’s words: “Joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8, *KJV*). As Barney watched the water bubble out of that pipe, the song “Joy Unspeakable” began to flow from his soul.

HYMN SINGING—After telling the story and singing “Joy Unspeakable” (423), ask several people to testify. Even though

“the half has never yet been told,” we must keep trying. After each testimony, have the pianist and/or organist play a chord to give the congregation the pitch, then sing the last half of the refrain as a response to the testimony.

HYMN STUDY—*The Birth of a Hymn*, pp. 62-65

OCTOBER—“ALL THE WAY MY SAVIOR LEADS ME”

HYMN STORY—Fanny Crosby was wildly successful as a gospel songwriter. Some publishers were a bit sheepish to acknowledge Fanny as the author of most of the songs in their books, so they started using pseudonyms as a curtain. Hymnology scholars suspect that over 200 pseudonyms were used. Fanny was typically paid about \$3 for each song, and she never received royalty payments beyond that. A few of her closest friends felt that Fanny should be more highly compensated, but it never became an issue for her.

Fanny Crosby did not see herself as primarily a gospel songwriter. In a newspaper interview on her 88th birthday, Fanny identified herself as a city mission worker. Many evenings each week, Fanny attended the services at the missions in New York City. Sometimes she would be asked to speak. Most of the time she would search for someone with whom to talk about faith in Christ and godly living. If she were not at a mission, Fanny often invited neighbors into her tenement apartment for fellowship and singing. When she discovered someone with a financial need, Fanny often shared her resources with her friend. If she had been paid more for her songs, some have speculated, she probably would have given it away.

One day in the fall of 1874, Fanny needed money to pay her rent. As her custom, she began to pray about the need, asking God to supply exactly what she lacked. Soon after she prayed

BY KEITH SCHWANZ
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Ridge Church of the
Nazarene
PORTLAND, OREGON



this prayer, a man visited with her in her apartment. As he prepared to leave, he shook hands with Fanny, leaving a five dollar bill in her hand. Fanny responded to the gift by saying: "In what a wonderful way the Lord helps me! All the way my Savior leads me!" She wrote the hymn that day.

HYMN SINGING—Tell the hymn story. Then sing "All the Way My Savior Leads Me" (559). The editors of *Sing to the Lord* often placed songs with compatible keys together. Using this feature, have the congregation go directly into "'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus" (560).

HYMN STUDY—*Amazing Grace*, p. 259; *The Birth of a Hymn*, pp. 28-37; *Songs of Glory*, pp. 20-21

NOVEMBER—

"IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL"

HYMN STORY—For many years Horatio Spafford knew only success. As a prominent attorney and businessman in Chicago, he and his family enjoyed many material blessings. A fervent supporter of Christian causes, Horatio was a personal friend of Dwight Moody and other leading evangelists of the 19th century.

Then a series of disasters ravaged the Spafford family. A son died suddenly of scarlet fever. The great Chicago fire of 1871 wiped out Spafford's extensive real estate holdings. A few Christian "friends" assumed that the Spaffords' misfortune was a sign of God's judgment, so they forced the Spaffords out of their church for unconfessed sin.

Hoping to provide a much-needed time of rest and to assist Moody with evangelistic meetings in Great Britain, Horatio made arrangements for his family to travel across the Atlantic. Urgent business matters arose at the last minute, so Horatio sent his family ahead of him. He was to follow in a few days. Partway across the Atlantic the *Ville du Havre*, the ship on which his wife and four daughters were sailing,

was struck by another ship, the *Lochearn*. The *Ville du Havre* sank in 12 minutes claiming 226 lives, including Horatio's four daughters. He learned of the tragedy in a terse cable: "Saved alone. Your wife."

Horatio immediately set out to join his wife who, by now, was in Wales. For hours he stood at the ship's rail watching the waves and thinking about his daughters. At one point, the captain of the ship interrupted Horatio's preoccupation to tell him that they were in the vicinity where the *Ville du Havre* had gone down. Somewhere on this journey, in the midst of sorrow that "like sea billows roll," Horatio penned the words of "It Is Well with My Soul."

HYMN SINGING—Tell the hymn story as a monologue with Horatio Spafford standing at the ship's rail. The monologue might be in the form of a prayer. The

script could be recorded in advance and played as the actor pantomimes. Ask the pianist or organist to begin playing the introduction of "It Is Well with My Soul" (554) as the monologue is concluding. The hymn might be sung by a soloist, a choir, or the congregation.

HYMN STUDY—*Amazing Grace*, p. 202; *52 Hymn Stories Dramatized*, pp. 75-77; *Songs in the Night*, pp. 3-4; *Songs of Glory*, pp. 329-30.

HYMN STUDY RESOURCES

- Amazing Grace*, by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1990)
- The Birth of a Hymn*, by Keith Schwanz (Lillenas, 1997)
- 52 Hymn Stories Dramatized*, by Kenneth W. Osbeck (Kregel, 1992)
- Songs in the Night*, by Henry Garipey (Eerdmans, 1996)
- Songs of Glory*, by William J. Reynolds (Zondervan, 1990) **PM**



When you lose your voice, Reverend Perry—you can just fake your sermon.

Is There Hope for the Hapless Wedding Guest?

Scripture: Matt. 22:1-14

“But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes” (v. 11, NASB).

Strange parable. Great beginning, catastrophic ending. Yet I find myself drawn to this hapless wedding guest because nobody else is. The first sermon I ever heard in a Nazarene church, while still in high school, was on this parable and the horrible fate of the guest caught at the heavenly banquet feast without the proper garments of righteousness. It so chilled me that I didn't go back for a year. I've never forgotten it. And I've never heard a sermon on it since. When preachers encounter this miserable fellow, like the Jews of old meeting a leper on the road, they give him a wide berth. Luke, in telling this same story, doesn't even mention him. Passes over him in silence. I guess that is why I'm drawn to him as I am to lost puppies and stray cats.

I am drawn to this poor man because of the monumental embarrassment he suffered.

He hears the invitation of the great king. Unlike those who earlier spurned the gracious offer, he responds with enthusiasm and joy. He joins the multitudes of both “evil and good” (v. 10,

NASB) from the “main highways” (v. 9, NASB) as they throng toward the king's palace. They are overwhelmed with awe as they file into the vast hall where tables are already spread for the celestial supper. The lights are low. The music is soft. Anticipation builds.

And then the trumpets blow. The band strikes up. Lightning flashes about the Eastern Gate as the great king comes in. A holy hush descends upon the vast multitude of heavenly hosts as the king solemnly scrutinizes his guests.

Suddenly his head snaps back. The music stops mid-beat. All

eyes turn toward the object of the king's obvious displeasure. The spotlights zero in on one guest. Gasps of shock are heard. Whispers of disgust ripple through the cavernous hall. The guests cannot believe it. What? A guest at the wedding feast of the great king's son—and no tuxedo? No bow tie? No high-polish black shoes? How did he get in? What nerve! What gross insensitivity! Disgusting!

I remember as if it were yesterday. Louis Shingler, distinguished lay leader of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene where I was an associate at the time, picked me up at Fuller

BY C. S. COWLES
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Nazarene College
Nampa, Idaho



Seminary library in Pasadena to take me out to lunch. It was a bright summer day. And my day off.

As he wheeled up in his Cadillac Eldorado, I sensed I was in trouble. I could see that he was dressed in a dark pinstripe suit. I had on a short-sleeve, open-neck, knit golf shirt, faded polyester slacks in which the permanent press crease had long since lost its perm, and was shod with Kmart "blue-light special" sneakers. I knew I was in trouble when instead of taking me to Denny's restaurant or the Rancho Country Grill, he drove into the parking lot of the Pasadena University Club, the most prestigious top-drawer country club in Southern California where everybody who was anybody was a member. The distinguished-looking maître d', gold-braided menus festooned on his arm, greeted Mr. Shingler by name. And he glared at me.

We were led into a cavernous ballroom that doubled as an opulent dining room: domed ceiling, chandeliers, white tablecloths, crystal goblets, fine china, a dozen pieces of silverware, a harpist playing background music. I glanced about. Everyone was dressed to the nines; men in dark suits, white dress shirts, power ties with matching breast-pocket kerchiefs, and Rolex watches; women in long formal dresses or pantsuits according to high fashion of the time. And here I was: knit golf shirt, naked arms, faded polyester slacks, tennis shoes.

To make matters worse, Louis Shingler was president-elect of the Pasadena Tournament of Roses that year. At least 6,384 guests—or so it seemed to me—stopped by our table. Gracious host that he was, Mr. Shingler dutifully introduced me not as "our associate pastor" but as "my pastor." Decorum dictated that I scoot my chair back, stand to shake the proffered hand, thus giving each person a frontal close-up of my open-neck golf

shirt, naked arms, faded polyester slacks, and tennis shoes. If I could have found a crack in the hardwood floor even one centimeter wide, I could easily have slid through it without touching either side. Do you wonder that my heart goes out to this poor man?

I am also drawn to this hapless wedding guest because of the abuse he has suffered at the hands of biblical commentators.

Without exception, they rush him to judgment. Some assert that he is a wicked wretch who weaseled his way in by nefarious means, perhaps climbing in through a window. Others assume that he is the embodiment of a phony Christian whose spiritual nakedness is exposed for all to see under the white-hot glare of God's holiness. Others maintain that he is a rebel who arrogantly refuses the king's offer of appropriate wedding garments. For holiness commentators, this wedding guest is the archetype of one who has been saved but not entirely sanctified, thus lacking the pure garments of that "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, RSV).

Why are biblical scholars so negative about him? Not knowing the facts, they invent a worst-case scenario. They argue backward from horrible fate to just cause. After all, surely this man must have been the absolute antithesis of all that is holy and righteous to have been subjected to such public humiliation—not to mention being damned in the presence of the holy angels and all the saints to a hell of outer darkness and inexpressible torment for all eternity.

The parable, however, says nothing of the sort. In fact it says nothing about this man, good or bad, other than that he failed to be wearing proper wedding attire. Perhaps he wasn't aware of the dress code, even as I was not for Monday's lunch with Mr.

Shingler. Perhaps he was too poor to buy a new suit. Perhaps he was a recent immigrant who wore the finest dress of his country not realizing how inappropriate it would be in this land. Even if he were a morally wretched tramp in filthy rags of unrighteousness, stinking up the place, I notice in verse 10 that the slaves "gathered together all they found, both evil and good" (NASB). So we would presume that whatever measures of grace clothed the others with robes of righteousness would have included him as well. Many commentators note that Eastern kings and wealthy potentates often provided wedding garments for their guests. To fail to wear the garments provided would constitute the greatest of insults. There is, however, not one scintilla of historical support for that kind of imaginative speculation.

There is something else that troubles me about the way commentators trash this poor man. They automatically assume that the king is God. If it is, then He bears no resemblance whatsoever to the God who, after the Fall, comes walking gently into the garden, not with the flaming sword of judgment but with the plaintive cry of a wounded lover, "Adam, . . . where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9, KJV). He is a God who not only graciously forgives but also freely and mercifully covers Adam and Eve's nakedness with the garment of righteousness.

The violent and vindictive king in this parable bears no relationship to the benevolent father whose heart so yearns for his lost son that he is up at the crack of dawn, scanning the distant horizon, looking for that wastrel son, who when he sees him yet miles from home flies down the mountain, runs across the plain, embraces him in his mighty arms, escorts him home and calls out, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and cele-

Like the
Jews of old
meeting a
leper on
the road,
preachers
give the
hapless
wedding
guest a
wide berth.

brate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:22-24).

So if not the God of Jesus, then who is this king? And who is this hapless man? I found my answer through a most unlikely source. A book titled *The Magic Eye* caught my attention. I bought a copy. It is full of fascinating computer-generated pictures called "stereograms." What you see as you turn the pages are colorful but repetitive patterns, appropriate perhaps for wallpaper but not for framing or hanging on a wall. But if you stare at the picture long enough, and force yourself to look beyond the surface into the depths, all of a sudden a miracle occurs. The flat graphic comes alive as a dynamic, moving, three-dimensional portrait. Striking images, previously hidden, come breathtakingly into view. A hummingbird in one. A throbbing heart in another. Dolphins frolicking in the ocean in yet another—none of which are otherwise visible. They remain hidden except for the one who has the fortitude and the will to plumb the depths.

What would happen, I asked myself, if I applied a stereographic technique to this terrifying parable and stared at it in depth? I read it over and over for weeks on end, pondering it on my early morning walks, thinking about it during odd hours of the day.

All of a sudden, I saw it. I broke through the surface. A vastly different picture of the hapless wedding guest suddenly took shape. It came alive with a force that astonished me. And what did I see?

I saw myself! I am the one who has heard the king's gracious call, who has responded with eagerness and joy, who has come into the king's hall only to discover with a shock of shame that I am not dressed right. I am not attired in garments that will stand the white-hot scrutiny of a

holy God. I don't have the right stuff. I am an unsightly spectacle. Clutching the tattered rags of an accusing conscience that points its finger at me and says, no matter how hard I try, "That's not quite good enough!" Ever falling short of "the glory of God." Not measuring up. An embarrassment to my friends. Ashamed of myself. Cringing in terror before the all-seeing and all-knowing omniscience of a righteous God. For "it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). And when called to account, I am speechless.

Some months ago, I raced up the escalator at the Boise Airport to catch a flight, dashed into the men's rest room only to be instantly confused. It didn't look right. What did they do with the . . . ? Just then a young woman came out of one of the stalls, looked at me somewhat startled, and then said cheerfully: "Good morning, Dr. Cowles, are you lost?" It was one of my former students. Instantly I saw myself standing with head bowed, face flushed, and ears burning before the president of the college, before the Board of Regents, before the Board of General Superintendents, before the General Assembly. I envisioned myself being called upon to explain. The utter shame of it all consumes whatever explanation I might try to offer. I am too humiliated to even say one word.

I live with the subliminal fear of embarrassing myself. I battle terrible nightmares of being called upon to preach and having nothing to say. I stand in the pulpit only to discover that my sermon manuscript has disappeared and the pages of my Bible are blank. I cannot even remember the text. A recurring dream I have on Saturday nights is standing in the anteroom just prior to the worship service. I can hear the choral introit signaling the start of the service. I quickly run through my checklist: glasses, Bible, sermon notes,

order of worship. But alas, I look down and I don't have any pants on.

The thought of being publicly humiliated fills me with total panic. Raw terror. It drives me right to the edge. And in those excruciatingly painful passages where I have, in fact, made a fool of myself, or been judged as suspect, or a heretic, or incompetent; when I have been criticized, maligned, voted against, and driven out, I feel not only rejected by men but cast out by God. I project that condemnation of the "significant others" in my life upon God. I have not only embarrassed myself but insulted God. God is angry. God is incensed. He is too holy to abide a failure like me.

This, I believe, is precisely what is going on in this parable. What we have here is **not so much a description of God as He is but God as He is perceived to be by the one who suddenly finds himself on the outside looking in.** I've been there. Haven't you? There is no pain to compare.

That is why my heart goes out to this hapless wedding guest, the quintessential misfit. The one who doesn't have the right color of skin. Or is not of the right gender. Or social class. Or didn't go to college. Or out to work. Or on welfare. Or not related. Or an immigrant. Or a newcomer. Or divorced. Or lacking in social graces.

As I kept staring at this parable and my depth vision skills developed, I became aware that something is missing in this parable. Or, more accurately, someone. The guests have gathered. The house is full. The king has made his grand entrance. But there is something wrong. There is no sign of the king's son!

Come to think of it, how can the king's son, the good shepherd, enjoy the party with the 99, or 99 million, who are safely in the fold as long as there is one poor lamb who is not? How can

A vastly different picture of the hapless wedding guest suddenly took shape.

He participate in this great heavenly "wellness" feast when there are those too sick to respond to the king's invitation? How can he delight himself with the "in" crowd when there are still so many out there lost in the jungle of this world's "main highways," those who have not yet heard the great king's gracious invitation?

Where is the bridegroom? The king's son? He is here. Among those of us who are naked, exposed, judged, and condemned. He is here beside those of us who have felt the stabbing pain of discrimination, the shock of public embarrassment, the hurt of being made a spectacle—someone to be gossiped about, laughed at, scorned. To all of us who feel shunned, unwelcomed, unappreciated, and unwanted, Jesus understands. The prophet Isaiah said of him centuries before he was born,

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men,

a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Like one from whom men hide their faces (*Isa. 53:2-3*).

Where is Jesus? He's out seeking the shamed, the wounded, the broken rejects. With open arms He says to you and me this morning: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (*Matt. 11:28*). "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (*John 6:37, KJV*).

I tried something else with this parable. I stepped back and surveyed the context with a wide-angle lens. Matthew places this parable during the last week of Jesus' life. The triumphal procession has fizzled. The cleansing of the Temple has enraged the religious authorities. Jesus' enemies are in full heat of conspiracy. The disciples are wavering. The shadow of the Cross looms ominously.

Immediately preceding this parable is another in which Jesus

tells about a landowner who plants a vineyard, lets it out to tenants, and sends servants to receive his rightful share of the produce. They beat some and killed others. Finally he sends his son, sure that they will respect him. Not so. Rather, "They said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him" (*Matt. 21:38-39*).

All of a sudden I saw it. Who is this unfortunate wretch without proper wedding attire? Who is the one that was stripped naked by the religious and political establishment of every vestige of orthodoxy, of honor, of legitimacy? Who is it that was arrested while at prayer, dragged off in chains, hauled before the chief priests, put on trial before the official Sanhedrin who functioned as representatives of an austere and authoritarian God? Who is it that did in fact stand before the great king, King Herod, without proper attire? Who is it that when questioned answered not a word? Was speechless? Who is it that heard those chilling words uttered by the duly established and legitimate authorities:

Bind this messianic impostor hand and foot.

Slap His face.

Flog His back.

Smash those thorns deep into His skull.

Drag Him through the streets. Cast Him outside the holy city.

Spit in His eye.

Split His hands and feet.

Pierce His side.

Crucify Him! Crucify Him!

Crucify Him!

And who is it that cried out from the cross in unspeakable agony, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Matt. 27:46, KJV*).

"He came unto his own, and his own said, 'Damn his soul to hell!'"

And to hell He went. Rejected by men and abandoned by God,

Jesus descended into hell. What did He do while there? What else could He do but what He had always done: He preached to the spirits in prison. What did He preach? He preached good news: good news that even in hell the rejects were not forgotten by God. Now I ask you: isn't that just like Jesus?

Why did Jesus do it? Why did He take on the garments of our humanity, our vulnerability, our sins, our shame, our lostness? Peter says it all: "that he might bring us to God" (*1 Pet. 3:18, KJV*). But the story does not end there, for Peter goes on to declare, "being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (*1 Pet. 3:18, RSV*). Made alive in the Spirit? Well, I guess.

*Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,
He arise a Victor o'er the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! . . . Hallelujah! Christ arose!*

I thought I had died and gone to heaven when my pastor—my friend, my model, my mentor—upon hearing that I didn't have a place to stay for the summer between my freshman and sophomore year in college, invited me to live with his family. They fixed a corner for me in the garage and provided me with a cot and a small chest of drawers. Though I worked 12 to 15 hours a day, I always tried to eat the evening meal with the family. I loved it.

"C. S., I need to talk to you," my pastor-friend announced one evening, rather ominously. We moved into the darkening living room. The sun had set. He sat in the chair with its back to the picture window, his face backlit by the twilight of the setting sun was shrouded in shadows. Sensing trouble, I slouched down in the couch. Then he started in on me. He scolded me for leaving my bed unmade some mornings, for shoes strewn about that someone might trip over, and for

When I
have been
criticized,
maligned,
voted
against,
and driven
out, I feel
not only
rejected by
men but
cast out by
God.

a dozen or so other minor irritations.

But that was only a warmup for what was really on his mind. "C. S.," he continued, "you've said that God has called you to preach. Well I can tell you that you've got very large rocks in your head if you ever think you can make it as a preacher. Forget it! You have neither the gifts nor the grace for such a high calling. I've heard you testify to being entirely sanctified. I've been watching you closely. I can assure you that you not only don't have the experience but you don't even know the meaning of the word. In fact, I can't see much evidence that you have ever been saved. So, what do you have to say for yourself?"

What did I have to say? What could I say? I was speechless. A fully loaded cement truck driven over my stomach could not have hurt worse.

Early the next morning, long before the sun came up, I wrote a note thanking my hosts for their hospitality, slipped into an envelope along with the money I owed for board and room, and slid it under the kitchen door. Quietly I packed everything I owned into two cardboard boxes,

strapped them on the back of my Cushman scooter, lifted the garage door, pushed my scooter down to the corner so as not to awaken them, cranked it up, climbed aboard, and drove out into the night never to return to that house. Never to return to that church. Never to go to any church of that denomination except for my uncle's funeral a dozen years later. I would, in all likelihood, have kept on driving into the deep abyss of despair, of shattered self-esteem of the outer darkness of hell . . .

Except for a Stranger who caught up with me in the night, who drew near, who gently put His arm around me, who hugged me to himself. I looked into His face. Starlight refracted from tears that glistened like diamonds on his cheeks. Tears to match my tears. I sensed that He knew. That He cared. That He understood.

He whispered in my ear, "The table is set. The food is prepared. A place has been reserved for you. I want you to go back to the banquet feast."

"But," I protested, "the great king . . ." Jesus interrupted and said, "The great king loves you. He was alarmed when you fled

from his presence. He sent me to seek you out and bring you back. The king says that it would not be a party without you there."

"But," I protested once again, "I can't go in! Look! I don't have garments fit to stand in the presence of a holy God. All I have are these rags."

"What rags?" Jesus asked.

I looked down. I couldn't believe it! My rags were gone. I was clothed in wedding garments pure and gleaming, shining like the sun in full strength.

"Hurry," said Jesus, as He bade me farewell and headed on down the road looking for other lost souls. "The great king is patiently waiting."

As I turned to head up the road toward the lights of the heavenly city, I glanced back at Jesus. I couldn't believe it. Guess what He was wearing? My golf shirt, faded polyester slacks, Kmart tennis shoes. I stopped and stared in amazement, once again speechless. Jesus turned, saw me standing there, and called back, "My Father's expecting you. The party cannot begin until you get there. What are you waiting for?"

Good question: **What are we waiting for?**

PM

Where is the bridegroom?



Pontius' Puddle



© Joel Kaufmann

Picture Windows for Preaching

Motivation

King Duncan, in his book *Amusing Grace*, relates a story about a man during the early 20th century who traveled from city to city to put on a "side show" to earn a living. One of the features was an elephant trained to follow his instructions and no one else's.

One day he arrived in a small town and gathered a large crowd around him and then challenged anyone to try to make the elephant "shake his head from side to side as if it were saying no." It cost one dollar per try. Several people tried unsuccessfully and the man started to pick up his cash.

Just then a young boy asked if he could try. "Sure, put your dollar with the rest," replied the sarcastic man.

When the kid put the money on the pile of ones, he then promptly left and went behind a building. He quickly returned carrying a 2" x 4" in his hand. He stood directly in front of the elephant, showed him the 2" x 4" and promptly hit the elephant alongside the head, causing the elephant to shake its head from side to side.

The boy took the money and left as an angry, frustrated animal trainer yelled at him.

A year later the showman returned, this time with the elephant trained to shake its head "Yes," and made the same challenge.

That same little boy showed

up and laid his dollar on the pile of dollars. He stood again directly in front of the mammoth beast and carried a 2" x 4" and showed the elephant the board. He then asked, "Hey, elephant, remember me?" The elephant shook his head yes!

King Duncan said, "That elephant was motivated to remember!" What does it take to get you motivated?

King Duncan, *Amusing Grace* (Knoxville: Seven Worlds Publishing, 1993), 239.

Attitude

Howard Hendricks was on a flight during the summer of 1987 from Boston to Dallas that finally left the airport six hours late. Exhausted Friday-afternoon businessmen fumed about the delay. Hendricks tells that the man across the aisle from him muttered under his breath every time the flight attendant passed by his seat. Hendricks contemplated talking with the guy but realized the futility of such an attempt. Instead he walked back to the galley to compliment the stewardess on her self-control and the way she handled the circumstance. He asked her name, suggesting he wanted to write American Airlines to express appreciation for the way she balanced the situation. She responded, "I don't work for American Airlines. I work for Jesus Christ."

Dynamic Illustrations (Knoxville: Seven Worlds Corporation), July/August, 1996, n.p.

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Stress and Pain

Charles Swindoll gives a wonderful illustration concerning how God helps train us through adjustment to irritation and pain.

He relates that pearls serve as a great illustration of pain and the adjustments one has to make in life. Swindoll tells that the shell of the oyster gets pierced and an alien object enters, lodging itself inside. Upon the forced entry of that particle, every resource of the diminutive oyster rushes to the blemish and begins to release healing fluids that would otherwise remain dormant for the life of the oyster. After a period of time, the pesky intruder is covered. The wound is healed and transformed into a pearl. Swindoll writes: "No other gem has so fascinating a history. It is the symbol of stress—a healed wound . . . a precious, tiny jewel conceived through irritation, born of adversity, nursed by adjustments. Had there been no wounding, no irritating interruption, there could have been no pearl. Some oysters are never wounded . . . and those who seek for gems toss them aside, fit only for stew."

Charles Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1983), 164.

Unwanted

"I have come more and more to realize that being unwanted is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience. Nowadays we have found medicine for leprosy, and lepers can be cured. There's medicine for tuberculosis, and consumption can be cured. But for being unwanted, except there are willing hands to serve and there's a loving heart to love, I don't think this terrible disease can be cured." —Mother Teresa

PM

God's Treasury of Virtues (Tulsa, Okla.: Honor Books, 1995), 232.

Within a Hair's Breadth?

John Wesley's Encounter with John Calvin and the English Calvinists

The affinities between the theological views held by John Wesley and those held by John Calvin and the 18th-century English Calvinists have been the basis for considerable discussion from the 18th century to the present.¹ This discussion attempts to examine those documents found in Wesley's writings that address the theological statements of Calvin and the Calvinist tradition of Wesley's day in order to assess whether or not Wesley's theology is "within a hair's breadth" of Calvin and English Calvinism.

Hair Story in Context

John Calvin's (1509-64) conversion to Christianity apparently occurred in the quiet of his studies as a young scholar. Though remembered today as a great reformer, his break from the Roman Catholic Church was not immediate; he initially believed Catholicism capable of reformation. However, in 1534, he cut his ties with Roman Catholicism after charges of heresy were leveled against him.

The publication of the first edition of his systematic theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in 1536 made him famous overnight. This work remains his greatest lasting legacy. While it expanded with each succeeding edition and was translated widely, the *Institutes* proved to shape

avant-garde theology in its own and ensuing centuries. It is, perhaps, the most important single work of Reformed theology ever written.

Continuing Luther's emphasis upon justification by faith, Calvin especially underscores both the utter sinfulness of humans and the absolute sovereignty of God in his *Institutes*. The particular doctrine that sparked the most lively discussion, both in Calvin's day and in the centuries to follow, was his doctrine of predestination. It is helpful to remember, however, that though predestination is a central doctrine in Calvin's system, it is not primary. It is a de-

rivative of his doctrine of God's sovereignty.

Calvinism took root in England after English exiles returned from those countries to which they fled as Elizabeth ascended to the throne in 1558. Presbyterians and Puritans in England found congenialities in this transplanted Calvinism and each became inseparable from it in their protest against Anglo-Catholic theology and episcopacy.

Calvinism's heyday in England occurred in the 17th century under the Stuarts. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, however, the fortunes of Calvinism declined rapidly. By

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the beginning of the 18th century, England's Anglicanism was largely an Arminian communion.

John Wesley (1703-91) was the most important religious figure in 18th-century England. Though raised as a Christian, his most famous religious experience occurred as a young adult when his heart was "strangely warmed" while reading Romans. Traveling throughout England as an itinerant evangelist, Wesley kept a journal while writing letters, tracts, and other articles. These documents contain his basic theological framework. Three notions, among others, that shape Wesley's legacy then and today are his: (1) emphasis upon Christian perfection, also known as holiness and sanctification; (2) doctrine of prevenient grace; and (3) tendency toward latitudinarianism, which he called "catholic spirit."

One Fine Follicle

In his *Rediscovery of John Wesley*, George Croft Cell joins various Reformed theologians in stressing the close relationships between Wesley, Calvin, and Calvinism.² Cell acknowledges, however, that the heritage handed down in Methodism has portrayed Wesley as an arch-foe of Calvinism, root and branch. He also admits that Wesleyanism has done more than anything else to discredit Calvinism in the modern church.

To be sure, there are basic similarities. Cell often reminds his readers that Wesley believed that the truth of the gospel lies "within a hair's breadth" of Calvinism. This phrase is found in the minutes of a Society meeting convened by Wesley and close associates in 1745. The group noted in their minutes that the gospel lies "within a hair's breadth" of Calvinism and antinomianism. Antinomianism literally means "against the law." The gospel comes to the edge of Calvinism in that it ascribes all good to the free grace of God, denies that free will and power are an-

tecedents to grace, and excludes all merit from humans. It comes to the edge of antinomianism in exalting the merits and love of Christ and in rejoicing evermore.³

Eighteen years after this Society meeting, Wesley reaffirmed his position in a letter written to a member of the Society. He states that "the true Gospel touches the very edge both of Calvinism and Antinomianism; so that nothing but the mighty power of God can prevent our sliding either into the one or the other."⁴

Elements of Calvin's basic doctrine of justification by faith were affirmed by Wesley in various sermons, especially in "Justification by Faith." In "The Lord Our Righteousness," a sermon preached at the end of his life, Wesley quotes approvingly from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: "God justifies the believer for the sake of Christ's righteousness, and not for any righteousness of his own. So Calvin: 'Christ, by his obedience, procured and merited for us grace or favor with God the Father' (Institutes 1.2, c.17)."⁵

"Hair's breadth" language appears, with reference to justification, late in Wesley's life again. He writes: "I think on justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years; and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect, I do not differ from him an hair's breadth."⁶ Returning to the 1744 discussion of whether Methodists have leaned too much toward Calvinism, Wesley and company comment in the 1791 edition that, concerning justification, there exists a strong affinity. Although humans can do something to be justified, namely ceasing from evil and learning to do well, salvation is not by the merit of works but by works as a condition.

Was the theology espoused by John Wesley, then, really within a hair's breadth of Calvin's theology? I have noted the similarities

between the two and recognized a few of those who have recently underscored them. At least on certain issues, Wesley considered himself very near Calvin.

A Broad Braid

The final version of the Society minutes appeared in 1791—the year Wesley died. In the section in which Wesley had previously declared that the truth of the gospel lies within a hair's breadth of Calvinism, a significant change can be noted. Almost a half century after the aforementioned meeting, Calvinism is now seen as the direct antidote to Methodism and the doctrine of heart-holiness! The minutes read: "All devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done far less toward stopping the work of God" than Calvinism!

What happened in that half-century to change the tune Wesley and friends were singing? What "happened" was that Wesley and the Methodist movement had been dogged by various controversies with English Calvinists and these controversies clarified what were the actual differences and similarities.

The differences between Wesley and the Calvinists arose early within the Methodist movement itself. George Whitefield had become convinced that various Calvinist doctrines were more sound than those being preached by Wesley. In a detailed response to Whitefield, titled "Calvinistic Controversy," Wesley discloses what he believes are the three points in debate: unconditional election, irresistible grace, and final perseverance.⁷

With regards to unconditional election, Wesley notes that God unconditionally elects various persons and nations "to do certain works." However, he cannot believe that there is "one soul upon earth who has not ever had a possibility of escaping eternal damnation."

With regards to irresistible grace, Wesley believes that the

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grace that brings faith and salvation may be irresistible at that moment. He concedes that most believers remember a time when God irresistibly convinced them of sin or acted upon their souls. However, at other times God's grace has been resisted. This leads him to profess that, in general, grace does not act irresistibly. Wesley also cannot believe that all persons, in whom grace does not work irresistibly, will be damned.

On final perseverance, he is inclined to believe that there is a state attainable in this life, from which persons cannot finally fall. The emphasis upon attainability underscores Wesley's belief that humans bear some responsibility in salvation.⁸

The major doctrine that divided Wesley from Calvin and the English Calvinists, however, was the doctrine of predestination, with all its subsidiary tenets. In a letter written in 1765, near the end of his life, Wesley writes the line Cell often repeats and that has been noted earlier: "I think on justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years; and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hair's breadth." Immediately after this remark in the same letter, however, Wesley writes:

Just so my brother and I reasoned thirty years ago, "as thinking it our duty to oppose predestination with our whole strength; not as an opinion, but as a dangerous mistake, which appears to be subversive of the very foundation of Christian experience; and which has, in fact, given occasion to the most grievous offenses." That it has given occasion to such offenses, I know; I can name time, place, and persons.⁹

This quote notes both the predestination itself and the consequence of it. This doctrine will be addressed next, and the discussion of its consequence will follow.

"Three points in debate: unconditional election, irresistible grace, and final perseverance."

The doctrine of predestination divides Wesley from Calvin.

The Main Difference

In "A Dialogue Between a Predestinarian and His Friend," Wesley cleverly quotes from Calvin's *Institutes* and various documents from the Calvinist tradition to illustrate their differences. He uses these quotes as the voice of an imaginary predestinarian in the dialogue. In particular, he notes that Calvin believes:

1. All things that come to pass are ordained by God;
2. Every human's will is governed by God;
3. God fore-ordained Adam's fall;
4. Some are predestined to eternal life and others to damnation;
5. God calls those predestined to damnation to repent in order that they be more deaf;
6. God destined those to damnation to do what he has ordained.

Wesley's response to this imaginary predestinarian is that God does elect, in Christ, *all that continue in unbelief*. The emphasis here is upon God's action toward a category of persons, not individuals per se. What has been predestined is God's actions toward those who believe or continue in unbelief, thus allowing for a degree of freedom for the individual. In light of this, Wesley does not believe that the Bible supports the Calvinist conception of predestination.¹⁰

It is in his "Predestination Calmly Considered" (1752) that Wesley gives his fullest denunciation to what he believes is a false doctrine. Here we find explicit and detailed evidence to support the claim that it is the doctrine of predestination that divides him from Calvin and the English Calvinists.

Wesley begins by acknowledging the experience of those who, at a certain time, believed that they did not have the power to resist the grace of God. These persons are convinced of the

truth that "by grace you have been saved, through faith; . . . not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9)—a text Wesley also quotes approvingly. Yet, Wesley notes how easy it is for these to infer, from their own personal experience, that God *always* works irresistibly in every believer. Because of this experience, these persons further believe it impossible for any to fall from grace. Consequently, they infer that God "absolutely, unconditionally, predestined them to life before the foundation of the world."¹¹ Wesley illustrates his point with John Calvin: "All men are created for the same end; but some are fore-ordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation. So according as every man was created for the one end or the other, we say, he was elected, that is, predestined to life, or reprobated, that is predestined to damnation."¹²

Wesley's line of counterargument begins by addressing those who reject double predestination and simply affirm single predestination. Using common sense, the confessions, and Calvin to refute the soundness of such reasoning, Wesley notes that the single predestination notion is, to quote Calvin, "quite silly and childish. For election cannot stand without reprobation. Whom God passes by, those he reprobates. It is one and the same thing."¹³

After showing how unreasonable the idea of single predestination is, Wesley defines the issue he wants to address: predestination, also called unconditional election. He summarizes:

Before the foundations of the world were laid, God of his own mere will and pleasure fixed a decree concerning all the children of men who should be born unto the world. This decree was unchangeable with regard to God, and irresistible with regard to man. And herein it was ordained, that one part of

mankind should be saved from sin and hell, and all the rest left to perish for ever and ever, without help, without hope.

Why should God do this? It was His good pleasure "to show forth his glorious power and his sovereignty over all the earth."¹⁴

To those who ground their doctrine of predestination in Scripture, Wesley responds that he is quite aware that election is spoken of therein. The Bible is the authority that he also places over all others. However, Wesley believes that election means two things when used in the Bible.

First of all, election can refer to a divine appointment of some particular persons to do particular tasks. Second, some persons are elected, by divine appointment, to eternal happiness. This election to eternal happiness is conditional, however; the election of those to hell is also conditional. Election is conditioned upon what can be expressed in this scripture verse: "He that believeth . . . shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16, *KJV*).

The doctrines of *unconditional* election or *unconditional* reprobation are not found in Scripture and are "utterly irreconcilable to the whole scope and tenor both of the Old and New Testaments."¹⁵ Following this grand assertion, Wesley goes about showing hundreds of Scripture verses that cannot be reconciled with these doctrines. Included are verses such as: "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9, *KJV*). In addition, Wesley points out numerous passages describing God's justice that cannot be reconciled to these doctrines. He believes that God's justice and sovereignty must not be separated from God's other attributes, particularly God's chief attribute: love.

Wesley continues his argument by noting that the logical conclusion to the doctrine of predestination is that there will be no

judgment to come, nor any future state of reward and punishment. If God's will is irresistible and all are predestined, judgment is unnecessary—reward and punishment are meaningless.

To those who believe that other passages are correctly interpreted to espouse absolute predestination, Wesley claims that, if these be true, the Scripture should be given up altogether. For God declares three things explicitly:

1. Christ died for all.
2. He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.
3. He died for all, that they should not live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them.

Of course, Wesley is not about to give up Scripture! He is confident that absolute predestination, such as what Calvinism espouses, is unscriptural.

To assert that the doctrine of predestination is a legitimate Christian doctrine, one must claim that God is insincere when He invites all persons everywhere to repent. Since God claims the attribute of love uniquely, how can God be loving to the one predestined to hell? "Is not this such love as makes your blood run cold?" he asks.¹⁶

Subsequently, Wesley shifts his discussion to the issue of free will. He quotes from the Calvinist *Assembly of the Divines*, which declares that even Calvinists affirm a measure of free will. A classic assertion by predestinarians is that God cannot have the glory of salvation if humans were to have any decision or choice in the matter of salvation. Calvinists believed Wesley had a deficient view of sin and this view robbed God of glory by emphasizing the capabilities of humans. Wesley's answer to this assertion is as follows:

1. God gives humans the initial power to work together with Him.
2. More glory is given to God when God is understood

to draw, woo, or persuade persons to salvation than when God is understood to force persons into heaven or hell.

3. When considered side by side, Wesley's scheme, based upon a certain degree of human free will, offers more glory to God than one based upon a scheme that sees humans as predestined machines.

To those who believe that the glory of God's love is displayed when God elects 1 person out of 10, or 1 in 100, Wesley has a question: How would they judge a human who, though she had the power and opportunity to save hundreds, elects to save only one? Would that human be praised and glorified? To those who believe that God is unchangeable, Wesley notes that what is unchanging is God's affection and "tempers." God's judgment changes depending on the actions of particular persons. To those who point to God's faithfulness in keeping God's promises in covenant, Wesley points out that many of the covenants are conditional—conditioned by the response of humans with whom God has made that covenant.

A discussion of predestination also brings up questions of assurance or the eternal security of the individual. Wesley responds by pointing out passage after passage from Scripture that tells of those who fall after first having faith. Therefore, the type of assurance available in a doctrine of predestination is unscriptural.¹⁷

Wesley's conclusion is that the doctrine of predestination is an opinion that is unreasonable and contrary to Scripture. If the doctrine were true, then the whole of Scripture must be false. Concerning this doctrine, Calvinists simply continue to hold inaccurate opinions handed down through the traditions of their ancestors.

The final argument Wesley has against the doctrine of predestination is one that seems as con-

Election is conditional.

Doctrines of unconditional election or reprobation are not found in Scripture.

vincing, or even more so, as those based upon reason and Scripture. It is the argument from experience.

The Big Hairy Deal

The consequences of predestination appear to present an even bigger obstacle for Wesley than the fact that he believes the doctrine to be unscriptural and unreasonable. On this matter he seems unable to remain calm! He is convinced, from his experiences and observations, that Calvin's doctrine of predestination often leads to antinomianism. Since holiness is central for Wesley, a direct assault on this principal emphasis cannot be tolerated!

The notion of antinomianism had emerged during the initial stages of the Reformation. Wesley may have considered Luther's doctrine of *sola fide* to be the source of the English Calvinist's antinomian bent since he regarded Luther's *Galatians* to be a dangerous treatise. He denied the treatise's reductionistic claim of faith alone. Instead, he affirmed that salvation was by grace through faith and was confirmed by works.

It was Wesley's concept of a holy God who desired holy people that heavily influenced his separation from what he saw as, at least latent, antinomianism in 18th-century Calvinism. His emphasis upon sanctification caused him to react to anything that undermined godly living. In light of antinomianism, Wesley said that "the real issue between me and extreme Calvinism is in the doctrine of holiness and Christian Perfection."¹⁸

Returning again to the conclusion of his tract "Predestination Calmly Considered," we find that near the end of the piece Wesley writes:

The observing [of] these melancholy predestinarian examples day by day, this dreadful havoc which the devil makes of their souls, especially of those who had begun to run

How can
God be
loving to
the one
predestined
to hell?
Such love
makes your
blood run
cold!

so well, by means of this anti-scriptural doctrine, constrains me to oppose it from the same principle whereupon I labor to save souls from destruction.¹⁹

Antinomianism, then, is that doctrine which Wesley actually believed leads persons to destruction.

A further example is found in a personal letter written by Wesley in which he asserts that absolute predestination is not only false but also dangerous to the souls of persons. It frequently hinders growth in grace and stops the pursuit of holiness. It feeds all evil, weakens all good tempers, turns many from the way of life, and drives them back to perdition.²⁰

As long as antinomianism remains a theoretical opinion based upon the Reformation's emphasis of *sola fide*, Wesley could calmly consider the inadequacy of the doctrine. But when doctrinal antinomianism turned into practical antinomianism, Wesley responds vehemently! As Allan Coppedge writes, "When the Calvinistic position on predestination gave rise to practical antinomianism, Wesley's 'catholic spirit' was stretched to the limit."²¹

Shockingly, Wesley illustrates what Calvin's doctrine of predestination finally amounts to by pointing to Calvin's part in the burning of Michael Servetus! Calvin's doctrine of predestination bears dismal fruit since he allowed Servetus to be put to death "purely for differing from him in opinion in matters of religion."²²

Split End

Within a hair's breadth? Wesley's desire to identify with John Calvin probably springs from his attempt to maintain a catholic spirit. The latitudinarian temper of 18th-century England, which surfaces in Wesley's catholic spirit, coupled with his penchant for drawing upon diverse sources from antiquity, no doubt encouraged him to seek to identify with

Calvin. Concerning the doctrine of justification, he probably comes within a hair's breadth.

Wesley's rejection of John Calvin and English Calvinism's key doctrine of predestination, however, places him much further than a hair away from them. He rejects predestination because it does not correspond with the character of God found in Scripture. When yoked with its antinomianism consequence, predestination is quite dangerous. Wesley's emphatic demand that Christians should strive to be holy makes it impossible for him to align himself with Calvin's theological scheme, despite the holiness rhetoric used by Calvin and some English Calvinists. However much John Wesley may have claimed that he was within a hair's breadth of them, this study reveals that Wesley's theology is explicitly distinguished from both John Calvin and the later formulations of his theology in English Calvinism. PM

1. See Randy Maddox's synopsis of the issue and various texts concerning this discussion in "Reading Wesley as Theologian," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* vol. 30, 1 (Spring 1995), 9-10.

2. Along with George Croft Cell, *Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935) are two other major works that contend similarly. These include Franz Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley* (1951) and Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York, 1960).

3. *Works*, 8:284, 5.

4. *Ibid.*, 7:278.

5. *Ibid.*, 5:240.

6. *Ibid.*, 3:212.

7. *Ibid.*, 13:507-9.

8. *Ibid.*, 508.

9. *Ibid.*, 3:212.

10. "A Dialogue Between a Predestinarian and His Friend" in *Works*, 10:259-66.

11. *Works*, 10:205.

12. *Institutes*, chap. 21, sect. 1.

13. *Ibid.*, book 1, chap. 23, sect. 1.

14. *Works*, 10:209.

15. *Ibid.*, 211.

16. *Ibid.*, 229.

17. Wesley's tract "Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints" echoes this conclusion. *Works*, 10:284-98.

18. Cell, *Rediscovery of John Wesley*, 362.

19. *Works*, 10:258.

20. *Ibid.*, 13:149-50.

21. Allan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate* (Wilmore, Ky.: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987), 271.

22. *Works*, 10:266.

Is Social Drinking Acceptable for the Church Member?

Part One

There is a great deal of controversy in the church concerning the drinking of alcoholic beverages. Is it acceptable? Will it harm my Christian testimony? Is drinking today the same as it was in Bible times? Didn't Jesus create wine at a wedding? Didn't Paul recommend wine to Timothy for medicinal purposes? Didn't the children of Israel even tithe wine offerings?

I. Alcoholic Beverages Are Dangerous

In one book, Pat Robertson attempts to explain how Jesus could create "wine" at a wedding for His first miracle: "Some would raise the issue of what Jesus did when He changed water into wine. In ancient Israel there was almost no alcoholism, and there is little problem with it in Israel today. But in Jesus' day, wine was used at meals and in ceremonial functions or for special parties. . . . Their wine was probably a low-alcohol-content grape derivative, and it was more of a refreshing beverage than it was an intoxicant."¹

This answer does little to assuage doubts about the Bible's position regarding alcoholic consumption by the Christian believ-

er. It is important for pastors to establish in their own minds what is proper for themselves and their flocks. People in a congregation are in various stages of spiritual growth. Some struggle with daily devotions. Others try to overcome sinful habits. Various individuals also fill various roles of leadership in the church body. New Christians encounter difficulties in their initial walk with the Lord as their old lifestyles are challenged. However, church members should be ready for deeper commitments. The following study will attempt to demonstrate that there is suf-

ficient evidence to support the idea that social drinking is unacceptable for the church member because it is a poor witness.

The Bible readily speaks to this issue. In fact, "There are 627 references to drink and drinking in the Bible."² David Hocking states: "In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, some 12 words are used in 251 places. In the Greek language of the New Testament, three words are used. *Gluekos* is used once in Acts 2:13. This reference is to alcohol-free wine. At Pentecost the believers were accused of being 'full of new wine' (*gluekos*). It

Is drinking today the same as it was in Bible times?

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was obvious the apostles did not drink fermented wine. It was an insult hurled at them. In modern terminology it would be similar to saying, "These tea-totallers are drunk on Coke."³ Aristotle said of sweet wine called *glukus* that it would not intoxicate, and the wine of Arcadia was so thick it was necessary to scrape it from the skin bottles in which it was stored and dissolve the scrapings in water.⁴

The term *lenos* is used five times. This refers to the wine-press.

The term *oinos* is used 36 times. This term includes three compound words: *oinopotes* meaning "winebibber" (KJV) in Matt. 11:19 and Luke 7:34, *oinophlugia* meaning "drinking parties" (NASB) in 1 Pet. 4:3, and *paroinos* meaning "not given to wine" (KJV) in 1 Tim. 3:3 and Titus 1:7.

One of the reasons there is so much confusion about the exact meaning of the term "wine" in the Bible is that the terms used have been loosely translated. "The Greek word *oinos* refers to wine in all of its stages, from being the grape on the vine to the total process of fermentation. This is the problem we have in examining the biblical evidence for the use of alcoholic beverages."⁵

The word *juice* does not appear in the New Testament and appears only once in the Old. All fruit of the vine was called wine, whether it was fermented or not. There are 13 different words used in the Bible which are interpreted as wine, nine in Hebrew Chaldean, and four in Greek. The common word in Greek was *oinos*. These Greek words correspond to *yayin* or *yain* in Hebrew, *vinum* in Latin, and *wine* in English.

In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures of Jesus' time, the Hebrew word for grape juice is translated 33 times as the Greek word *oinos*. It is also

used to denote other kinds of drinks, such as lotus fruit and dates.

According to Professor Samuel Lee of Cambridge University, the root of this word in Hebrew is *yain* or wine. The word does not refer only to intoxicating liquor made by fermentation, but more so to a thick, unintoxicating syrup or jam produced by boiling to make it storable. This thick substance was stored in skin bottles.

The grape syrup was stored in new wineskins to prevent fermentation. It was referred to as "new wine." Old wineskins induced fermentation, just as improper canning procedures today can cause decay. This thick syrup was similar to our grape jellies and could be squeezed out of the skin bottles onto bread or dissolved in water, to be reconstituted as a very desirable grape drink. This process is described in the Hebrew Bible by Solomon and among Roman writers by Pliny.⁶

This evidence seems to be borne out in historical books as well. "Homer, in the ninth book of his *Odyssey*, tells us that Ulysses took in his boat a goatskin of sweet, black wine, and that when it was drunk, it was diluted with twenty parts of water."⁷

"The Greek (*oinos*) . . . although [it] could be used for the juice of the grape however perceived or for the fermented juice of other fruits, primarily meant fermented grape juice."⁸ Scholars have difficulty agreeing on the very definition of the terms used for wine in the Bible. In some minds this may leave the issue of social drinking open to interpretation. However, just as there may be some latitude in the Bible for consumption of alcoholic beverages by Christians, there is social and scriptural evidence that social drinking should be considered unacceptable for church members. The following

discussion will attempt to show the reasoning behind the latter position.

Alcoholic beverages are dangerous. Alcohol has the potential to deform unborn babies, poison the liver, and cause depression. It identifies with 6 million alcoholics and can easily become habit forming. Yet, only 35 percent of Americans abstain from the use of alcohol.

One out of three Americans report that drinking caused problems in their family. "Alcoholism is our third worst national health problem following only cancer and heart disease."⁹ "An estimated 10 million Americans suffer from alcoholism."¹⁰ Someone dies because of drunk driving every 22 minutes. "Far from aiding work, **it reduces reaction time** in every direction."¹¹

The irony of all this is that while working on this very paper, the author stopped to watch a favorite television show, *Cheers*. American society has literally become so inebriated with the consumption of alcohol as acceptable behavior that it is glamorized on a popular television situation comedy.

For so many years people have been told of the helpful uses for

Is there sufficient evidence to support the idea that social drinking is unacceptable for the church member?



wine. It is recommended as a helpful digestive with meals. Perhaps no one has perpetuated this habit more than the French, yet evidence may now be showing contrary effects to their long-held practice: "The French may be happier than other people, but they don't live much longer and, apart from heart disease, they aren't much healthier. Life expectancy is only about a year more in France than in the United States. Diseases associated with alcohol abuse are more common there, and although the overall incidence of cancer is comparable to ours, the rate is rising faster."¹² This researcher continues:

More important, not all French people drink wine. In 1980 about a third of the French drank no wine; today it's up to half. A mere 10% of the women and 28% of the men say they drink wine every day. (They're still way ahead of us—only 13% of Americans drink wine at least once a week.) . . . "Alcoholics are not a race apart," says Dr. Michel Craplet of the Paris-based National Association for the Prevention of Alcoholism. "To say drinking two or three glasses is OK will ultimately encourage alcoholism." Even Dr. Curtis Ellison, a specialist in preventive medicine at the Boston University School of Medicine who is convinced that wine has beneficial effects on the heart, doesn't endorse such promotion measures as the Food and Wines from France ad. Some research, he says, has come up with a possible association between alcohol and breast cancer. "Our policy should be, let's get the facts."¹³

Unfortunately, another danger inherent with the practice of drinking is that children are watching parents: "93% of all church kids will have at least one drink before they leave high school. And 40% or more will have had their first drinking experience before leaving the sixth

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grade."¹⁴ Could it be that Christian parents are influencing their children to drink? Is that a proper witness for the church member?

Rights are an important emphasis in society today. Tragically, Christians can be enticed to exercise rights as well. Unfortunately, as church members interpret the Scriptures for permission to drink, they not only set a bad example for their children but are subject to hurting others as well. Rachel Kelly in an issue of *USA Today* dated April 7, 1989, makes a poignant point:

It's not the falling-down drunk who's killing people on the highways. It's the social drinker, the person who's been out to lunch or who's returning from a ball game, has had a couple of beers and gets in the car to drive. It's the social drinker—the person who can afford both to drink and to drive. It's not the poverty-stricken person in the ghetto who's causing the carnage. It's the social drinker, the person who has money.¹⁵

The Scriptures expressly tell of the dangers of alcohol as well. Prov. 20:1 (RSV) states, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler; and whoever is led astray by it is not wise." Prov. 23:33 (RSV) reads, "Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things." Hab. 2:15 warns, "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies." The *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* elaborates:

Wine was often mixed with spices, following the general usage of the ancient Near East. Such a drink was, of course, especially intoxicating. A cup of "foaming wine, well mixed," is prepared by Yahweh for the wicked of the earth (Psa. 75:8, RSV); . . . In general, however, "those who go to try mixed wine" have woe, sorrow, strife, and complaining (Prov. 23:29-30, RSV).¹⁶

In Luke 21:34, Jesus said, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap."

II. Alcoholic Beverages Are Denied to Certain People in the Bible

There is no question that alcohol is dangerous. The Scriptures describe those prohibitions.

Priests

Priests were not to partake while ministering. Lev. 10:9-10 (RSV) mandates, "Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die; it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations. You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean." Ezek. 44:21 (RSV) concurs, "No priest shall drink wine, when he enters the inner court." Even Jesus avoided alcohol on the Cross. "Christ was priest as well as offering, and no Jewish priest could be thought of as touching wine when sacrificing."¹⁷

Nazirites

Nazirites were not permitted to drink wine during the time of



their vows. Num. 6:3 says, "He must abstain from wine or from other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins."

Prophets

Others that were not to drink wine were prophets while teaching or prophesying. Isa. 28:7, RSV, describes the difficulties when prophets do imbibe, "These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment." "Isaiah condemns those who 'tarry late into the evening till wine inflames them!' (Isa. 5:11, RSV; cf. v. 22). Habakkuk contends that 'wine is treacherous' (Hab. 2:5, RSV; cf. Hos. 4:11), and Micah complains that the people want a preacher who will speak of wine and strong drink (Mic. 2:11)."¹⁸ Obviously, this is not proper or a prophet would not have been taken seriously and would have been thought out of his mind when relating a word from the Lord. John the Baptist in Luke 1:15 is a tremendous example of a prophet set apart by not drinking: "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth." "John the Baptist could not drink strong drink. Evidently abstinence from alcohol was felt to be a matter of high importance to be placed in parallel with sonship to the Highest. It was the mark and symbol of separation from corrupt living and from a degenerate and doomed society."¹⁹ When one makes the decision to indulge in church membership, that commitment should involve a symbol or symbols of separation from a degenerate society.

There is a great deal of controversy in the church concerning the drinking of alcoholic beverages.

Kings and Princes

Kings and princes were also forbidden to drink. Prov. 31:4-5 commands, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel—not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights." "Isaiah mocks the 'shepherds' [kings] who are merely interested in processing wine and filling themselves with strong drink (Isa. 56:11-12; cf. Hos. 7:5)."²⁰ Following the Prov. 31 passage that is cited, the *New International Version* interprets verse 6 as an admonition to "Give beer to those who are perishing." Again, one encounters the difficulty of interpretation of terms used for wine. This particular interpretation is troubling, though, since the art of distillation was not invented until the ninth century. *The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee* interprets verse 6 to read "give strong drink unto him."²¹

Once again, the difficulty of interpretation of the very terms for the argument for or against alcohol are inflamed by ambiguity. "Wine is praised and condemned in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; in this respect a sharp distinction cannot be made between the two testaments."²²

Church Officers

In the New Testament, church officers were charged to abstain. 1 Tim. 3:3 charges that officers should be "not given to drunkenness." Verse 8 goes on to say, "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain." Titus 1:7 continues this line of thought, the "overseer . . . must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness." Ernest Gordon explains the Greek terms involved in these guidelines:

Nepho in its primary meaning, to abstain from wine, is used nine times in the Epistles

to Timothy and Titus and in the First Epistle of Peter. It is translated "be sober" (seven times), "be vigilant," and "watch," the implied meaning of sober being either sober in conduct and dress, or sober, that is, not **visibly** intoxicated.²³

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is no place for wine. "In the accounts of the Last Supper the term **oinos** occurs neither in the Synoptists nor Paul."²⁴ In 1 Cor. 11:25, the word "wine" is not even used. Instead, all accounts say, "the cup" or "fruit of the vine."

The incongruity of drunkenness and Christian experience emerges very clearly in the context of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:21), so clearly in fact that current Corinthian practice must be declared invalid (11:20). The Dionysus cult, with its stress on religious intoxication, was familiar in Corinth and further afield, and it is reasonable to see within these New Testament epistolary texts a concern to draw a clear line between all such Hellenistic cults and the life of the Christian in the Spirit.²⁵ In Mark 14:25, Jesus uses the term "fruit of the vine" not wine.

Because of its color wine could also be called the "blood of the grape" (Gen. 49:11; Deut. 32:14; Ecclesiasticus 39:26; 50:15; cf. Isa. 63:3; Rev. 14:20). A similar phrase is found in Ugaritic epics. . . . It is possible that this terminology was in Jesus' mind when he "took the cup, and . . . gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; this is the blood of the covenant'" (Matt. 26:27-28; cf. Mark 14:23-24; 1 Cor. 11:25).²⁶

It is important to note that there was a Jewish tradition of "watering wine" at Communion.

The watering of wine at Communion, a practice of the early Church, was a continuation of Jewish usage and pre-

sumably dictated by the same consideration. Dr. W. M. Christie, a connoisseur of Jewish customs and rabbinical literature, speaking of the Last Supper, says (*Palestine Calling*, p. 128): "The Passover wine was always mixed in the proportion of one of wine to three of water (B. Shabb. 77a)."

According to the Mishna (ch. 10) a person was not to have less than four cups of wine at the Passover. This, according to Lightfoot (vol. 9, p. 151), would, if alcoholic, have meant six ounces of alcohol, enough to badly intoxicate the women and children partaking.²⁷

"The wine at the Eucharist was the mixture of water and wine that was the ordinary table drink (Justin, 1 Apol. 65; 67)."²⁸ David Hocking in his book also supports this theory for Passover, especially in regards to Matt. 26:29: "As mentioned previously, the rabbis of ancient times mixed three parts water with one part wine (regardless of its stage of fermentation) to insure that it was not intoxicating."²⁹ "Our sinless High Priest ate with publicans and sinners and drank the pure juice of the vine. But never did He sit in the seat of the scornful or touch the cup when its contents were 'red and biting' (see Prov. 23:31, 32)."³⁰

Paul admonishes believers to abstain if it causes someone to stumble. In Rom. 14:21 he cautioned, "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall."

In Rom. 14:21 he recommends total abstinence from flesh and wine should the weaker brother be upset about eating and drinking. In Eph. 5:18, on the basis of Prov. 23:31 . . . he warns against excessive drinking of wine. . . . In contrast, he calls for surrender to the fullness of the Spirit, cf. Luke 1:15. There is also a warning against over-indulgence in 1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 2:3.³¹

The *New International Dictio-*

nary of New Testament Theology concurs with this position:

Typical of the Pauline attitude is 1 Thess. 5:6, 7, where, with an awareness of the imminence of the end, Paul issues a strong warning against the perils of drunkenness. The argument is based on the conviction that Christians now live in the light of Christ's new day. . . . A similar attitude is present in one of the parables (Matt. 24:29; Luke 12:45), where drunkenness is shown to be inconsistent with the alertness of the faithful servant, who is properly aware of the eschatological dimension of service in the new age (cf. Luke 21:34).³²

"Drunkenness is characteristic of Gentile culture (1 Pet. 4:3); therefore, the thoughtful Christian should not drink any wine at all if it will cause his weaker brother to slip back into Gentile ways (Rom. 14:21)."³³

To be continued . . .

Watch for Part Two in the next issue. **PM**

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33. Buttrick, *Interpreter's Dictionary*, 851.

In ancient Israel there was almost no alcoholism, and there is little problem with it in Israel today.



"What did the executive committee think of your suggestion to revise the remodeling program?"

Helping People Heal from the Wounds of Divorce

When I was divorced after a 12-year marriage, the reality hit me hard. I wasn't just a 'divorce statistic.' I was now a divorced woman terrified at being alone and doubting if I could navigate my way through all the new responsibilities that were mine alone. I, the 'together woman,' suddenly felt paralyzed, unable to function or make decisions," recalls Sandy, 39.

- "Although my former wife and I managed to divorce without creating great hostilities, I was immediately overwhelmed when the divorce papers were finalized today. Now, after 18 years of family life together, I am a divorced man and the single parent of three teenage boys. How could I possibly manage. I am numb with fear and insecurity," wrote David, 41, in his daily journal on the day his divorce papers arrived in the mail.
- "I never expected it to happen to me, therefore I was unprepared for the rejection and devastation involved when I was divorced. I was absolutely certain that I would not survive being divorced. Death could never be so painful," says Lauren, 29, who had been married eight years.

Most women and men who are divorced or in the process of divorce can quickly identify with the emotions expressed above.

Divorce is a couple's greatest disappointment and one of life's most stressful situations. The wounds are deep and the pain searing. Yet, by planning carefully, praying earnestly, thinking creatively, and acting optimistically, the wounds can be healed and the pain eventually eliminated. Here are some effective strategies that pastors, Christian educators, and other spiritual leaders can make to help people heal from the wounds of divorce.

Emphasize the need to trust in the God of everlasting love.

The Bible makes clear God is not a faultfinder, constantly on the search for things to condemn in us. Rather, God's magnificent love sees us at our best, not our worst. God's love anticipates what we can become, not merely what we are. Claim for yourself the promise declared in Jeremiah: "The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness'" (31:3). If you feel detached from God, reconnect yourself to God's love by reviewing these reminders from the Bible: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). "You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you" (Ps. 86:5). "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy" (Dan. 9:18).

Placing trust in God effectively reduces anxiety, facilitates emotional balance, and generates hope during a divorce process, says Larry M. Correu, a pastor and counselor. In his book, *Beyond the Broken Marriage*, he writes: "The dread you feel is lessened if God's grace is a powerful enough factor in your life to drive dread from it. The outcome of this whole mess may not be exactly what you hoped for. But even this will not be too heavy for you if you walk by faith in the advocacy of God for you, believing that God is working out good and gracious purposes for your life."

Remind the divorced they must learn to live with the loneliness.

An immediate result of divorce is the disheartening feeling of loneliness. Remind the divorced that this is natural. They are making the awkward transition from being part of a couple to being a single person. A psychological void will linger as they carry on the daily duties of life—cooking, laundering, working, paying bills, and so forth, *alone*. Learning to live with the loneliness is greatly facilitated by adopting these kinds of attitudes and techniques:

Accentuate the positive side of loneliness.

"When I was being divorced, I decided immediately that I could either brood and further depress myself over circumstances or I

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could make the most of my time alone," recalls Mike, who was divorced after a 15-year marriage. "I made a deliberate attempt to identify some benefits of being single again. Suddenly, I had more time on my hands, so I used that time to prepare for law entrance exams. When I passed those successfully, I applied and was accepted to law school, which I attend part-time. I never felt I could do those things when I was married because of time constraints."

Refuse to live in an isolated shell.

The divorced should initiate contact with others to reduce loneliness rather than wait for someone to call them. Suggest they contact friends and invite them for dinner, a walk, a concert. Of course, remaining active in the church is vital for both spiritual and emotional support.

Encourage grieving.

A divorce signals the "death" of a marriage. Death always produces grief. There is a mourning period similar to someone whose spouse dies. The divorced must allow themselves to grieve. There is great wisdom in this Jewish proverb: "If you bottle up grief, you'll never soften it." Consider this insight from Mark, divorced three years ago after nearly 25 years of marriage: "The best advice I would pass on to those currently divorcing is to mourn your loss. No matter what the circumstances nor who initiated the divorce, there is almost always great sadness. Hearts are broken. The pain produces tears of grief. Don't hold back the tears. Don't be 'brave and strong.' Both men and women should cry out their pain and not be ashamed. Tears cleanse the body and heal the spirit." The healing nature of tears is also noted in the Bible, "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). "Those who sow in

tears will reap with songs of joy" (126:5).

Suggest the divorced use the healing sentences.

In any relationship breakdown it is tempting to attack and to blame in these ways: "She was so unfair. Everything we worked for is gone." "I had a lousy lawyer, that's why I'm in this situation." "How could he do this to me!" Avoid completely the temptation to attack and to blame. Remind yourself that it really doesn't matter what "they" did. The recently divorced may need gentle reminders there is no future in the past. Encourage them to move ahead by using healing sentences such as these:

- God is guiding me moment by moment, day by day.
- I will face new challenges with courage and dignity.
- I am willing to begin again.
- I accept the need to make change.
- I am teachable. I can learn. God helps me.
- I will move forward with confidence.

Advise the divorced to sit tight for one year.

Some people have made drastic mistakes by initiating changes too soon following a divorce. Most people experience divorce as an emotional earthquake. The pattern of life is drastically altered, leaving a person with conflicting and confusing feelings. Because the emotional distress level is high, the divorced should avoid making major decisions during the first 12 months. In her book *Positive Plus*, Dr. Joyce Brothers offers this sound advice for the recently divorced: "For a year, don't make any change that is not absolutely necessary. Don't sell your house. Don't move in with your daughter. Don't marry. Don't buy a condo in Mexico or a cabin in Alaska. Don't buy that stock. Don't make that loan. Put everything on hold for 12 months."

Recommend seeking help and support from others.

"The best single piece of advice I can give to someone in the divorce process is to surround yourself with friends who will listen without interrupting, without judging, and without advising," says Martha, 34, recently divorced after a 10-year marriage. "Divorce creates emotional pressure and the most effective way to release the pressure is by talking about the details in the presence of kind and sensitive friends. Not only will you find it a great relief to get your feelings out, but your friends will feel closer to you and be even more supportive."

Encourage the divorced to assist someone else.

Reaching out to help other hurting people helps the divorced take the focus off themselves and their pain. Helping others who are hurting will bring emotional balance and a fresh perspective to their lives. "One of the things that really helped me as I was being divorced was continuing my volunteer work as a weekly tutor for inner-city children," recalls Janice, 38. "As I focused on others, I was made aware that my situation was not the worst thing happening in the world. Helping others during my own time of crisis actually poured healing into me."

The divorced ought to be reminded that none of us can control everything that happens to us. However, we can control our response. Healing from the wounds of divorce means responding to life with energy, optimism, hope, and faith. No matter how desperate, frustrated, guilty, or lonely they may feel, urge the divorced to accept the challenge of divorce recovery by responding with faith, positive attitudes, and actions. This will help them heal from wounds, lead to increased growth, greater wisdom, more sensitivity for others, and an even greater appreciation for living.

PM

Problems? Maybe Not!

Once again I am in the middle of a church crisis. Fires need to be extinguished, feelings need to be soothed, misunderstandings need to be clarified, and perceptions need a dose of reality.

Crisis is something I have been through before. As in the past, it consumes my time, drains my energy, frustrates me, makes me want to quit all together, and in my lowest moments even makes me question why anyone would want me to be a pastor.

Am I the only one who has to deal with such ugly feelings?

The current crisis is not the issue, although it is significant enough that my fears suggest that I might even destroy a church—but that will probably not happen. Nevertheless, that's how I feel at the moment. My reaction to the crisis is the real issue.

I am disappointed in myself! My disappointment comes from allowing myself to be put in the pits by something that has the strange ability to seem bigger than God. Why do I let myself become so consumed by something I can't really solve?

Reality check! I am out of focus. It's time once again for a refocusing jolt. *Thank You, Lord, for not giving up on me!*

This jolt is a bit more dramatic than most I have experienced. Do you think God knew just how "unfocused" I was becoming this time?

Last Sunday on the way to church, feeling very much like I did not want to even go to

church, I began to express out loud my frustrations to my wife. The conversation focused on "my problem." Then, much to my joy and relief, Allan was introduced into the conversation. Perspective on the immensity of my problems immediately changed. Let me explain.

Allan accepted Jesus Christ last Sunday. I was privileged to witness along with the congregation this most thrilling of all church events. A student at Nazarene Theological Seminary, home for the holidays, was asked to preach. He is an earlier convert of First Church who came because of sports. His folks even came to hear him preach. It was their first time to be in church when he preached. They speak very little English, so they probably understood very little of what he said. Yet they heard him preach, but that is another story. He preached a powerful but simple message. He opened the altar. Allan came forward and "stood" at the altar. He was so new he didn't know that he was supposed to kneel. Allan was graciously converted.

The refocusing continued that morning on the way to church as we talked about "the rest of the story."

Allan came to the service that morning because his sister has started coming. She and her husband come because her husband's brother and wife accepted the Lord about two months ago. They accepted Jesus Christ after expressing a desire to have their

children dedicated. When I went to their home to talk about the dedication, I asked them where they were in their relationship to Christ. They admitted having none. I presented the gospel and in a very simple but real way, they committed their lives to Jesus Christ.

They wanted their children dedicated because another brother who had been saved two years ago invited them to church. They accepted his invitation and witnessed a baby dedication. They were touched by God's Spirit. The first brother and his wife in this evangelism chain came to Christ two years earlier because one of the "old timers" in the church, thank God for them, recognized him in a downtown elevator. He had attended Sunday School several years before. So the man invited him to church again. He came. He found Christ! Aren't the webs of evangelism wonderful?

In the car that morning, as we reviewed what God was doing, my "problem" became very insignificant. By the time we reached the church, I knew God was going to be there. That's good news for a pastor!

What is church all about anyway? Why do we labor as pastors? To be found in favor with those who wonder why such gifted, nice people are feeling led to go someplace where they can be "fed"? Am I to change who I am so I can "feed" people who don't always want to eat? Do I wish to be found in favor with people?

The following are a few things I think about when the "tyranny of the urgent" raises its demanding head and I am forced to refocus. These lessons help keep me better focused.

1. I must learn to distinguish between two very different "sources of problems."

There is a big difference between the kind of "storm" or problems that come from lack of organization, inadequate training, or inept recruitment of personnel,

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and the storm that is birthed out of a spiritual problem. When I expend energy on matters I can do something about, I don't have nearly as much trouble laying them down at night. Yes, they have to be picked up the next morning, and that's not always easy. I don't always find an immediate solution, but those problems don't sap the same kind of energy as do problems of a spiritual nature. When I dissipate my personal energy trying to solve problems that are in God's arena alone, I approach burnout.

For example, if a lack of children's workers is the problem, it is basically nonspiritual in nature. I can reorganize until more workers are ready, invest in equipment that will make children's programs more exciting, use people in a double capacity for a while, or many other options. When "me, myself, and I" try to solve a worker problem and the problem is really caused by a carnal attitude of ownership, aversion to change, or an unsanctified power play, and thereby take over the work of God, I can't sleep, work, or even enjoy moments of recreation.

2. I must remember that the Enemy is the enemy.

How often have I made people, circumstances, the lack of finances, or any other number of things the enemy. I have to remember that the Enemy is the enemy, not people, places, or things.

3. I must be honest with myself about priorities in my ministry.

I struggle to keep the main thing the main thing. Sometimes it's easier to keep programs running than to develop eyes for the harvest. I sometimes assume that everyone I know is already aware of the good news, so I spend my energy being creative in interpreting the Scripture for overfed Christians, which is quite fulfilling. When one of the saints says, "That was a new thought to me and it was really a

different approach to the Scripture," it builds my ego because they have heard the best preach. I must not forget that living all around me are people who refer to the Bible as, "you know, that book," and think our church is some sort of Jewish sect.

4. I must stay close to a support group.

God did not intend for us to walk the "faith walk" alone. He gave us community. It is one of God's best ideas. Pastors are especially susceptible to thinking we can do it alone. Find someone or a group to whom you can be accountable. Without it, small problems become much larger than they are, and big problems become major blind spots.

5. I must be ready to say, "I am sorry."

Even a sanctified pastor must

learn to say, "I am sorry." Perfection of heart does not give us perfect perception of all circumstances. Sometimes I react out of a lack of knowledge and information, making a wrong choice. I must not be beyond admitting my mistake, asking for forgiveness, and praying for reconciliation.

During the 20-minute commute from home to church that Sunday morning, I was gently reminded that pastoring is about holding up Jesus before people who need Him and seeing that they have a chance to consider Him. It is not about winning all the skirmishes. And people are finding Jesus! Allan is the eighth person to make a personal decision for Christ in the few months I have been the pastor of "ol' First Church." It is happening. That is not "a problem!" That is victory! **PM**



Pardon me . . . where would I find books on overthrowing the church government?

When Your Companion Dies

Be instant in season, out of season" is a regular instruction to ministers of the gospel about to be ordained. However, few apply the scripture from 2 Tim. 4 to themselves when it comes to personal tragedy. What does a minister do, for example, when his companion dies?

Ministers counsel members of the church on a regular basis when they face death in their families. Who counsels ministers when their companions die? Over the years I have told dozens of bereaved families, "I understand." Not until my wife died suddenly and prematurely did I realize I had not understood.

Perhaps few ministers stop and think what they would do if their companions died suddenly. Such was my case. On Friday afternoon, I took my wife to a doctor when she had signs of having suffered a light stroke. The doctor immediately diagnosed the problem as toxic poison caused by a combination of two medications prescribed by another doctor.

We admitted my wife to an area hospital around six o'clock in the evening, and she died at 1:30 the following Tuesday afternoon. A beautiful and fruitful ministry of 38 years came to a sudden end. I was not prepared.

One may minister for many years, counsel several bereaved families for a year and feel very confident in doing so, but it is a different story when death

comes to the parsonage. No doubt many go through the traditional stages following death—denial, anger, rejection, and loneliness.

Thank God, I was able to get through the grief. During the first few weeks following the funeral, I was encouraged to talk with a denominational minister who was employed in a counseling ministry. He helped me through the initial weeks of grief. In the process, I learned a great many things that might help others—especially ministers—when they lose a companion.

First, don't expect people to rally about you.

It may happen, but in too many cases, it doesn't. Some individuals do not understand. Others are afraid and do not know what to say. A few think a minister has all of the answers and needs no help.

However, a few close and concerned friends and relatives can make a difference when death comes. My two sons, both of whom live in distant cities, stayed in constant contact with me. Few days passed that they did not call. While they were undoubtedly grieved by the loss of their mother, they were concerned about their dad!

One young couple—the husband is a fellow minister—stood by me. A day seldom passed when they did not come to see me. They invited me to their home where we sat and talked. Occasionally we shared a meal

out. In brief, they filled a tremendous void in my life.

Second, don't be shocked when matchmakers try to select a future companion for you.

I was not immediately prepared to consider remarriage, but that did not prevent matchmakers from suggesting an "available" possible wife. Most shocking, some women contacted me personally to express their "love" for me.

Third, don't withdraw or go into a shell.

Fortunately for me, my church board called me into a meeting and said: "Pastor, it is rumored you plan to resign. The board has discussed this and wants to urge you not to resign. We need you!"

What a comfort to know I was needed in a time of overwhelming grief! Really, I needed them more than they needed me.

Return to the pulpit as soon as possible. Following my wife's funeral on Friday afternoon, I attended church Sunday evening. My minister friend preached the morning and evening sermons, but I asked for the pulpit and closed the Sunday evening service. I do not remember most of what I said, but I do remember saying to the congregation: "You can't give up now. I'm going to make it. We've come too far to quit!"

The following Sunday morning, I was back in the pulpit, conducting the service. The first few weeks, I cried a great deal. It was not uncommon to weep during the worship. Sometimes I did

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not know whether I was weeping for my departed wife or because of the presence of the Holy Spirit who was my Comforter.

Fourth, recognize that loneliness may be an immediate problem.

I was lonely. An older brother agreed to spend the nights with me for a few weeks until I made personal adjustments.

Loneliness was heightened as I watched my sons dividing my wife's considerable library. Books they did not want they contributed to our church library. As a public school librarian, she had collected a sizable library, which was her joy. The absent books signaled the vacancy in my home and heart.

Fifth, my strongest advice to a minister who has lost a companion is to stay busy.

During the first few weeks following my wife's death, I arrived at church each morning around 7:00 or 7:30 instead of the usual 8:30. I often remained in the office until 7:00 in the evening to avoid being home alone. Thankfully, looking back, I spent a great deal of time in prayer. Sometimes I wept and prayed as I drove across the city to make hospital visits. And, yes, there were times when I asked God why.

Meals became impossible! Like many depressed individuals, I lost all appetite for food. As a result, I lost 11 pounds in a very

short time. One good thing—my blood pressure, always relatively low, dropped to 116 over 65.

Months passed. More than 300 friends mailed me sympathy cards. Cards continued to come as news of my wife's death spread across the nation. I prayed for the cards to stop coming in order to give me a chance to get over the death. But they continued to come. Even as Christmas approached, I began receiving the usual notes addressed to "Carl and Sara." My wounds were opened all over again as I took time to write and tell close friends she had died.

Fortunately, time passed rapidly because I stayed busy. Then one night a close friend from another state called. "How are you getting along?" he asked. I admitted I was depressed and lonely. He finished the conversation and hung up.

Later, I learned my friend called a former parishioner who lived in the same city as he. "Have Violet call the pastor," my friend suggested to Violet's mother.

"Why?" she asked.

"Well," responded my friend, "perhaps she can comfort him."

Several evenings later, Violet called. She talked of her admiration for my late wife and asked how I was getting along. Following the 15-minute conversation, I asked if I might correspond

with her. She had also been a parishioner of mine seven years earlier. I didn't even know her address. She gave me the information that I requested.

A few days later, I sat down and wrote a note of thanks for her call. Then, as days passed, I realized I was attracted to her and picked up the telephone and called her. One call led to another. As we compared notes on likes and dislikes, I discovered we had a great many things in common. She was a schoolteacher—both my late wife and I had been teachers. She was interested in music and owned a Baldwin piano—I had an almost identical one. She had lost her husband 21 years earlier in Vietnam. She had three sons—I had two.

The result was marriage.

Looking back on these happy years, I realized our meeting years ago was ordered by God. If nothing good came out of my short pastorate in Georgia but meeting Violet, it was worth it. A public schoolteacher and pastor in one household make for a busy schedule. Thank God He brought us together.

In all honesty, I am not completely over my wife's death. It has been particularly difficult to accept the cause of her death.

What do you do when you lose your companion? Trust God! I made it, and you can too! **PM**

Pontius' Puddle

THEOLOGIAN'S HAVE MADE SCRIPTURE TOO DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. BRING ME A PROPHET WHO CAN EXPLAIN FAITH SIMPLY.



LOVE THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF, AND GIVE GENEROUSLY TO THE POOR.



UMM. ON SECOND THOUGHT, BRING BACK THE THEOLOGIAN'S!



PONTIUS@AOL.COM

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Myths and the Ministerial Family

A myth has a grain—perhaps many grains—of truth, but it is not the whole truth and may even be deceptive in some important way. Although many people believe in myths, following one may lead to personal disappointment.

As a PK (preacher's kid), the wife of an ordained minister, and a professional counselor, I have identified some common myths that impact the behavior of ministerial families. Because family religious values closely tie into how children feel about their family, myths can affect the spiritual growth of the pastor's children.

Myth No. 1: The minister's family should be (is) perfect.

Mike disrupts the general science class for the umpteenth time with one of his famous pranks. His teacher is exasperated and yells, "How can I ever believe anything your father preaches when you act like this?"

Mr. and Mrs. Pastor know that church members expect their family to be perfect. In their desire to be models to their congregation, the couple places a heavy burden of perfection on their children. Phrases like "We can't do that—the members wouldn't understand" or "Shsh, Daddy's the preacher and everyone's looking at us" slip out frequently. The pastor's children

What myths surround the ministerial family? How do they affect the spiritual growth of the pastor's children?

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must be models in behavior, dress, and spirituality. The children get the underlying message: Mom and Dad's love for them is conditional on good behavior. They easily transfer this message over to their relationship with God.

Mr. and Mrs. Pastor may give their children the idea that if their family has problems, no one should know. To admit problems is to admit imperfection. They must deny feelings, put on a good front. Appearance counts. But Michael and Michelle, alert PKs that they are, know everything isn't right. They know how they feel, even though Mom and Dad deny those feelings. The kids interpret the instructions to "look good" for the parishioners as crass hypocrisy. All of this game-playing can easily lead to feelings of perfectionism—a denial of grace, a reliance on self for salvation.

Denying feelings and problems

often leads to an inability to deal with personal feelings or to understand the feelings of others. Hardening of the emotional arteries sets in, leading to difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Sometimes the pent-up emotions and pressures of being the "perfect kid" erupt in an explosion of anger toward God (or parents). Mr. and Mrs. Pastor are crushed. What went wrong? Michael seemed like such a good kid. Very likely Michael simply couldn't stand being in the pressure cooker of perfection any longer.

What can we do about this myth? Yes, part of the job description of a church leader is to model God's way of family life. But how can we do this without denying problems or demanding unreasonable perfection?

The answer lies in our motivation for Christian living. If our actions emanate from an ongoing relationship with Christ, we will communicate this to our children. We will be concerned about how we stand with God, and not be overwhelmed by how we stand with the congregation we serve. Our way of living comes from how God wants us to live—not from what the parishioners expect. We should never let the parishioners' wishes dictate our expectations for our children. We must teach our children to derive their enthusiasm for life from God. When that happens, the model for the congregation takes care of itself.



The answer lies also in how we deal with problems. Pretended perfection doesn't show our children how to deal with their own guilt and imperfections. If we humbly admit our own shortcomings and ask forgiveness, our children will feel surprisingly warm toward us. They will also learn how the grace of God operates in real life. The burden of perfection will be removed by the comforting and reassuring grace of salvation.

Yes, we can be a model for the parishioners, but only by being in close communion with God. Our modeling becomes the natural outgrowth of our walk with the Lord. Our children must hear this message and experience the freedom needed to grow spiritually.

Myth No. 2: Every need is a call from God.

The phone rings constantly. Parishioners, the conference, the city fathers, the church school, other conferences, discouraged saints, dependent clingers, and myriads of others want to talk to the pastor. Most calls involve a request for something and don't respect time—family time, mealtime, sleep time, devotional time. The needs and the calls seem endless.

Each request raises the specter of turning down a call from God. So Mr. and Mrs. Pastor keep trying to meet everyone's needs. In time a grave but subtle danger arises: the pastoral ego begins to feel needed and indispensable. Each call feeds an insatiable ego. Gradually God's will and Mr. and Mrs. Pastor's need for approval and feeling needed become intertwined, and, as Tim Hansel shows in *When I Relax I Feel Guilty*,¹ busyness becomes an evidence of doing God's will. In contemporary terminology, the pastoral couple has become addicted to doing good.

The problem with any addiction is that it dominates a person's life and makes rational decisions about everyday life and

relationships difficult. The satisfaction of the addictive need becomes paramount.² This, in a ministerial family, means putting others' needs before those of the family. This "sacrifice" feeds the pastoral ego but starves the family.

Mr. Pastor promises to lead out in the games at Michael's birthday party on Saturday afternoon. But early Saturday morning Sister Suzanna calls and asks the pastor to please help her move. Everyone she knows is gone for the weekend, and besides, the pastor is such a good organizer. Things will go so much better if he is there!

Sister Suzanna, a new church member, really needs his support, reasons Mr. Pastor. Maybe he can get back in time for the party. Mom can cope—she always has before. "No problem," responds Mr. Pastor, "I'll be over right after breakfast." Of course, the moving takes longer than expected, and Dad doesn't make it to the birthday party.

When five-year-old Michael asks why Daddy didn't come to his party, Dad explains how he had to help Sister Suzanna. And Mom covers up for her husband by reminding Michael that "Jesus is happy when we help other people." That doesn't satisfy Michael, who feels let down that Daddy wasn't at his party.

Michael and Michelle soon learn that they are less important than others. Eventually this translates into feelings of rejection and resentment of their father's job. Because his work is a religious calling, they easily transfer these negative feelings to their father's God and his church.

How can the ministerial family keep in perspective the many demands on their time? Isn't their specialty helping God meet human needs? The answer lies in an intimate connection with time's Creator. Helping others can never substitute for personal encounter with God. Before the day begins, we must seek God's

priorities for our time. The moment personal devotions begin to slide, we walk on dangerous ground. Satan quickly substitutes his motives for God's and traps us in his net of ego needs.

We need to be specific in seeking God's help to direct our daily activities. We need to ask for creativity in solving human problems. We need to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. Are we doing this because it makes us feel important? Could someone else help? Are we willing to give up some control to others (assistant pastor, elders, deacons, and deaconesses)? Have we organized our church so the members can help meet the needs of others? Can we say no graciously but firmly, without feeling insecure? Are we aware of the effect of flattery on our priorities? And the most searching question of all: What will be important 10 years from now?

The answer to the myth of the pastor meeting every need also lies in a firm commitment to family needs. Putting work first and family second does not provide the undergirding necessary for children to grow spiritually. Placing God first reorders our priorities into family second and work third. Putting the family before work does not mean second-rate work. It may actually result in better work because we then focus on the most important aspects of our calling. Our families will know their importance to us exceeds that of others.

How does this work in practical terms? Consider again Sister Suzanna. The pastor had several alternatives. (1) He could have told her he would help for only two hours (placing a limit on his availability), because he had an appointment later that day (writing family commitments in the weekly schedule instead of leaving them to chance). (2) He could have suggested that Sister Suzanna call one of the deacons (delegating responsibility). (3) He could have given her the

We need
to be
ruthlessly
honest with
ourselves.
Are we
doing this
because it
makes us
feel
important?

names of some teenagers who would like to earn a little extra money.

As soon as he received the call, Mr. Pastor should have thought to himself, *Nothing is more important today than my son's birthday party.* He also should have been aware of the desired effect of Sister Suzanna's flattery on his ego. His family commitment called him to be home in time to prepare for Michael's party and share the pleasant event with them.

Children understand real emergencies like a death or an accident, but they quickly recognize pseudoemergencies. They will share their parents for the real emergencies, but they will resent it when Dad ignores them in favor of ego-satisfying "emergencies."

Children need their parents every day. A special time each day for play or reading creates a warm bond between parent and child. When Dad spends time with his children before leaving for evening appointments, he gives a forceful message of love. When children know their importance to their parents, they also know they are equally important to God.

Myth No. 3: The minister's family must attend all church functions and be active in all church programs.

I never met the anonymous writer of a letter I received, but my heart ached for her. The wife of a ministerial student, she wanted to be his perfect helper in ministry. However, a serious problem arose. Her husband insisted that she and their 15-month-old son attend services at both churches in the district where he worked as a student pastor. After the services he wanted them to accompany him on his afternoon pastoral calls. She found it impossible to keep the baby quiet through both church services, and he didn't want the child to have a bottle because that would be "eating

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between meals and giving a bad example to the members." The baby needed an afternoon nap, but he had difficulty sleeping in strange places. Sometimes he would drop off to sleep, only to awaken as they moved on to another home. At the end of the day they had a cranky baby and a critical husband who told her she was ruining his ministry because she couldn't "make the baby behave." The young woman felt totally inadequate as a minister's wife. Every week this scenario was replayed. What should she do? Her husband believed the myth.

Because religion is the life career of ministerial families, their children have certain advantages. They attend services regularly, frequently hear about God and salvation, learn to respect and love the Bible, and often experience the joy of serving others. However, along with these advantages, there exists the danger of overexposure until religion becomes routine and loses its heart appeal.

To require children to attend all the services in one or several churches where Mr. Pastor is the minister ignores the normal needs of children and imposes an impossible burden on the family. Children cannot be expected to forgo their own Sabbath school classes and attend two or three church services each Sabbath. They need activity on Sabbath just as they do on other days of the week, and such activity should be with their friends with whom they feel close. An unbalanced church life often leads to boredom, resentment, and eventually to rejection.

How can we communicate to members our involvement and support without denying the normal needs of our children? Perhaps we should begin by examining our own attitudes about ministry. Most church members understand today's lifestyles and would probably welcome a more family-oriented ministry. An em-

phasis on spiritual gifts may guide the ministerial family to set their priorities for church involvement on the basis of their own gifts. Lay leadership and participation in different aspects of ministry would certainly reduce the possibility of ministerial burnout.

Myth No. 4: Spiritual activities nourish personal spiritual growth.

Church services, Sabbath schools, and prayer meetings are all good, but not sufficient to nourish spiritual growth. Preparing sermons, giving Bible studies, and serving others can help, but they in themselves are insufficient. Sending children to church school, Pathfinder meetings, and summer camp, though highly desirable, cannot compensate for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

All these activities do have their role in personal spiritual growth, but the question is, Are they motivated by Christian love expressing itself in joyous service, or are they a kind of salvation by works? The danger becomes real when ministerial families begin to think of these activities as making up for deficiencies in family life. After all, Mr. Pastor is working for God. In our rush of activities for the Lord, we are too busy to notice our children's needs. We think everything is going fine, until that day when reality hits. Children rarely collapse overnight. The little red flags are usually up for a long time.

True, God does care for our inadequacies, but not our deliberate flouting of His priorities. What we sow, we reap. His instruction is clear: There is no substitute for individual time with Him, for family worship, for heart-to-heart talks with our children, listening to them and being there when they need us.

Myth No. 5: The minister represents the voice of God speaking to humans.

Unfortunately, some individu-

als are attracted to the ministry because of an unhealthy need or desire to exercise power and authority. When a minister believes he or she is the voice of God in all matters, it can lead to extreme authoritarianism in the family. As the voice of "divine authority," the pastor believes in doing whatever he or she wishes to any member of the family. Such an individual denies human fallibility, shuts off new ideas, and exhibits authoritarian-type parenting. The situation may even lead to child abuse—physical, sexual, or emotional.

Of the four parenting styles identified by research (authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglectful),³ the authoritarian style remains the most damaging to the child's moral development, religious values, and self-concept. Children reared in authoritarian homes often have difficulty making decisions because all decisions have routinely been made for them. Over the years they amass a reservoir of anger against their parents and God. Many times they leave home at an early age and reject family values.

The authoritative parenting style retains parental control and sets firm limits for children but provides more communication and support. The parents gradually and supportively introduce

children to decision-making. They communicate reasons for parental sanctions and provide openness between parent and child. The parents do not exercise authority for authority's sake, but, in communicating reasons for rules, encourage children to participate in learning how to live. The parents feel secure about their parenting role; they do not feel secure about their parenting role; they do not feel threatened because they know they remain in control. Authoritarian parents fear loss of control, so they exercise it in extreme.

Authoritative parenting leaves more room for children to make decisions. Therefore, it reflects God's method of helping humans grow in spirituality and character. Parents can best understand authoritative parenting by studying God's Father role.

How shall we react to this myth of authoritarianism? Pastors do have a responsibility to communicate God's Word to the parishioners, and they do have a priestly role in the family. Leadership, however, does not imply pastoral-parental infallibility.

Studying different parenting styles and gradually introducing them into the family can be helpful. If parents attempt new ways of parenting, the children must know this ahead of time; other-

wise confusion follows. When switching from authoritarian to authoritative parenting, we can expect things to get worse before they get better, as with any major change in family structure. Children in late childhood or the teen years will not know how to be more involved in self-direction.

A ministerial family does provide advantages for spiritual growth. But perpetuation of certain ministerial family myths places a burden on a pastor's home. A close relationship with God, a careful reordering of priorities, an awareness of problems, and an attempt to let the positive dominate the family atmosphere would ensure a spiritual and balanced pastoral home in which God remains the true Head of the family. **PM**

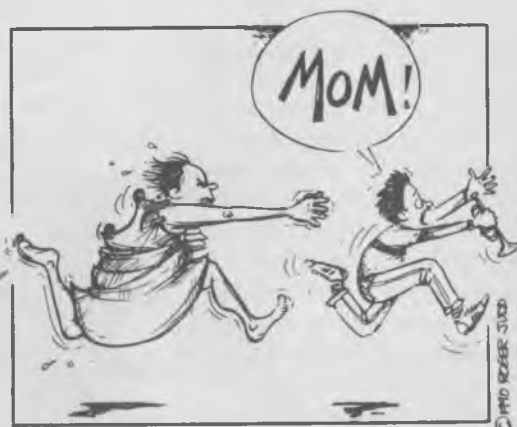
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2. Craig Nakken, *The Addictive Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

3. Eleanor E. Maccoby and John A. Martin, "Socialization in the Context of the Family: Parent-Child Interaction," in *Handbook of Child Psychology*, ed. Paul H. Mussen, 4th ed., vol. IV of *Socialization, Personality, and Social Development*, ed. E. Mavis Hetherington (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1983), 37-56; cf. Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents and Teachers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1943), 155; *Child Guidance* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982), 263.

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BEYOND BELIEF



Today's Books for Today's Preachers

Christianity in Crisis

by Hank Hanegraaff

(Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House, 1993), 447 pages, \$12.99
PA156-507-6966

Don't buy my theology book. At least, not until you have bought and read *Christianity in Crisis*.

Evangelicals in general need to read this exposé of the faith movement, which for years, over and over, has been slipping up on our blind sides.

The "name it and claim it" people are often not naming the right things. They want you to have wealth. You are to become wealthy by making them wealthy. The hundredfold increase here, folks, is for their coffers, not yours. They get theirs first, and then, they say, you will get yours. "Referring to his wealth," one of them says, "the reason he drives a Rolls Royce is that he is following in the steps of Jesus" (p. 34).

Health is the same as wealth—the Christian is supposed to enjoy both. Some of them simply do not allow flu and other illnesses into their houses, into their lives. Jesus will just as surely heal you as He will bring you wealth. When the apostle Paul sought God for healing three times, some of them fault Paul—and some say that his "thorn in the flesh" was Satan.

As Diane Sawyer on *Prime*

Time in 1991 exposed Robert Tilton's fraud, this book exposes many of the TV people whom so many of us look to as deeply devout persons, who, in many ways, I think, are indeed devout.

They name to God the nice things they want, especially wealth and health. This book names the people who do this and quotes some of their weird, mythical, cultish, nonbiblical, and non-Christian teachings.

If you are impressed by Benny Hinn's soft-spoken sweet-spirit-edness as I always am when I see him operate as on the TBN network, with the methodical instances of people being "slain in the Spirit" and caught by associates, along with his so-called gift of knowledge due to which he says he knows what diseases are being healed out in TV-land, read this author's exposé of Hinn. He gives 42 different sources for his treatment, including *Christianity Today's* study of him in its September 3, 1992, issue.

If you love Kenneth Copeland as I do, as one who has listened to him perhaps hundreds of times, always finding what is helpful and winnowing out the harmful, read this scholarly Christian author on Copeland and his dear wife, Gloria, from 46 of their sources.

Read about Paul and Jan Crouch and their estimated half-billion-dollar TBN empire (see p. 417, footnote 223, *L.A. Times*,

Sept. 29, 1991), and his 22 references to them, also with quotes you will not believe. Crouch avidly supports Copeland, Kenneth Hagin (father of the faith movement), and a denomination that is "a cult which claims that the trinity is a pagan doctrine" (p. 360). He calls people who question his doctrines "heresy hangers," and says, "Quit blocking God's bridges, or God's gonna shoot you if I don't" (p. 360). Crouch says, "If you want to criticize Ken Copeland for his preaching on faith or Dad Hagin, get out of my life! I don't even want to talk to you, or hear you. I don't want to see your ugly face" (p. 360).

Our careful author dresses up the outline of his book with long lists of alliterations, which only some readers will find helpful. Whereas I have reviewed scores if not hundreds of books for over 40 years, and whereas I have perhaps never reviewed one that has been out some three years, I have never called attention to a book more needed to be read by us evangelicals than this one.

The New International Commentary on the New Testament THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Revised Edition
by Robert H. Mounce
(Grand Rapids, Mich.:
Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 475
pages, hardback, \$44.00
(PA080-282-5370)

No New Testament book has

BY J. KENNETH
GRIDER

*Distinguished Visiting
Professor of Religion,
Olivet Nazarene
University; and
Professor of Theology
Emeritus, Nazarene
Theological
Seminary
SUN LAKES, ARIZONA*



Pastoral Tenure and Church Growth

caused as much confusion and been subjected to as many varied interpretations as Revelation. Today we continue to witness a surge of popular interest in Bible prophecy and questions concerning such matters as the "last days" and the second coming of Christ. Scholarly debates continue as well, especially regarding the occurrence, timing, and theological significance of the "tribulation" and the "millennium."

When the first edition of this commentary on Revelation was published, in 1977, it was widely praised as a standard commentary on the Apocalypse. In this new edition, now based on the text of the NIV and Nestle-Aland, Mounce has revised and expanded his work to reflect more than 20 additional years of mature thought on Revelation and to bring this work up to date with the latest scholarship.

As in the original edition Mounce here engages seriously with the various approaches to interpretation and with the conventions common to apocalyptic literature. In affirming more directly his own reading of the Apocalypse, Mounce steers a middle course between an extreme literalism and a highly imaginative subjectivism, believing this to be the way the ancient text spoke to the first-century churches to whom it was addressed—and the way it speaks to us today.

Robert H. Mounce is president emeritus of Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington. He is author of numerous articles and books, including the volume on Matthew in the *New International Biblical Commentary* series and a popular commentary on Revelation titled *What Are We Waiting For?* **PM**

Win Arn, a scholar of church growth studies, reported a significant correlation between church growth and the number of years in the pastor's present pastorate.

Based on a study by Kirk Hadaway, author of *Church Growth Principles*, two questions surfaced: (1) Is longer pastoral tenure associated with church growth? (2) Is frequent pastoral turnover associated with decline?

Analysis of 542 randomly selected churches revealed 20 percent or more increased over a five-year period, 15 percent declined, and 5 percent plateaued.

I found it interesting that three-fourths of the growing churches had pastors who had been at their church for four or more years. Conversely, two-thirds of the declining churches had pastors who had served there for fewer than four years. Plateaued churches remained randomly distributed.

The average pastoral tenure among Protestant denominations in the United States at the time of

the study was three and seven-tenths years. Arn claims it is not coincidental that 82 percent of the churches in America find themselves plateaued or in decline.

Arn believes that denominations that allow pastoral change every few years are allowing the continued plateau and decline of their churches. He says that pastors moving every four years increase the likelihood of their own church and the church they leave behind remaining plateaued or in decline.

Arn further cites the ludicrousness of the physician, dentist, or other professional relocating every four years and expecting to build a growing and loyal customer base.

What makes the church think it can expect any long-term influence on a community using short-term leadership that relocates every few years?

Obviously, pastoral longevity will not produce church growth by itself. There seems little doubt, however, that rapid pastoral turnover produces short-term leadership and prevents significant church growth. **PM**

BY WAYNE M.
WARNER
Pastor
BATTLE CREEK,
MICHIGAN



The Romance of Ministry

There is romance in ministry. Yes, some will doubt the very words. For too many, there has been little or no romance in ministry. But because of the lack of it in some we cannot conclude that it is not there for others. Ministry will have its low times, its valleys, its dry season. But, take heart—joy comes in the morning! There is romance in ministry.

There has to be romance in ministry—for we are in partnership with God. Ministry is God's business, not ours. For too many pastors the ministry is a solo journey. Without God as our Partner, ministry loses its romance and its motivation.

There has to be romance in ministry—for we are in the greatest partnership in the world. It is a humbling thought to realize that God has called us to be His spokespersons with such a great and desperate message. When we comprehend all that means, we can only be encouraged that we are in partnership with God of the universe, the source of all our abilities, the fountain of all our strength, and the wellspring of all our words. There is romance in such a partnership.

There has to be romance in ministry—for we are in a grand relationship. Heidi Husted, in an article titled "Four Ways I've Found Encouragement," tells of a relationship with a spiritual director, and how this director "helped me listen to my life" ([*Leadership*, Summer, 1996], 44). Heidi stat-

ed, "She has been a reminder that there is a huge difference between working for God and being with God" (ibid.). Our partnership with God is not just "doing ministry." It is a relationship of redemption—He is our Savior. It is a relationship of love—He loves us not because we do ministry, but for who we are. It is a relationship of covenant—He is committed to us beyond our comprehension. He is Father to us, He is Comforter, He is Healer, He is our "all in all." Relationship means to relate. God relates himself to us by bringing His love, His Spirit, and His resources, spreading them on the table of our souls. In this relationship He invites us to partake at His table, to be nourished, to be fed, to be equipped for ministry. There is romance in such a relationship!

There has to be romance in ministry—for we have a great cause. Kevin A. Miller, editor of *Leadership*, tells of being at a conference. At a time in the closing session, people were asked to pray for other participants. During that prayer, Kevin Miller said one woman prayed this prayer for him, "Thank you, Lord, that you have entrusted him with the gospel of Christ" ([*Leadership*, Summer, 1996], 3). There is romance in a cause, a mission, bigger than life. The ministry is a trust. God entrusts those whom He calls with the most thrilling news the world has ever heard. He entrusts that news to our care. What a chal-

lenge! There is romance in facing such a challenge.

There has to be romance in ministry—for we are servants. It is a strange sound to the materialistic world—a mind-set that seeks to gain and talks in terms of "what's in it for me." God's language and ways are different. He calls us to a cross, to sacrifice, and to service. Jesus gave us one of His Kingdom principles when He said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mark 10:43-44). There is romance in serving.

There has to be romance in ministry—for we are touching the lives of people. There are two ways to see people—as problems or as potential. No one would deny that there are problem people in our world. They get all the press! If we are not careful, we could conclude that all people are problems. The romance in the ministry comes from helping people, sharing God's good Word with them, seeing it take root in their lives and bear fruit. Romance comes from touching the lives of people in their moments of crisis and, having their warm, affirming response, know then that you were an ambassador of God. Romance comes from comforting people in their hour of despair and knowing it makes a difference. Romance comes from sharing the joys of people, knowing you had a part in the joy mix. In their book *Pastors at Risk*, H. B. London Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman wrote, "Who else has a commission from God to walk into the main events of the human drama as a proxy for the Living Christ?" ([Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Press, 1993], 234). There is romance in helping people.

There is romance in ministry! This is not to say that every day is a celebration of victory or success. But the victories of ministry outweigh the downside. So, be encouraged, pastor, your ministry can be one of romance and victory.

BY C. NEIL STRAIT
District
Superintendent,
Michigan District,
Church of the
Nazarene
GRAND RAPIDS,
MICHIGAN



Bridge to the Future

A stylized graphic of a bridge with two towers and three cables, rendered in a light gray color against a dark background.

February 15-17, 1999
H. Roe Bartle Hall
Kansas City, Missouri

A Millennial Celebration
of Holiness, the Message of Hope

**Mid-Quadrennial
Evangelism Conference**



Greetings

Kansas City will be the site of the U.S.A. Church of the Nazarene's celebration of the changing of the century and the millennium. We invite our laity along with our pastors to join us in recognizing the advent of the third millennium and the 21st century. We have invited several of the most notable Christian communicators to speak to us about the challenges and opportunities at this momentous event in time. The Board of General Superintendents will be addressing the issues of identity and purpose in the coming century. We urge Nazarenes throughout the U.S.A. to join us in Kansas City, February 15-17, 1999, for this once-in-a-lifetime celebration. We also implore all our members to pray for divine blessing on this important gathering of the church.

The Board of General Superintendents



James Dobson



Haddon Robinson



William Willimon



John Maxwell



Jim Cymbala



George Hunter III



Bill Bright



H. B. London Jr.

Great Musical Program

THE BOARD OF GENERAL SUPERINTENDENTS





"Celebration," Monday, February 15

- Registration from 12 to 5 P.M.
- Historical pageantry of our Nazarene heritage with John Knight, general superintendent
- John Maxwell, special guest speaker



"Directions," Tuesday, February 16

- Speakers include Bill Bright and George Hunter III
- Luncheon with discussion groups (optional)
- Workshops
- Evening worship service with James Dobson

"How to Get to the Future," Wednesday, February 17

- Speakers include Jim Cymbala, Haddon Robinson, H. B. London Jr., and William Willimon
- Luncheon with discussion groups (optional)
- Workshops
- Evening worship service focusing on identity and purpose in the 21st century
- Dramatic presentation



The following list is just a few of the large number of workshops that will be offered:

Urban Evangelism	Volunteers: Recruiting People to Ministry
Understanding Gen-X Ministry	Thinking Globally, Acting Locally
Sunday School: Reclaiming Our Birthright	Prayer: Connecting with God
Starting New Churches	Reading the Culture
Churches Daring to Change	Preparing for Worship Style Changes
Lay Mobilization	Relationships for Life
Media, Message, and Ministry	Compassion Evangelism

—EXHIBITION CENTER—

Hours: Monday, February 15 2-6:30 P.M.
 Tuesday, February 16 10:15 A.M.-6:30 P.M.
 Wednesday, February 17 10:15 A.M.-6:30 P.M.





Housing Form

DESIGNATED HOTELS

The Kansas City Marriott Downtown and the Hyatt Regency Crown Center hotels have been named the designated hotels for the 1999 Millennium Celebration.

SPECIAL NOTES ABOUT YOUR HOUSING RESERVATIONS

1. Housing forms are released to the Nazarene public August 1, 1998. Reservations should be received no later than January 13, 1999.

ALL REQUESTS MUST BE PROCESSED THROUGH THE KANSAS CITY HOUSING BUREAU. TELEPHONE REQUESTS WILL NOT BE HONORED. ALL REQUESTS MUST BE IN WRITING.

2. Prior to January 13, 1999, any cancellations or changes in arrival and departure times must be made directly with the Housing Bureau. After January 18, all changes must be made directly with the hotel.

3. Please allow three to four weeks for the Housing Bureau to process your reservation request.

Please complete all information and mail or fax this form to the Kansas City Housing Bureau no later than January 13, 1999. No phone reservations will be accepted. Within three to four weeks you will receive an acknowledgment from the Housing Bureau. The hotel will send a confirmation at a later date. A credit card will guarantee your reservation, or you may send a one night's deposit to the hotel after receipt of your hotel confirmation. All changes and cancellations are to be made in writing directly to the Housing Bureau before the January 13, 1999, deadline. After the January 18, 1999, deadline, you may contact the hotels direct. All room rates are subject to a 12.1% local tax. Room assignments are made on a first-come, first-served basis.

Instructions: Please list your arrival and departure dates. If you do not give dates, you will be assigned to the official convention dates, which are February 15-17, 1999. Select the type of room desired with the number of persons in each room. Print or type names of all persons occupying each room. Use a separate form for each room requested.

Downtown Kansas City Hotel Rates

HOTEL NAME	SINGLE (1 person / 1 bed)	DOUBLE (2 persons / 1 bed)	DOUBLE/DOUBLE (2 persons / 2 beds)	TRIPLE (3 persons / 2 beds)	QUAD (4 persons / 2 beds)
Hyatt Regency Crown Center	\$89.00	\$89.00	\$89.00	\$99.00	\$109.00
Marriott Downtown	\$92.00	\$92.00	\$92.00	\$107.00	\$122.00

HOTEL CHOICES:

1st: _____

2nd: _____

Arrival Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Time: _____ Departure Date: _____ / _____ / _____

Normal check-in time is 3 P.M. and check-out time is noon for all hotels.

Room Type (mark one): 1 bed: _____ 2 beds: _____

Number of people in room: _____

Please check any room preferences:

Nonsmoking: _____ Handicapped: _____ Rollaway: (not available in two-bed room) _____

I am attending (please check all events that you will need this hotel room for):

_____ U.S.A./Canada Leadership Conference

_____ U.S.A./Canada District Sunday School Chairpersons' Meeting

_____ Millennium Celebration

_____ International Board of Education

_____ Women's Council

_____ General Board

_____ Other

All rooms must be guaranteed. If you wish to guarantee your room by credit card, complete the following:

Credit Card No.: _____

Card Type: MC VS DS AX DC (circle one)

Your name as it appears on the card: _____

Names of persons in room: _____

Name: _____

Church Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: (____) _____

Fax: (____) _____

Mail your form to: The Kansas City Housing Bureau, P.O. Box 26310, Kansas City, MO 64196-6310 • or fax to 816-691-3880 (PLEASE DO NOT BOTH FAX AND MAIL THIS FORM.)

FOR REDUCED AIRLINE FARES CONTACT:

American Airlines—1-800-433-1790, File No. 2429UD

If using American Airlines, you may receive a discount through Avis Car Rental—1-800-433-1790, File No. B136000

Delta Airlines—1-800-241-6760, File No. 117565A

Trans World Airlines—1-800-325-4933, File No. V16709

Or, you may access these discounted fares by contacting your local travel agent directly.



Smart Investing: Balancing Risk and Return

We'd all like a way to invest a few dollars today and be *guaranteed* a return in the millions of dollars—preferably by this time next year. This notion, of course, falls under the heading of “too good to be true.”

When you invest money in a retirement plan, you want it to grow as much as it can as fast as it can for as long as it's invested. You also want it to be secure and safe. Unfortunately, these desires probably compete with one another. Maximum growth potential usually means maximum risk. “Safer” investment strategies normally yield lower returns. Can you invest in a way that produces satisfactory returns at acceptable risk levels?

Yes. First, think “diversify.” In other words, spread your retirement plan assets among a variety of options. This can decrease risk because market forces that influence one investment type may not similarly affect another.

Most denominational retirement plans offer several different investment options. The different options usually invest monies in a group of securities. That means each option already has

done some of the diversification work for you. To diversify further, divide your retirement con-

tributions among two or more of the options offered.

Next, determine the amount of investment risk you can accept. Generally speaking, the younger you are, the more risk you can tolerate. This is because market fluctuations historically have averaged out over time. A 28-year-old retirement plan investor can, and should, invest more aggressively than a 60-year old, who generally should be more conservative.

Finally, decide how to allocate your retirement dollars among the investment options available to you. Many of you will consider investing in a combination of options with varying levels of risk.

You should take the time and effort to learn about the different investment options offered by your church's retirement program. Armed with this information, you'll be on your way to making the best decisions for you.

PM

BEYOND BELIEF



SUBMITTED BY
PENSIONS AND
BENEFITS USA,
CHURCH OF THE
NAZARENE

Are We Robbing Visa to Pay God?

To some it seems that financial stability has as many illusive twists as a sidewinder slithering across the desert floor. Bill and Jane came to me on a sultry August morning and asked if I would help them out of a financial disaster in their marriage. Financial disaster in a marriage is generally the symptom of a deeper disease that must be treated before finances can be cured.

I was prepared to probe deeply to discover the problem when Bill said: "I don't know how it all happened, but there's more month left after the paycheck runs out than there is money in the bank. We're six months behind on the rent. We need some help or we're out on the street."

What many people blame on their lack of income is more likely the result of a faulty philosophy underlying their management of life. So I asked, "How long did it take you to get into this mess?"

"I don't know," Jane responded, "it seems we've always been behind somehow."

"There are no quick fixes," I counseled. "If you're going to get free of this debt, you'll have to discipline your lives. Notice, I didn't say discipline your spending. That's only part of it. The secret to stewardship integrity doesn't lie in organizing your money but in organizing your life. Are you willing to give it a shot?"

"We'll try anything." Bill spoke for both of them. "But I don't know how long it'll be before we lose everything."

"The first principle of getting

out of the hole is to 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God' (Matt. 6:33, κλν). My first obligation is to acknowledge God as sovereign over all my life."

"But we don't have anything left over. We can't even pay the bills! How can we even think of a tithe?" Jane pleaded.

"I didn't say the word 'tithe,' did I?"

"What else could you mean?" Bill asked.

"That's God's way," I said. "But there are two things you've got to remember: First, God doesn't charge dues for church membership and, second, the church isn't a bank where you make deposits that earn interest in heaven."

I've counseled many young couples on their last leg financially. The one thing that strikes a common cord with each situation is that they want a quick fix. Most don't want a change of lifestyle but some magician who'll make all their debt disappear. No such magician exists. I found a formula I believe can assist anyone who is serious about financial stability—if they're willing to let go and allow God to readjust their priorities.

The first principle of stability—whether in the home, the community, or the church—is giving with a cheerful attitude. I know how ridiculous this may sound. Many people have asked me, "How can I give if there's not enough to feed the children or pay the rent? It just isn't possible!"

"Yes." I usually agree after comparing their income with the payment schedule under which

they're struggling. "But, with God's help, you can begin with what you have and God will stretch it—if you let Him."

"Now that sounds a lot like prosperity gospel to me," I've been told. I'm not proposing a miracle to circumvent the laws of cause and effect. What I propose is a sound system of "giving management" that honors God first and, at the same time, organizes the whole life in such a way that finances are in control.

Spiritual principles for all giving are found in two passages, one in the Old Testament and the other in the New Testament. "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" (Mal. 3:10). The tithe is a tenth of the increase in possessions according to Deut. 14:28. The second part of this principle is that one must give with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:6-9). Giving grudgingly applied is not giving but paying a debt. Jesus paid our debt. We are not obligated by a debt. We are brought into a new relationship where everything we have belongs to God and where all the riches of God are ours in Christ Jesus.

For those who wish to argue that the law of tithing is an Old Testament law that made provision for the priests of the Jewish Temple and does not apply in the church, I would enlist counsel from father Abraham (Gen. 14:18-20). Abraham gave a tithe long before the Law of Moses came into effect. Abraham gave his tithe to Melchizedek, king of Salem. I may easily transliterate Melchizedek's title to be the Prince of Peace. Abraham gave unto God. It is not the law but a principle of living that a tenth of all one's increase belongs to God.

Then Bill asked, "If I can't give 10 percent without the threat of debtor's prison, how do I do it? I can't commit 10 percent then expect to pay my debts. I can't even pay them as it is."

That's where the rub comes in. If I ever expect to get my priorities right, I must commit everything I have—not just 10 percent—but all I have and am to God. I am a new

BY JOHN CONLON
Pastor, New
Beginnings Fellowship
OREM, UTAH

creature in Christ Jesus. My life is changed; my priorities are new.

When I am forgiven, the past is forgotten. So I start from today. If I stole in the past, God forgives me now and remembers my sin no more. If I have murdered in the past, I may have to pay the civil penalty of the law. When I confess that crime to God and ask forgiveness, my sin is forgiven and I am free of the guilt and released from the bondage of sin. This same principle carries over to the financial sins I have committed by overspending and worshiping my charge cards more than God.

When I repent of that sin and confess my guilt, God is faithful and just to forgive me. I still have the civil responsibility to repay that which I have taken in the past. Just because God forgives me does not release me from the civil debt I owe any more than God's forgiveness of a murderer releases that person from the civil penalty for his or her crime. The things I have purchased do not belong to me; they belong to the credit bureau, or the department store, or to whomever I have contracted an obligation to repay.

So, what is my responsibility? I have made a commitment to tithe and give God all that is His. How do I get out of this "catch 22" situation? I have an income of \$1,600 per month. I have a debt of \$1,800 per month. I have a tithe obligation of \$160 per month that pushes my debt to \$1,960 per month. How do I pay my tithe and still meet the obligations I am obliged to pay to my creditors. Do I say God comes first and the people I've borrowed from don't get paid? Is that robbing the Visa card to pay God? The commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal" (Exod. 20:15, *KJV*).

First, I must take an inventory of all my debts. Then I must negotiate with the people I owe on how to pay them a lesser amount each month until I am able to repay everything. That means I must curb my spending and acquiring appetite. I accomplish this by preparing a budget. However, a budget is of little value

unless I am committed to live by it. Now that I have balanced my income at \$1,600 per month and my debt at \$1,800 per month by management and negotiation, I still find that there is not enough to pay the tithe. What do I do?

After I work with the figures very carefully, I find that I can squeak out \$30 a month to God by sacrificing Cokes and other personal treats. I begin with that. Then I identify my smallest creditor. I pledge to repay, say \$30 a month, to this debt until it is fully repaid. Then, instead of moving that \$30 that has been freed up by paying off the smallest debt to pay some other debt, I add that on to my tithe. I now am tithing \$60 a month. Again I select my smallest creditor and begin to work that debt down to nothing. When I find extra money in my purse or wallet, rather than falling for high-pressure advertisements, I use that money to accelerate payment of my debts. There are always emergencies for which I must have provision in my budget. But extra money, income tax rebates, and things like that need to be channeled toward debt reduction. When I can maintain a committed focus on this repayment schedule, I will work my way out of debt. At the same time, I will begin to meet my obligation toward paying my tithe.

After doing all this, I am not forced into filing for bankruptcy, which may amount to breaking the eighth commandment. Instead, I am on the way to being released from debt. When all my obligations are under control, I will discover I have extra income. Then I can begin to make up any back tithe I owe to God in the same way I have repaid my civil debts. The principle behind all of this is that God sees into the motive of my heart and honors the honesty and integrity with which I come to Him. He has promised to open the floodgates of heaven with blessings when I return to Him that which is His own. What I am returning is my life, wholly committed, unconditionally given to Him.

The thing that makes this possible is not a commitment to financial discipline but the commitment to whole life giving. As I consecrate my income to pay back those from whom I have stolen, I am also committing my time to God, my mind, my gifts, my all, and everything to God. I am learning discipline and gaining in the service of God. When I have committed my whole life to God, stewardship is not a matter of the pocketbook but a faithfulness that enlists all of me.

God said to those who continued to shove sacrifices and incense before His face: "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. . . . If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land" (Isa. 1:13, 19).

The first thing in stewardship is total commitment to God. I can't use my financial limitations as an excuse to give less than \$160 a month or renege on my commitment when I want something for myself. I am realigning my priorities to give all of myself. I am focused upon God and His kingdom first. I am no longer rationalizing or manipulating, but maintaining a pure heart before God. This pure heart is characterized by honesty and decency in everything I think and do. I am repaying my earthly obligations as well as putting God first in all things. As I commit myself to God, I must not incur more debt. I must begin to live within the limits of my income. I must rein in my lifestyle to be in harmony with my income. I have found that when I do this, I may not receive a landslide of financial help, but I always receive more from God than I give to make my life a repository of peace and joy. That only happens when I follow the second principle of giving—to give with cheerfulness. Not a surface cheerfulness but from a heart of gladness and joy.

Bill and Jane began to follow the counsel I gave them. Within a couple years, they were well on their way out of debt and were able to tithe fully without robbing the Visa card to pay God. **PM**

Doomsday Clock: It's Still Ticking

On the cover of the *U.S. News and World Report*, December 19, 1994, is a picture of *The Virgin and Child* from the studio of Andrea Solari. Beneath it shouts the headline "Waiting for the Messiah: The New Clash over the Bible's Millennial Prophecies."

The article highlights the large percentage (61 percent) of Americans who believe Jesus Christ will return to the earth, but it also shows the wild confusion about how that return will take place and approximately when. A troubling part of the article is its reference to how "the mystery and promise of the Second Coming of Christ have fired Christians' imaginations . . . and artistic and theological creativity but sometimes destruction and violence as well."

The article says, "The history of the church is filled with self-proclaimed prophecy experts who think they have cracked the biblical code and pieced together precise timetables for the end of the world."

Predictions of apocalypse are hardly new. Just about every age has had its doomsayers, and there have been many episodes in which prophets have gathered their flocks to await the Apocalypse, only to be greeted by the embarrassment of another sunrise.

The end of the world and the return of Jesus Christ have be-

come synonymous for many in the Western World. And as we approach the end of this millennium, history can teach us some important facts. Dates often fascinate people. Some attach prophetic meaning to approaching years. The closer we get to such times, the more new prophecies seem to appear. For example, around the year A.D. 1000, there was speculation in Europe about the end of the world. Almost a thousand years had passed since Christ's birth. Did not the Bible speak of a millennium of the kingdom of God on earth and then the Judgment? Was it not evident from man's corrupt condition that the Judgment must be nigh?

We read about this in the writings of a German monk named Johann Trithemius (1462—1516): "In the thousandth year after the birth of Christ, violent earthquakes shook all of Europe and throughout the continent destroyed solid and magnificent buildings. The same year a horrible comet appeared in the sky. Seeing it, many who believed that this was announcing the last day were frozen with fear" (*A History of the End of the World*, Yuri Rubinsky and Ian Wiseman).

Perhaps one of the most famous examples of failed predictions is that of the American preacher William Miller—a soldier, atheist, and prosperous

farmer. In his later years, his intensive studies of the Bible led him to pronounce in 1831 the general period of Christ's return.

Accounts show Miller to have been a sincere man. He was intent on believing the Bible. In particular, he constructed a prophetic scheme from the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation.

The *New York Herald* reported Miller's prophecies. Miller first predicted that fire would destroy civilization on April 3, 1843 (the approximate beginning of the lunar year). This pronouncement caused quite a stir in New England. Although the destruction did not come to pass, the movement rapidly gained listeners. Miller later declared the Day of Atonement (even his calculation of this date was one month late), October 22, 1844, as the day of Christ's return. Hundreds climbed hillsides, waiting for the Second Advent. Again, nothing happened. Miller died in 1849, continuing to believe in the imminency of Christ's return.

Interest in the future is not a new phenomenon. From the beginning of time, people have had an obsession to know about the future. In the past, magicians, astrologers, seers, and witches were consulted to interpret dreams or discern the signs in the heavens. The only source of authoritative prophecy, however, is the Bible. And almost one-third of the Bible is predictive prophecy, dealing with future events. The focus of all biblical prophecy is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are no less than 1,845 references to the second coming of Christ in the Scriptures. Of these, 1,527 are in the New Testament. Whole chapters and books are given to this thrilling theme. An average of 1 in every 25 verses of the Bible refers directly or indirectly to this future event. For every mention of His first advent, there are eight mentions of His second coming. The second coming of Christ is a pre-

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Living . . . Way Back from the Edge

eminent doctrine of the Scriptures.

Billy Graham has said that more prophecy has been fulfilled in the last decade than perhaps in all of the years since the fall of Jerusalem. The front pages of many of our newspapers read like pages straight out of the Book of Revelation. Nature is in upheaval, civilization is in chaos, governments rise and fall, wars flare, and talks of peace increase. Many of the things Jesus spoke of are coming to pass. He said when you see these things, you know that His coming is near, even at the door (see Mark 13:29).

The time of the end and of the second coming of Christ is uncertain. This is one of God's great secrets: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father [only]" (Mark 13:32, κλν). For this reason, questions or speculations concerning it are unnecessary, also unprofitable.

Concerning the end time and the second coming of Christ, G. Campbell Morgan emphatically declares, "One of the fundamental positions of the New Testament is that the hour of the Lord's return is not known, nor can be." Hence anyone claiming to know the day and hour of Christ's coming is merely indicating that he or she is not heeding what Christ himself said concerning His return: "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man."

One evening Murray McCheyne was entertaining a company of friends. To each he put the question "Do you think the Lord Jesus will come tonight?" When all had replied, "I think not," he went on to say, "That means that He may come tonight. 'For in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh'" (Matt. 24:44, κλν).

Herein is the paradox: The fact of the end of this age and the second coming of Christ is as certain as the dawn; the date is as humanly unpredictable as a flash of lightning. **PM**

Isn't anything timeless? What's a retired preacher to do?

In a recent church publication the reader was assailed with a number of articles and columns that pressed the point—computers in churches are inevitable. In fact, they are here!

About 10 years ago I bought what was then called a personal word processor. For several years I jumped into discussions about computers and other electronic aids, touting the virtues of my equipment. Recently, however, when I referred to my word processor, a listener said, "O yes, well that's just a glorified typewriter." In other words, if you're going to insist on driving an '86 Toyota, please keep it to yourself. So I'm keeping the kind of car I drive to myself.

Am I out of it or what? When our family visited us this summer, our oldest granddaughter asked if she could call her cousin in Kentucky. "Sure," we said. A little while later she whispered to her mother that our phone didn't work.

"I pressed all the numbers, but nothing happens." She had never used a rotary phone before.

All this electronic wizardry seems to be so far away from our daily lives. Secretly we've been hoping to make it to Maple Grove Cemetery without having

to make friends with a mouse, modem, printer, E-mail, or the "Web."

Doesn't anything stay the way it is?

Several weeks ago out-of-city friends came to visit. Just before leaving their home they turned to their computer and using a "program" typed in our address. What "printed out" was an accurate map of our city highlighting the location of our home. It also identified every eating place in the city limits with its proper name and a red dot to catch the eye more readily. This they obtained in just a few minutes. Yeah we know, don't look back, something may be gaining on you.

Increasingly what we do or say is becoming quaint. We overheard someone referring to us as "that nice older couple." That's a nice warm fuzzy. It's also a push to the sidelines.

So we are staying timeless by using those behaviors that have proven to keep us in relationship with one another: notes of love, hugs, kisses, and pieces of rhubarb pie—with a choice of ice cream or cheese on the side. (If rhubarb pie isn't timeless, we don't know what is.)

In the meantime, we wish you well finding your way onto the Internet. **PM**

Worship and Preaching Helps

INTRODUCTION

A pastor in the waning years of the 20th century is specially privileged. Many of the mores required of him or her at the beginning of the century have faded. Pastors have more freedom to be the person God made them. That reflects in language, dress, and interests.

Coupled with the loosening of pastoral protocol is the explosion of resources and tools for preaching. None is more welcomed than the computer with its links to the world and its skills in word manipulation.

These changes have drastically affected the way we worship. Sunday-best clothes look nothing like the business dress of a decade ago. Attention spans get shorter and shorter. Bibles flood the church. Music changes as fast as best-seller book lists. Sound is generated, amplified, recorded, and broadcast by mission-control-type systems. Organs and pianos have given way to keyboards, and projection has supplemented hymnals.

And sermons—ah, yes, sermons—have changed. They are shorter. They are more direct. They move fast. They are not so proprietorial. These sermons move far from the traditional illustration, three points, conclusion, challenge. They are not

masterpieces. They lose a lot moving from sound to sight.

The first four sermons deal with common spiritual issues of Christians. The next four are drawn from 2 Corinthians, a letter written to people much like us. The next sermons look at being saved, growing in grace, and being sanctified. The last sermon is the first sermon of Advent.

Our local church worship services usually follow along these lines:

Traditional organ prelude.

Praise team begins service with one or more upbeat choruses (all choruses and hymns are projected on a screen that comes down at the beginning of the service and goes up during the offering).

Traditional choir enters.

Lay leader makes announcements.

Mini drama on focus of the morning.

Lay leader reads scripture and prays.

Four or five more choruses.

Prayer with open altar.

Pastoral staff "share" as appropriate.

Traditional hymn with organ and piano only.

Responsive reading—varies in kind and methods.

Offering with various kinds of offertories.

Special music.

Sermon.

Smaller praise team leads in invitation, closing hymn, or chorus.

Reflections/applications/challenges.

Closing prayer.

Sometimes traditional benedictions.

September
October
November
1998

PREPARED BY
JIM CHRISTY

Hope of Heaven

by Jim Christy

2 Cor. 5:1-10

Sept. 6, 1998

"We have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor. 5:1).

INTRO

Two things have more to do with our view of God than with anything else. They are our belief in creation and our belief of eternal life in heaven. They deal with the beginning and the end of time. Both are shrouded in mystery and require us to accept them by faith because of what is written in the Bible. One of the great conflicts in science today is the question of creation. The issue echoes in our courts as well as in our classrooms. Evolutionists reject God as the Source of all things, substituting a series of chances as proof. Christians believe God created all things.

The same remains true of heaven. The Bible defines heaven. We know angels and uncountable numbers of people from every tribe and tongue and time will be there. We know Jesus stands as the central Person and all present will love and adore Him. The Bible does not tell where heaven is, if it operates in time and space, or exactly how we fit in.

ILLUS. One man, dead for several minutes, reports visiting heaven. While there, he met old friends and relatives, sang songs of praise, and had a glorious time. When he awakened, he did not want to stay on this earth.

These two—creation and heaven—are important to everything else in our lives. One explains where we came from and the other explains why we are here. They set the framework for our dreams, our disciplines, our direction. As the product of God's creative act, we see ourselves as special, unique, irreplaceable. Because we have a heaven to gain, we see each day as an investment in our personal future.

I. WE WERE MADE FOR HEAVEN (V. 6)

Here Paul puts creation and heaven together. They belong together because the one supposes the other. God made us with eternity in mind. Our existence is not for a short 50, 60, or even 120 years. God created us to dwell with Him forever. Gazing into a night star-filled sky, we sense that we are destined for those stars. God put the stars there for us. God puts us here to enjoy them. God placed eternity within us when He made us.

Writers have penned dreams of humans moving among the stars. We have the popular *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, along with dozens of sagas going back to Jules Verne. As I read and watch these stories, I am moved by two things: (1) the grandeur of the dreams and (2) the corruption of the dreams. Without Jesus, these dreams become corrupt. But the dreams remain. If you follow any space stories, you know how they move farther and farther from the

good to the evil. *Blake Seven*, an English space story, ended with the leader betraying his team.

In history studies, it is amazing how easily everything from a secular source is accepted and how quickly anything from a biblical source is viewed with suspicion. Bill Moyers' *Genesis* series continues the method of verifying the Bible by the secular instead of verifying the secular by the Bible. This not only happens with the past but also happens with the dreams and hopes and purposes God has planted in our hearts.

II. WE STRUGGLE ON EARTH BECAUSE WE BELONG IN HEAVEN (V. 4)

If we belong in heaven and have eternity infused in our very existence, then we do not belong on this earth. As the songwriter put it, "This world is not my home / I'm just a-passing through."

There are ample proofs that this world is not and cannot be our home. Paul tells us to look at our bodies. They are the tents that hold us together, not very good tents at that! They get old. They break. They do not always work. They limit us. They control us. They keep us from doing more than they let us do.

The world that surrounds us is more hostile to our bodies than it is helpful. Science seems to discover that almost everything eventually causes some sort of problem for the human body. Food is filled with things that can trigger cells to grow wildly. Air contains poisons to the body. Sunshine slowly destroys the elasticity of skin and spawns cataracts in the eyes.

The inventions of humans that make life easier, faster, more efficient, broader, and wider also cause a constant source of deformities, pain, exhaustion, and suffering. Humans bring grief to each other. Only the smallest number of people bring us joy. Too often those who bring us joy also bring us sorrow. Our own bodies work against us. They grow weary, depressed, sick, and aged. People sing a lot of songs about the body growing old. The finest bodies wear out. In a different place, Paul the apostle writes that if this earthly life in this earthly body is all that we have or will ever have, then we Christians, of all people living, are the most miserable.

God never intended for this earth to be all, to be the end. He created us for eternity. That's why we constantly feel homesick—even when we're at home, why we are constantly feeling like we do not belong, why we never quite enjoy a peace within ourselves. This holy discontent is the call of eternity God has placed in all of us.

Paul calls this sense of lacking something as being naked. Corrie ten Boom wrote about her life in a Nazi concentration camp where she was sent for helping rescue Jews who were being sent to death camps. She was required to stand before her guards totally naked. The men walked around her, inspecting her body. She felt shame and embarrassment. She hated that moment more than any other in her whole life. She wanted to hide and could not. Paul talked about something other than bodily nakedness. He spoke of nakedness of the person. This nakedness was difficult for me to understand until I began to think about all the studies on human nature dur-

ing these last few decades. There is a wealth of information out there about us. All of it is drawn from our physical natures.

ILLUS. I walked into a bookstore last week. Instantly my eyes were drawn to a woman standing inside the door. It was only as I got closer that I realized she was a statue. I felt foolish saying "hello" to a statue. I looked around to see if anyone had seen me.

Little by little, layer by layer, we humans are being stripped of what covers our uniqueness. Think what kind of world we shall be living in as studies of human genes and hormones, blood chemistry and nerve systems get more precise.

In the O. J. Simpson trial, the jurists and potential jurists were studied until their outcome vote was guaranteed.

We are becoming more and more naked as people. It is nearly impossible to hide behind clothes, homes, jobs, families. The bad part of all this is that the more naked we become, the less comfortable we are, the more we realize we do not belong.

III. GOD HAS GIVEN US THE HOLY SPIRIT AS OUR DEPOSIT OR GUARANTEE OF HEAVEN (V. 6)

This assurance looms very important as we live day by day in this world where we know we do not belong. And we know will not be around very long.

ILLUS. A boy and a girl were separated after their parents died. The boy, 2 years old, was adopted by a family in Missouri, the girl, 3 years old, by a family in Colorado. Seventy years later they met but were not sure they were who they thought they were. The 72-year-old took out of his billfold a piece of paper wrapped in plastic. It had written on it, "You are the son of Paul and Edna Turner." The 73-year-old woman reached into her purse and pulled out a tiny box. In it was a paper that read, "You are the daughter of Paul and Edna Turner." For 70 years they had carried those papers.

We carry the Holy Spirit a lifetime. He is our guarantee that we belong to God and that our home is with Him.

Heaven is real. God wants us to be there with Him. I want you to be there too. Make your plans to be there. Come to Jesus. Let Him take you to heaven.

ILLUS. One Sunday morning, I noticed a girl about 10 years old standing on the sidewalk outside the church. Everyone had gone home. I asked her if she needed a ride home. "No, thanks," she said, "my dad is picking me up, and we're going to dinner together."

I said I would wait with her. We sat on the grass and talked. She told me that her mother and father were di-

vorced and she had not seen her dad in over a year but he was coming to take her to dinner. I tried to brace her for his not showing up. The longer we sat there, the more convinced she was that he was coming and the more sure I was that he was not. After about 30 minutes, I was about to tell her that she needed to go home. Then an old car drove up, trailed by blue smoke. A man jumped out of the passenger side of the car, ran to the girl, picked her up, hugged and kissed her. He waved at the driver and the two, father and daughter, walked with arms around each other down the street.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
 - Take an inventory of the friends and relatives you have in heaven.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture ReadingIsa. 57:1-2; Rev. 21:1-6
- Choruses....."Come into His Presence with Thanksgiving"
 - "Great Is the Lord"
 - "Peace in the Valley"
 - "The Happy Jubilee"
 - "He Is Lord"
- Hymns "When We All Get to Heaven"
 - "My Savior First of All"
- Drama "The Gate of Heaven"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon "Hope of Heaven"
- Closing Chorus..... "There Is a River"
- BenedictionRev. 7:12

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on those who are going through the "valley of the shadow of death."

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTOR'S PREPARATION

The sermon target is reminding the congregation there is a heaven to gain that will be the fulfillment of all the hopes God has placed in us. It is essential that the pastor is caught up in the hope we have through Christ.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, we celebrate and worship You, make yourself known to our waiting hearts and infuse in us the hope of heaven."

A View of Community

by Jim Christy

2 Cor. 2:5-11

Sept. 13, 1998

"If anyone has caused grief . . . he has grieved all of you" (2 Cor. 2:5).

INTRO

The church has always viewed the group of believers as family. The church at Corinth was a family, but something had split them apart. Paul was trying to get them to move from community to family.

I. PAUL WAS ATTACKED BY A CHURCH MEMBER (V. 5)

We are not sure what happened to Paul, but someone who was a member of the Corinth Community Church attacked Paul, either physically or verbally, questioning his character.

Sin destroys respect and regard for the family and the possessions of the family.

ILLUS. A lady told me of the horrors she experienced as a teen in her own home because her older, bigger, and stronger brother would sneak into her bedroom and rape her night after night. Sin in his heart sent him into her room.

Sin destroys respect for the family. Sin destroys respect for the church family. When someone attacks with the intent of harming or destroying a member of the church family, that attack flows from sin in the heart.

Right now the churches of Colorado are in a struggle for their survival. In November an item on the ballot, if it passes, will mean the closure of hundreds of churches because churches will be forced to pay property taxes. Some churches will be required to pay more than they receive in offerings. This referendum was presented by a lawyer who as a child and teen was molested by a Roman Catholic priest many times. He is intent on getting revenge for what he suffered. He wants to punish all churches for what he suffered. He readily admits he hates the church. Nothing would please him more than for the church to disappear from the face of the earth. This attack on the family of God comes from sin in his heart.

Whoever attacked Paul was prompted by sin.

Sin creates excuses for inappropriate behavior toward the family. Once in a while all of us do stupid things that bring harm and hurt to others. Yet the minute we are made aware of how harmful our actions have been, we immediately repent and begin mending our ways. Sin in the heart, on the other hand, begins rationalizing and explaining the behavior. In "political speak," we call that "spinning."

I was visiting with a friend this summer who began a tirade against a district superintendent. At first, I thought he was simply sharing his observations. However, as he talked I realized he was attacking the man. I asked him how he could feel that way as a Christian. He was

shocked by my words. He bristled, saying the man was stupid and deserved any pain that came his way. I asked him again how he could have such feelings as a Christian. He then went into a long explanation of Christian responsibility to think. I pointed out there is a big difference between Christian thinking and attacks on people. I haven't visited with him for a while now to find out if he has continued his attacks or has repented.

There is one and only one test for our actions—do they please God? Sin causes us to build a case for our wrong acts.

II. PAUL'S GRIEF AFFECTED THE WHOLE CHURCH (V. 5)

Paul handles this attack in a brilliant way. He sees it for what it is. It is an attack on the *whole* church family.

ILLUS. During the Vietnam war one of the favorite attacks of the Vietcong was to spread small land mines all over an area. Often the mines looked like toys. They rarely killed anyone. Instead, they blew off a leg or an arm or blinded the person. Many children were maimed for life.

The Vietcong did this because they knew a dead person could be abandoned but an injured person required the attention of at least one person and often a dozen people. Well-placed injuries could hurt the whole squad or company. A soldier whose buddy just had his arm blown off would forget the fighting and go to the aid of his buddy.

If anyone in the church family is attacked, the whole church suffers. A blow to any one of you is a blow to me. A blow to me is a blow to you.

III. THE CHURCH REACTED AGAINST THE ONE WHO CAUSED THE GRIEF (V. 6)

The church understood something very simple: the ones prompted by sin to attack others in the church will sooner or later turn their attacks on the rest of the church. Sin in the heart is never satisfied. It must conquer and conquer and conquer. As soon as sin has destroyed one, it must move on to another. That is the nature of sin. Sometimes people foolishly think they will be treated differently. They are wrong. Actions prompted by sin have no respect for anyone.

ILLUS. I grew up in a large family. It was so big we had about every kind of person possible in it. My family was not alike. Every one of us was different. Our family had a deadbeat, a crook, a liar, a society starlet, a boss, a wheeler dealer, a social climber, a moneymaker, a money spender, a girl who broke all the guys' hearts, and one whose heart all the guys broke. We were never allowed to have the radio on. I think I know why. We could never have agreed on the station. We would fight for the best seat in the car—the top of the pile. We had unbecoming nicknames for everyone. One sister was so stubborn we called her the "white goat." Another was "Gabby Maggie" because she never stopped talking.

We knew where the line was between family fun and attack. We never crossed that line without risk.

I remember one time when it happened. One of my sisters seemed destined to never date. She was stuck between two sisters whom the boys lined up to date. One

sister would have two dates some evenings. This particular sister never had a date. She did not seem to have the knack for attracting guys. Any guys who talked to her were trying to get to the other sisters.

One morning the girls were getting ready for school and fighting over the bathroom. A fourth sister was trying to get into the bathroom and my nondating sister stood in her way. She said to her, "I don't know why you take so long in the bathroom; no guy will look at you!"

Suddenly the whole house got quiet. No one said a word. My nondating sister opened the door to the bathroom and silently walked to the bedroom and shut the door. Throughout the day the sister who attacked received the silent treatment. We younger ones knew she had done something awful, and we could not speak to her. That went on for several days with the delinquent sister trying to convince the rest of the family that what she said was true. No one budged. The family knew that if she got away with that, soon she would set her sights on the rest of the family. I was too young to know how things were resolved, but I know a long time passed before that attack was put to rest.

This is what happened when Paul was attacked. The church slowly realized the danger to itself and began isolating the attackers.

IV. THE ONE WHO CAUSED THE GRIEF REPENTED (V. 10)

We have no idea how much time elapsed between the attack and the repentance. The repentance did not occur immediately. Paul left the church stunned and deeply concerned by the attacks. He knew the whole church could turn from serving Jesus Christ if nothing changed. Much later, he writes of his relief that the troublemaker had repented and was committed to changing.

V. PAUL INSTRUCTS THE CHURCH TO CAUTIOUSLY EMBRACE THE REPENTANT ONE (VV. 7-8)

Trust betrayed is not easily restored. One of the most difficult things a marriage can face comes when the husband or wife is unfaithful. I have been amazed at how many couples decide to try to hold their marriage together after one has betrayed the relationship. But the trust is slow to return.

Paul calls on the church to embrace the very one who wounded them. He feels the particular one has truly repented and is safe to bring back into the family as a trusted member. He knows it will not be easy, but they should do so anyway.

ILLUS. Paul is speaking out of his own experiences. We first hear of him when he is making havoc of the church, arresting and killing member after member. Suddenly he converts to Christ and begins trying to enter the church as a loved member. He does not succeed. The church in Jerusalem is very slow to accept him. A few brave souls open their lives and hearts to him, but most

of the church is skeptical. A dozen years later Paul is still struggling with a few who do not trust him. Yet Paul knows the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ can take sinful people and transform them. He knows because God had transformed him.

Paul points out that the one who has attacked the whole church through an attack on Paul has repented and is letting Christ transform him or her, now needs the grace of God extended to him or her through the church. He or she cannot demand it, nor does that one deserve forgiveness. But the church is called to carry out the redemptive acts of Christ that include forgiveness and restoration.

Family forgives and restores. Family welcomes home the very one who has tried to destroy it. Family senses the prodigal has been transformed and welcomes him home.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- Pray for those around you in this morning's service.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture ReadingDeut. 30:15-20
Gal. 6:1-6
- Choruses*"Come into His Presence with Thanksgiving"*
"Great Is the Lord"
"Gentle Shepherd"
"Family of God"
"He Is Lord"
- Hymns.....*"We Exalt Thee"*
"Glory to His Name"
- Drama*"Getting Along with Aunt Tillie"*
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon*"A View of Community"*
- Closing Chorus *"We Are One in the Bond of Love"*
- BenedictionEph. 3:20-21

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the unity of the congregation in fulfilling God's call to them.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target calls the congregation to accept responsibility to each other.

It is essential that the pastor does not allow problems in the church to bleed into this sermon.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, we come into Your presence with thanksgiving because You love us all. Teach us this day to share that love."

An Open Door

by Jim Christy

2 Cor. 2:12-16

Sept. 20, 1998

"The Lord had opened a door" (2 Cor. 2:12).

INTRO

When God opens a door, that door leads to ministry—to doing good. John Wesley wrote of God opening doors for him to preach to the spiritually hungry. The missionary Livingstone tells of God opening doors for him to share the gospel with a tribal member for the first time.

Paul, in today's scripture, speaks of God opening a door for him to share the gospel of Jesus. That door opens to him because of his concern for Titus, his friend and co-worker. God used Paul's love and concern for Titus as an open door. When God opens a door, it is always for ministry. Open doors allow us to always do good to others.

God never opens a door for us to get something. His open door always provides us an opportunity to do something. He gives an opportunity to do something good, something good to others.

Someone says something unkind to you. That becomes an open door for you to do something kind and good in return. Trouble comes to you. That becomes an open door for you to openly demonstrate your trust in God. Sickness or disease knocks you down. That becomes an open door for you to pray.

Joseph, the son of Jacob, saw in his brother's treachery an open door for God to do good through him to his whole family and the whole nation of Egypt.

Paul saw, in the disappearance of his fellow minister, an open door to be used by God to find and encourage Titus. When God opens a door, it is always for ministry to others. It is never a way to satisfy ourselves. Open doors become opportunities to let the power of God be demonstrated in us.

When you see a sign saying a store is open, it means you can go through the door and get something for yourself. When you see a sign saying "open" over a door God has set before you, it means you get to do something for someone else. Note what Paul says about the open door before him.

I. GOD OPENS DOORS AND LEADS US THROUGH THEM

"Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me . . . But thanks be to God, who always leads us" (2 Cor. 2:12, 14).

God not only opens doors but also leads us through them. He never tells us to go alone. In fact, it is not possible to go through the doors God opens for us on our own. He must lead us because the doors are always more difficult to get through than we are able to manage in our own strength.

Here are two doors He opens and leads us through:

A. God uses our suffering to open doors to His grace.

Who can better understand the suffering of others than the one who has suffered. God does not intend for your suffering in any area to go wasted. He has plans to use it to bless others. When you suffer, let God show you His open door to use that suffering to show His grace.

ILLUS. Corrie ten Boom arrived in America as an old lady. This short Dutch woman spoke broken English. As she traveled across America, speaking in churches and halls, the people by the thousands crowded in to hear her. The multitudes came to hear her because she spoke of her suffering and God's amazing grace.

B. God uses our concerns to open doors to His ministries.

Paul was concerned about his friend, Titus. God opened a door for him to reach out to Titus.

ILLUS. George Mueller was deeply bothered by the hundreds of orphans he saw running the streets of towns throughout the British Isles. God opened a door for him to help thousands of children and to establish laws protecting children.

ILLUS. Bill Bright was concerned about the millions around the world who have not heard or seen the story of Jesus. God opened the door for him to guide a program that plans to show the *Jesus* film around the world to everyone living.

God opens doors through the things that touch us so we can touch others with the things of God. All of God's open doors lead to helping others, to minister to those in need.

II. WE MAKE A TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION WHEN WE FOLLOW GOD THROUGH THE DOOR HE HAS OPENED

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14).

ILLUS. In ancient Rome, the head of armies would bring back to Rome their trophies of war. When the soldiers arrived outside the city, heralds would go through the city announcing the arrival of the general. When the crowds had gathered, the soldiers would march through the city, leading their prisoners who carried the loot captured from the cities. At the head of the parade, the general was carried in an open cart as the people cheered his rich bounty that enriched all of Rome.

Paul takes this picture and shows what will happen when we walk through the doors God has opened. Sometime in eternity, Jesus will lead His captives into the eternal city. We, His love slaves, will follow behind carrying the treasures we gathered when we walked through the doors God opened for us.

III. WE BECOME THE FRAGRANT AROMA OF CHRIST TO THE WORLD

"But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:14-15).

Greeley, Colorado, is known for its aroma. And even

though a lot of folk say that smell is the smell of money, it's not our money. It's just a bad smell.

Christians spread the aroma of Christ. To some, it is the smell of life. To others, it's the smell of death.

ILLUS. One of the pleasant surprises that has come from the lowering of the Iron and Bamboo curtains is the fact that the number of Christians in those countries is much larger than anyone thought. Why? Through suffering and tough times, God has opened doors for Christians to minister.

One of my favorite stories that came out of China is about a Christian man who was removed from his professional practice and his family and placed in a mine to work. For many years, he worked until his body could not survive the work deep in the earth. So he was placed at the top as the ringer of the bell when it was time for shift changes. He was able to talk to the men as they came in and out each shift. Always he kept a right spirit, no matter how cruel his treatment. He always gave Jesus credit for the good.

One day he felt a deep need to ring the bell in the middle of the shift. He knew it would mean his death, but the more he prayed about it the more he felt he should. He rang the bell and the men came out of the mine. The leaders were angry with him and were making plans to execute him when the earth began to shake. The mine collapsed in an earthquake that would have killed everyone inside.

**IV. THROUGH US GOD GIVES LIFE TO OTHERS
THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

God's open doors are meant to give life. They lead us away from the letter to the Spirit. They reveal to us that we get to serve and to trust Christ, not that we must. Open doors are the way to freedom.

Take suffering as an example. Paul tells of his suffering. His suffering is so bad it's unbelievable. He suffered physically. He suffered persecution, both from inside and outside the church. He was abandoned, chased, made fun of, hurt, and abused. On the other hand, he was treated like a god, was fed and lavished with gifts. He was given seats of honor, taken before powerful people, provided the best money could buy. Yet, in all these things, Paul had learned a lesson: God uses life to open doors for ministry. God opened door after door for Paul to minister.

Today's scripture tells about one of those doors. At first it looked like the door opened to preach in Troas, but suddenly it became a door to find Titus, who was missing. Paul left the comfort of Troas, with all the perks and rewards, and

traveled into Macedonia to find Titus. As he writes to the church at Corinth, he tells them that because he walked through the open door that God was leading him through, the church at Corinth would be blessed by the coming of Titus whom Paul had found and was sending to them.

This morning God has placed before each of you an open door—an open door to do good, to let your suffering, your good things become opportunities to send the aroma of Christ to the world around you. God has placed before you an open door, a door to reach out and touch your world for Christ, a door to those who are perishing. Follow Jesus Christ through the open door He has placed before you.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- Answer this: If time and money were no object, what ministry would I develop?
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture ReadingNeh. 2:11-18
Matt. 28:18-20
- Choruses "Come and Go with Me"
"What a Mighty God We Serve"
"Gentle Shepherd"
"Family of God"
"My Jesus, I Love Thee"
- Hymns..... "I Am Resolved"
"If Jesus Goes with Me"
- Drama..... "The Food Bank Gang"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon "An Open Door"
- Closing Chorus "Gentle Shepherd"
- Benediction Eph. 3:20-21

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on ministries that the people can/need to get busy doing.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target challenges the congregation to attempt great things for God.

It is essential that the pastor dream the impossible dream that God is giving him or her.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, may this service be a time when we hear Your voice calling us to something bigger than we are."

The New Covenant

by Jim Christy

2 Cor. 3:1-6

Sept. 27, 1998

"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant"
(2 Cor. 3:6).

INTRO

The best-selling books in America are not novels or even romance books. The largest selling books are how-to books. They are step-by-step explanations on what to do to succeed at something like making a boat, a desk, a television set. They explain how to repair a clogged drain, a broken garage door, a cracked pot. How-to books have become a standard part of the Christian Book Store. They explain how to become a Christian, how to be a Christian, how to live a holy life, how to be a good husband, a good wife, a good parent. The greatest how-to book of all time is the Bible.

I. GOD GAVE ADAM AND EVE THE FIRST THREE STEPS TO GET TO HEAVEN (GEN. 1:24-30; 2:17)

The Bible begins with three steps to eternal life. Adam and Eve were instructed to (1) subdue the earth; (2) populate the earth, and (3) avoid eating from the tree of the knowledge of right and wrong. That was it. In those three steps were everything anyone would ever need to know to live a good and fulfilling life.

The sons and daughters of Adam and Eve have rejected all three steps. Instead of subduing the earth, they have destroyed much of it. Instead of populating the earth, they have persisted in starving, murdering, and destroying people. Instead of staying far from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they have persisted in exploring evil, learning more and more ways to do evil.

II. GOD GAVE MOSES THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OR STEPS TO HEAVEN (EXOD. 20:1-17)

Once the first 3 how-to principles were rejected, God added a new set of how-to concepts. They are called the Ten Commandments. The 3 became 10.

Look how we, the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, have rejected these steps to eternal life.

To the command about having no other gods, we have succeeded in making ourselves gods.

To the command about making no graven images, we have learned to worship the image of ourselves.

To the command about not misusing the name of God, we have filled the air with curses using God's name.

To the command about remembering the Sabbath by keeping it holy, we have concluded we do not need a holy day.

To the command about honoring your father and mother, we have given this job to the state.

To the command about not murdering, we have said, "It depends on the circumstances."

To the command about not committing adultery, we used to say, "Do not get caught." Now we say, "Admit you cannot help it; it is a biological problem."

To the command about not stealing, we explain that we are not stealing, we have a right to it.

To the command about not giving false testimony, we allow the end to justify the means.

To the command about not coveting, we teach that to covet is good—even profitable.

The children of Adam and Eve rejected the three steps given in the garden. They also rejected the 10 steps given on the mountain on "how to get to heaven."

Next came the expansion of the 10 commandments. Over the years, these embellishments of the 10 laws grew and grew until, by the time Jesus arrived on the earth, the 10 had become more than 20,000 laws. The way to heaven grew from 3 to 20,000 steps.

III. GOD GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, JESUS, TO PROVIDE A NEW COVENANT (V. 6)

Jesus came to the earth to fulfill the Law and to provide us the power to fulfill it. Three laws could not be kept; 10 laws could not be kept; 20,000 laws could not be kept. Jesus brought one law. That law is placed in the heart of each person. The new law is simple—love God and love your neighbor. This one law written on the heart is the new covenant replacing the old covenant of 3, 10, or 20,000 laws written on stone, on paper, and now in computers.

There is only one way to live under the new covenant. That is through Jesus Christ. He is the new covenant. The old covenant, written on stone, paper, and computer, is dead. It is black and white. It provides no room for differences in people and places. It cannot see and understand a higher law.

ILLUS. In the early days of computers, when we wrote our own programs, one of the most frustrating things we experienced was the one letter error in a huge program. No matter what you did, the program would not work correctly until that one letter error was corrected. The computer would continue making the same mistake over and over again. That's how the old covenant works.

The new covenant law, written on the heart, is alive. It is unique to each of us. Jesus Christ dwells with us, showing us what is best, not what is correct. In the old covenant, it is possible to keep the Law and not do good, to obey the 10 commandments and be an awful person. In the new covenant, it is impossible to keep the one law and not do good—and not be good. Jesus simply does not allow you to do evil without a great inner struggle.

IV. GOD GIVES US ONE STEP TO GET TO HEAVEN (V. 6)

The one step is following Jesus as Lord and Savior. The old covenant is 3 or 10, or eventually, thousands of laws. The new covenant is one. These covenants have two purposes. The first aspect of covenant was to make it possible for us to live a good life in community and the second aspect was to provide a way to heaven. God has always tied the two together.

A. The old covenant and the new covenant both tell us how to act in society.

They are the foundation for how people should behave in society. In the old covenant, the laws are specific—do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal—whereas, in the new covenant, they are summed up in one—love your neighbor. No society survives long without either the old or the new covenant.

B. The old and the new covenants both tell us how to get to heaven.

The old covenant provided lists to keep to qualify for heaven. The new covenant provided the sacrificial death of Jesus.

ILLUS. The Bible tells about a rich young man who was very important in Jerusalem politics who came to Jesus. He asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life and get to heaven. Jesus told him to keep the commandments—all 20,000 of them. The man honestly said he had kept them from his youth. He lived under the old covenant, laws written on stone and paper. He knew they were not enough, for he might have overlooked one law and, if he broke one law, he was lost. He would have failed to meet the standards of the old covenant to get to heaven.

Jesus gave him the way to heaven by the old covenant. The man pushed a little. He said he had done all the right things but was not confident of them.

Jesus then turned to the new covenant. He said to the man, “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Matt. 19:21).

The man was shocked. He was very rich. The old covenant never asked anything so extreme. The new covenant did. He refused and walked away depressed and sad. What he missed seeing was that, if he had agreed to do what Jesus said, his life would have taken on a glorious dimension of joy and peace. He would have had the law of love written on his heart.

ILLUS. One day at the Nazarene Theological Seminary where I attended graduate school, four of the great Holiness thinkers of the day led a discussion on what it means to be sanctified. Dr. Willard Taylor believed in and taught covenant holiness; Dr. Richard Taylor believed in and taught substantive holiness; Dr. Mildred Wynkoop believed in and taught relational holiness; and Dr. Kenneth Grider believed in and taught systematic holiness. The best way to describe how these four agreed was to put each one in the corner of the room. That was as close as they could come in their heads. What was so amazing, however, was how alike they were in their hearts. Not once did one take advantage of another or put down another or intimidate another. They talked totally different approaches and ideas about the holy life, how we arrived

there and how we lived it, but they felt and acted exactly the same. The new covenant was clearly written on their hearts. Not a one would purposely hurt or harm another. They were eager to do the things God wanted them to do. Everything they did was intended to glorify Jesus Christ.

Jesus calls us to the new covenant. The covenant of His love is written on our hearts. That law will take a dozen turns you could never imagine. It will demand much more than the old covenant laws, but it will give far more than the old covenant could ever give. It will open for you the way to heaven and eternal life.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
 - Pray for the pastor as he or she ends the sermon. Be ready to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture ReadingExod. 20:1-17, abbreviated
John 3:13-17
- Choruses “Come and Go with Me”
“What a Mighty God We Serve”
“There’s Just Something About That Name”
“Oh, How He Loves You and Me”
“My Jesus, I Love Thee”
- Hymns.....“Amazing Grace”
“Softly and Tenderly”
- Drama“Free Rides on the Gospel Train”
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon“The New Covenant”
- Closing Chorus.....“Oh, How He Loves You and Me”
- BenedictionEph. 3:20-21

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the salvation of the lost.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target provides an opportunity for any in the congregation to become Christians.

It is essential that the pastor prepare for the closing altar call so the music and focus are not distracting.

OPENING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, prepare us now to hear Your call. We want to say yes to anything You ask of us.”

A Great Treasure in a Clay Jar

by Jim Christy

2 Cor. 4:7-12

Oct. 4, 1998

"We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

ILLUS. Some of the best packagers, as those who sell products are called, are cosmetic and perfume companies. The section of the store where they sell them is as foreign to most men as Tibet. The products sit inside glass cases where each little bottle is wrapped in foils or shiny papers with gold trim, gold embossed seals, and gold ribbons. The product the man seeks is inside one of those glass cases. It has been moved from the last time he was there. Moving merchandise is an old trick in selling things. In order to find what he's after he must look at everything else. At every step he is hit with sweet smells.

Since his goal is to get what he wants, to escape the place, and to get back to a Country General kind of store, he looks for a salesclerk who is not busy doing mysterious things behind the counter.

Each woman has on a black dress with a long flowing scarf hanging off the shoulder held there by a gold something. Her hair is perfect, and her long nails are painted dark colors. Real people don't look like that.

When the man buys a little bottle of perfume, the box, four times the size of the bottle, the price 10 times what it should be, is placed in a huge bag with the name of the perfume emblazoned on the sides. Everything surrounding that perfume says, "This is wonderful perfume!"

Packaging the product is big business in the world today. We have packages to protect the product from getting damaged, from getting contaminated, from getting wet, from drying out, from being stolen, from getting zapped with electricity or magnets.

The most significant purpose of a package, though, is to make the product look good. The word "package" has taken on the meaning of what it requires to sell a product, including advertising, testimonies, and sales techniques. The package has become as important as, if not more important than, the product.

A few years ago, a trailer or advertisement was made for a movie about Robin Hood. A minicamera was mounted on an arrow and shot through the woods. The film was played in slow motion. That advertisement did not come from the film and had nothing to do with the story. Yet the filmmakers liked it so well they inserted it in the middle of the film. Some who have seen the movie have told me that was the best part.

The standard of the world is how you are packaged. Looks count for more than brains or skills. If we have to choose between the two, most often we will choose the one who looks the best. Only a handful of sloppy people ever are accepted as they are—and that is because they are irreplaceable. That's why we spend a fortune on straightening teeth, removing warts, taking off ugly pounds, wearing contacts, dressing in fine clothes, growing hair, shaving hair, applying makeup, putting on pain-inflicting shoes, shampooing, perming, moussing, styling hair. That's one reason we wash, polish, and wax our cars, paint our houses, green up our lawns, buy new clothes long before our old ones show wear, buy toothpaste, deodorant, perfume, and mints. Image is the name of the game from the world's perspective.

Paul is writing to a church full of people who lived and believed like the world. They wanted all Christians to look sharp as a testimony to the world. The beautiful, the best witness of Christ, they proclaimed. The package was the key to the witness. The better the package, the more effective the witness. Beautiful people best expressed Christ. The church not only used the methods of the world to witness but also believed in them. They were more interested in the way the message was presented than in the message. They spent their time making themselves look good in order to make Jesus look good.

Paul did not care much for the way these church folk looked at witnessing. These verses are his response to them.

I. WE ARE CLAY JARS (V. 7)

In today's language, Paul is saying we are disposable containers. We are gallon milk containers, egg cartons, pop cans, freezer bags, shampoo bottles. Clay jars were cheap ways to store everything from water to wine, from grain to grease, from fish to flour, from salt to silver. Clay jars were used for trash and garbage, as well as hiding places for money and jewelry. Most homes had dozens of clay jars of all sizes, shapes, and colors. There were so many of them that some large excavation areas look like they were graveled with pieces of jars. There were fancy jars that had been fired, painted, and fired again.

Fancy, expensive, beautiful jars are not what Paul spoke about. He referred to the everyday kind of clay jar. The only unique thing about these treasure-holding jars is that they often had inscribed on the outside drawings that revealed what was inside. We pots holding Jesus Christ can be people who hint at what He is like by how others see us.

II. WE HAVE THE GREAT TREASURE IN OUR HEARTS (V. 6)

The value of the treasure is determined by itself, not by the vessel that holds it. The treasure is so valuable that the finest vessel in the world adds nothing to its value.

ILLUS. When the British were about to burn down the White House in Washington, D.C., the president's wife cut out of the frame the painting of George Washington and carried it off to safety. The frame burned, but the painting was saved. No one complained because the frame was lost. Everyone rejoiced because the painting was saved.

The frame had value only as long as it held the painting. Once she removed the painting, the frame could be burned with little loss.

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered 50 years ago, they were inside clay jars. Ordinary jars contained priceless manuscripts. No one has bothered to keep track of the jars, but the manuscripts have been carefully watched.

Our worth is determined by Jesus Christ being with us. The disciples had difficulty understanding this idea. They sailed in a boat together on the Sea of Galilee. Suddenly when a storm hit, they cried out because they feared they were going to capsize and drown. Jesus reminded them who was in the boat with them. He implied that no way the boat would capsize with Him on board.

III. THE WORLD WILL BEST SEE THE GREAT VALUE OF THE TREASURE WE POSSESS IN CHRIST ONLY AFTER THEY SEE JESUS, NOT US (V. 5)

The more of us others see, the less of Jesus they see living in us.

A. Our greatness detracts the world from seeing Jesus Christ.

B. Our greatness looks plain before the greatness of Jesus Christ.

People see Jesus in us by the way we handle the bumps and bruises of life. The purpose of a clay jar was to protect the treasure inside. The jar was sturdy enough to be kicked around, rolled, dropped, set in water or mud, left in a burning building, all the time protecting the treasure.

ILLUS. The "football" or "black box" that carries all the codes for firing the U.S. nuclear weapons remains within six feet of the president at all times. The satchel looks ordinary, but it is made of special material to protect those vital facts and the system needed to deliver commands.

No one would carelessly place great treasure in a container that could not handle it. Jesus does not come into the heart and life of the person who cannot hold Him. He comes only into the hearts of those given strength in all circumstances.

Paul shifts the picture a bit. He points out that the jar or container is made too strong to destroy because of the treasure inside. The treasure of Jesus Christ makes the jar or the Christian strong by dwelling inside. That means, if Jesus dwells in your heart, you are a vessel able to hold the treasure. This adds up to something very important. Jesus Christ is living within us! Jesus Christ, the great treasure, the pearl of great price, is in us. He is in us, we who are pots of clay. With such a great treasure, we must act like people who hold something wonderful. We must live so all can see the treasure. We must not let our clay pots hide Jesus Christ.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
 - Think about Jesus with you right here, right now.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture Reading.....Psalm 23
Phil. 2:5-11
- Choruses..... "Majesty"
"Great Is the Lord"
"Gentle Shepherd"
"His Name Is Wonderful"
"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
- Hymns....."Spirit Song"
"Springs of Living Water"
- Drama....."The Old Box in the Attic"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon "A Great Treasure in a Clay Jar"
- Closing Chorus....."Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
- Benediction.....Eph. 3:20-21

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on praising and worshiping God.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target helps the congregation grasp the wonder of Christ dwelling in them.

It is essential that the pastor first feel the wonder of Christ within so he or she can share that wonder with the people.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, You are worth all glory and honor and praise. As we worship You today, may we see You high and lifted up."



"I don't come to church anymore. I'm home-Sunday-schooled."

The Will to Get Along

by Jim Christy

2 Cor. 5:16-21

Oct. 11, 1998

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

ILLUS. A few weeks ago my wife and I were looking for a new coffeemaker. We are terribly hard on coffeemakers, so we wanted to find one that would last longer than others we have owned in the past. We stopped at Boyer's Coffee store in Denver and found what looked like something we could use. It was mostly stainless steel. The water lines can be cleaned with a special spring.

Velma began asking about it when a short, stocky man came to the front of the store carrying his lunch in a crumpled brown sack. He began talking about the coffeemaker, telling her how it worked, how to clean it, and a lot of things I did not hear. He spoke with affection about the machine. Sometimes his voice sounded like he felt she was about to rip out of his life a very special thing. I half expected him to grab the coffeemaker and run with it, fighting her off.

Later we found out the man was Mr. Boyer himself. She was looking at his favorite coffeemaker and it was the last one. He wanted to be sure it went to a home where it would be properly cared for and used.

It made me think of how God, who made us, sees us. When God made us, He planted heaven in our hearts. He has a great deal of interest in us. We are always important to Him. The Lord is willing to go to extremes to see that we fulfill the purpose for which He made us. Paul the apostle insists God's desire to assure that we go to heaven is so strong He came among us and died to correct the separation sin caused between us.

God is not willing that any should perish, that any should fall short of the glory of God. Since the days of Adam and Eve, people have been at war with God, unwilling to get along with Him. No matter what God says, we humans have resisted Him. Though God brings peace and a full life, we resist His ways. The world thinks getting along with God is for the weak. Marx called religion "the opium of the people." The world believes strong people do not need God. They think the person who gives in to another is weak.

"Surrender" is the worst word in the vocabulary of the human ego. People have even developed a strategy of surrender that is not surrender at all. It goes like this: "All right, you can have your way." What a tricky statement. It keeps the speaker in charge. He or she lets you have your way. He chooses to let you be boss. The subtlety is that he remains in charge by letting you be in charge.

In 2 Cor. 5, Paul points out that the Christian way of thinking was different from the world's way of thinking. Paul says, "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you" (v. 13). He

is saying the things of God will always look crazy to the world.

In 2 Cor. 6, Paul writes that he has been so successful serving Jesus that he has gone through trouble, hardships and distresses, beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, hunger, dishonor, bad reports, regarded as an imposter, beaten some more, sorrowful, poor, have nothing. Anyone who takes up a life that brings all these things is crazy. The world calls that kind of person sick in the head and in need of much help, including extended hospitalization. Paul does these things because Jesus calls him to do them. He does them for no other reason. Jesus says "go" and he goes. Jesus says "run" and he runs. Jesus says "stay" and he stays. Doesn't that sound like a crazy man? He acts like a trained dog.

In this list, Paul explains what he gets for doing these things. The Christian reading them understands and knows he is not crazy: He says the things that brought him suffering also brought him purity, understanding, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, sincere love, truthful speech in the power of God, weapons of righteousness, glory, and good report. They taught him to be genuine. They made him known around the world and to God, kept him always rejoicing, making many rich, possessing everything. This list makes sense to the Christian. It makes no sense to the world. Most Christians would go through a lot to have what Paul had. We would go through the first list to have the second things. We do it all the time.

ILLUS. A group of mountain climbers gathered together to plan an ascent of Mount Everest. These men and women were successful in their professional fields. They had acquired large personal wealth. They had almost everything they wanted.

Mount Everest was known as a killer. The weather could turn terrible overnight. The risk to them would be great. Nevertheless, they went. They invested huge amounts of time and money preparing for the climb. Their hike was painful and slow.

As they neared the top, a storm smashed down on them. Half of the climbers died. They took all the risks, paid all the prices for the feeling of conquering that dangerous mountain. To most people they were crazy. To mountain climbers, what they did made perfect sense.

Without visible and understandable rewards, anything that brings risks is crazy. The world applauds people who attempt dangerous things for great causes. The medical world stood in awe when a researcher publicly drank HIV. It was only months later when word came that he had killed all the virus before he drank them and sterilized his potential potion of death. The world calls "crazy" martyrs of great causes who attempt dangerous missions.

The world calls us "crazy" if we let God lead us into things that bring suffering, pain, failure, and sorrow. Yet that is exactly what Paul says we must do. We must agree to get along with God no matter what He tells us to do.

I. WE ARE TO REGARD NO ONE FROM A WORLDLY POINT OF VIEW (V. 16)

The world views people as something to use to get what they want. One of the marks of the worldly is the

way they go through people, getting from each person as much as they can, and then dumping them for the next person. They prey upon people in the church as one of the best places for worldly people to operate. They swoop into a church, make friends with people, use them, and then charge off to another place to find more people to use. After a few dozen times that this happens to Christians, they become suspicious of new people who arrive on the scene and immediately act like friends.

Paul warns us not to develop the spirit of the world toward people. So you get burned; so you are used. Still Paul says we must keep our hearts open to those who come among us. We must persist in taking the risk of being a true friend, even though many are friends only as long as it remains to their advantage.

ILLUS. *Christianity Today* tells about what has happened in the church of Eastern Europe. When these countries were trying to free themselves from Communist control, they filled the churches week after week. Once they gained their freedom, they abandoned the churches.

II. WE BECOME NEW CREATIONS IN CHRIST (V. 17)

A new creation is just that—new. The old passes away, replaced with the new. Jesus Christ does that to all who come to Him. He transforms them. He makes them into new persons. The bodies look the same. They sound the same. Yet something is different, very different. Selfishness has been replaced with compassion. Greed has been changed to generosity. Weakness has been infused with strength. When Jesus comes, all is changed.

ILLUS. An evangelist returned to a church two years after holding a revival there. One of the seekers in that first revival was a dirty rogue of a man. His wife and children wore plain, worn clothes. As the evangelist walked into the church two years later, he was greeted by a well-dressed family. The husband and father was clean, clear-eyed, and open about his faith in Jesus Christ. It was the same scrubby man who had prayed at the altar two years before. He was totally transformed by the grace and power of Christ.

III. WE ARE RECONCILED TO GOD (V. 18)

To be reconciled to get along with God, the Bible teaches that we have strayed far from God. He has become our enemy. We fear Him. We run from Him. We hide from Him. We feel uncomfortable around Him. When we are made new through the power of Christ, the first thing that happens is that we get acquainted with God. We discover that He is good. He cares about us. He wants to help us. He pours good gifts on us.

IV. WE ARE TO RECONCILE THE WORLD (V. 19)

This calls for us to lead others to get along.

No Christian lives alone. Our deeds touch the world around us like the ripples spreading out over a pond when a rock is tossed in. When we are changed, we begin to change our world. It may not look like much, but it will make a difference. A little change makes a big difference over time.

ILLUS. When a space capsule is launched, its destination is determined by tiny increments. A fraction of an inch on earth makes the difference of thousands of miles in space. A little difference at launch time can assure success or failure months and years later.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- If God asks you to do something in this service, will you do it, no matter how small or how large?
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture ReadingPs. 51:1-12
John 21:15-17
- Choruses "Majesty"
"Celebrate the Coming"
"My Tribute"
"Seek Ye First"
"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
- Hymns "O Worship the King"
"Wonderful, Wonderful"
- Drama "Who's That Talkin'?"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon "The Will to Get Along"
- Closing Chorus "Seek Ye First"
- Benediction Jude 24-25

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on living in the center of God's will.

CREATIVE WORSHIP ORDER

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target calls the congregation to get along with God, to accept His claims on them.

It is essential that the pastor get along with God, that his heart and life are obedient to Him.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, speak. Your servants are listening. Your servants are ready to obey."

Things to Remove from Your Life—a Critical Spirit

by Jim Christy

Col. 4:5-6

Oct. 18, 1998

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6).

"Forgive us . . . as we also have forgiven" (Matt. 6:12).

INTRO

There is a big difference between a critical mind and a critical spirit. We need critical minds. None of us needs to have a critical spirit. A critical mind enhances and builds our world. A critical spirit breaks down and destroys things and people.

The Bible encourages a critical mind. A critical mind critiques. The Bible tells us to test the Word of the Lord, to challenge in our minds what it says. The Bible will withstand the most intense critical study. God does not expect nor desire that we accept His Word without thought. We are not robots following instructions from on high. He created us to participate in our faith. A critical mind does not lead one away from faith in Jesus Christ but a critical spirit will.

The Bible condemns a critical spirit. A critical spirit criticizes. As we look at this awful spirit that God wants to remove from our lives, remember, I am speaking, not of a critical mind, but of a critical spirit. I wouldn't be surprised if more people have been harmed by a critical spirit than all the other sins people engage in. I know of no pastor who does not pray for the cleansing of critical spirits from the church. People with critical spirits eat at the heart of the church. They create distrust and suspicion. They destroy friendships and marriages. They smother the fires of the Holy Spirit and revival, becoming a tool of the devil.

I. WE ARE CRITICAL BY NATURE: "ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD" (ROM. 3:23)

The Bible points out that all of us, by our very natures, are critical of others. We slip into this critical spirit without meaning to do so. We criticize people for whom we work and with whom we work. We may criticize at school, people with whom we attend church, our neighbors, even our immediate family members. Wherever people come together, there is a critical spirit. The Bible

says all of us are that way.

II. WE HAVE DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING THE ERRORS, MISTAKES, FLAWS, AND SINS IN OTHERS

ILLUS. Jesus told the story of two men who went into the Temple to pray. The first man told God how lucky God was to have him on His side and that he was not like other men, including the awful sinner praying at the same time.

The other man did not notice the marvelous devotee praying but cried out to the Lord to be merciful to him because he was an awful sinner.

Jesus did not deny that this second man was an awful sinner, nor that the first man was superreligious. Jesus simply pointed out that a critical spirit is awful in God's eyes. The good guy had great difficulty getting the picture of the bad guy straight because of his critical spirit.

People do that. We see only the result, so we criticize. Anyone can tell story after story of times when, if people knew the whole truth, they would not be so critical. We are all that way. We have great difficulty understanding the errors, mistakes, failures, and sins of others.

III. WE UNDERSTAND ERRORS, MISTAKES, FLAWS, AND SINS IN OURSELVES

This is the strange thing about the spirit of criticism. Somehow we see ourselves as exempt from it, as though no one has reason to criticize us. I know why I say things I say and do the things I do and act the way I act. It is all so logical. My mistakes are little mistakes, while your mistakes are big mistakes. God understands my sins quite well. We have this wonderful ability to understand why we sin. We do not understand why others act the way they do.

ILLUS. Jesus told the story of the man who owed something like \$7,000,000 and could not pay. His creditor forgave him the debt. The man walked out of the office of his creditor and soon met a man who owed him \$20. He grabbed the man and demanded he pay up or go to jail.

When the creditor found out what happened, he threw the man in prison until he could pay the \$7,000,000. The man thought his reasons for not having to pay his \$7,000,000 debt made sense, while the reasons the other man had for not paying his \$20 did not make sense to him.

By our very nature, we may condemn criticism by others and justify it in ourselves.

IV. WE ARE FORGIVEN OUR ERRORS, MISTAKES, FLAWS, AND SINS AS WE FORGIVE OTHERS OF THEIR ERRORS, MISTAKES, FLAWS, AND SINS

"Forgive us . . . as we also have forgiven" (Matt. 6:12).

This part of the Lord's Prayer is profound and powerful. It strikes to the very heart of a spirit of criticism. We are not nearly as likely to criticize if we know that we are guilty of the same thing.

Timothy McVeigh did an awful thing when he bombed the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. His sin is great before the nation and before God. What is his sin? Murder? Yes. Hate? But I believe the sin that took him to Oklahoma City in that yellow Ryder truck loaded with barrels filled

with fertilizer and oil was a critical spirit. He became critical of a government that is far from perfect. That spirit of criticism seeped deeper and deeper into his soul until he acted.

You may say it is ridiculous to even hint that any of us could do what McVeigh did. You are right. But his critical spirit took him on the path he followed. A critical spirit will not take you to good things. They surely will not be as awful, but they will lead you away from the good, away from what God wants from you and me.

You ask, "How can I be freed from a critical heart, from a critical spirit?" Two things need to happen for you to be free:

A. First, find forgiveness in Christ for your critical ways.

When you were sanctified and filled with the Holy Spirit, your heart was cleansed by faith. However, the spirit of criticism was not removed. It continues to pop up. It lies at the heart of your very nature. When you are with others, that spirit of criticism may pop up. The ugly little thing that keeps popping up in even Christian circles is the spirit of criticism. We must constantly ask God's forgiveness for a spirit of criticism that creeps into our lives.

B. Second, if you are going to be free from a spirit of criticism, forgive people who have had a spirit of criticism toward you.

This is not easy to do. Paul tells believers in the church at Rome not only to forgive those who spitefully use them but also to do good to them. When others have a spirit of criticism directed at you, be careful to not respond with criticism of them.

The pastorate today is filled with subtle pressures. Pastors can easily become the focus of a spirit of criticism that can harm their families and bring on the temptation to despair. That, in turn, can cause pastors to have a critical spirit. We have all experienced the spirit of criticism from friends and good people. We've all been tempted to allow a spirit of criticism to grow in our hearts.

In order to be cleansed of this spirit of criticism, you must be willing to forgive whoever has viewed you with a spirit of criticism. That's what Jesus was saying, "Forgive us . . . as we also have forgiven." It is God's way of doing things. He gives us a powerful insight into our nature. As long as other persons' spirit of criticism toward us is unforgiven, we cannot be cleansed of our own spirit of criticism. Our forgiveness is tied up in our forgiving.

Whenever I feel a spirit of criticism developing in me, I seek forgiveness and look for ways to forgive. It is a lot easier to find and receive forgiveness for my spirit of criticism when I can forgive someone with a critical spirit toward me.

If you want to be forgiven and cleansed from the spirit of criticism, then forgive those who have allowed their critical spirits to hurt you. God will bring healing to your critical spirit.

The most important things for you to understand today are that a critical spirit comes to all of us and all of us need God's continuous cleansing. Paul wrote to good peo-

ple. These believers practiced their faith. Yet Paul had to remind them, as he did most every group of Christians to whom he wrote, that a spirit of criticism is an ever-present threat to their spiritual health. This message is for everyone. Will you let the Holy Spirit search your heart to see if there is a critical spirit? Will you call on the Lord to forgive, heal, and cleanse you? Will you forgive those who, by their critical spirit, have hurt you or one you love? Paul reminds us Christians that there is a right way to live, a life free of the spirit of criticism. He knew a Christian life filled with grace is powerful. So he tells these wonderful Christians, "Be wise in the way you act." We cannot, we must not act in a spirit of criticism. Like those first Christians, we must live filled with the grace of God.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- Examine your week to see where you may have had a critical spirit.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture ReadingDeut. 30:15-20
Gal. 6:1-6
- Choruses....."Majesty"
"Celebrate the Coming"
"My Tribute"
"Seek Ye First"
"Open Our Eyes, Lord"
- Hymns "Trust and Obey"
"The Old Rugged Cross"
- Drama "The Swimming Pool"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon "Things to Remove from Your Life—
a Critical Spirit"
- Closing Chorus "Seek Ye First"
- BenedictionJude 24-25

PASTORAL PRAYER

The sermon target confronts the congregation with the problem of a critical spirit.

It is essential that the pastor does not allow a critical spirit to invade his or her life.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target confronts the congregation with the problem of a critical spirit.

It is essential that the pastor does not allow a critical spirit to invade his or her life.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in Your eyes, our strength and our redeemer."

Things to Remove from Your Life— Trust in the Flesh

by Jim Christy

Rom. 8:28-39

Oct. 25, 1998

"Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

INTRO

Flesh represents the opposite of faith. Flesh provides five senses as well as a dozen or so emotions to tell us what is happening. It signals pain, heat, cold, obstacles, success, failure, loss, frustration, danger, and a multitude of other things. Flesh soars and it sinks. It screams and it whispers. It sings and it cries. It puts together all the experiences thrust upon the body and reinterprets them. Sometimes the signals get garbled. Sometimes they conflict. Sometimes they are overwhelmed.

It is in this milieu that faith operates. Faith must manage the multitude of signals the flesh sends. It must level the highs and lows. It must counter fleshly outbursts that reach too high and collapses that fall too far. Therefore, faith cannot be built upon flesh. Faith must be built upon the sure word of Jesus Christ.

In this scripture, Paul has been writing about the danger of allowing things of the flesh, like meat or drink, to take the place of faith. Things of the flesh will never hold up because they will change from day to day, from year to year, from situation to situation. For faith to flourish, flesh must be removed as the controlling force from the Christian's life.

ILLUS. In the Great Awakening that swept across New England 200 years ago, Jonathan Edwards documented events, experiences, and effects of that revival in the town of Northampton, Massachusetts, where he served as pastor of the community church. He tells of shrieks of terror as people got under conviction, shaking and jerking and fainting as they prayed, large crowds gathering together night after night. As the revival ended, he noted something else. Not everyone who was stirred by the Spirit became kind and forgiving. Those who were swayed more by fleshly experiences than faith became troublesome people. They clustered together and in short order threw Edwards out of the church.

I. FLESH TRUSTS IN EXPERIENCES AND FEELINGS; FAITH TRUSTS IN WHAT GOD HAS WRITTEN

Flesh is much easier to connect with than faith. All it takes to feel good in the Lord is an inspiring service that

stirs the soul. Often church services lend themselves to people getting fired up for Jesus. We like to think those things are the Holy Spirit moving among us. If they encourage Christians to test their faith by their feelings, we mislead the people. Faith remains unmoved by the ups and downs of the flesh, even in church services.

Faith is not the absence of feeling but the recognition that feeling is not faith. We do not "feel" saved. We have faith in the words of Jesus. First comes faith, followed by feeling. Faith does not go up and down. Faith is not happy and sad, encouraged and discouraged. It is not swayed by diet, sickness, drugs, alcohol, and people.

ILLUS. A famous singer and actor wrote about his first years as a Christian. He is a very emotional person and allowed his faith to be controlled by his feelings. When things went good on the stage and he was up emotionally, his faith soared. When he had troubles or a bad night and felt bad, his faith collapsed. One day God helped him to see that he had to move feelings behind faith. Then his spiritual life began to stabilize.

Faith builds on truth that does not change or shift.

ILLUS. At the general assembly of the Church of the Nazarene in 1997, General Superintendent Jim Diehl said, "As we have gathered here in San Antonio from around the world, we will be discussing many things, but there are some things we will not be discussing. We will not be discussing moral questions. We will not be discussing whether we will continue to preach and teach holiness. We will not be discussing whether we will be ordaining homosexuals. We will not be discussing whether the Bible is true. We will not be discussing whether there are more ways to heaven than through Jesus Christ. Those issues are not on the table for discussion."

God does not want to remove feelings from our faith. He wants our faith to move our feelings. He wants faith to guide the flesh, not flesh to guide faith. Paul wants us to eat and drink according to our faith, not to build our faith on what we eat or drink. Salvation by faith leads to joy and peace in the flesh. Joy and peace in the flesh do not establish faith.

II. FLESH TRUSTS IN WHAT CAN BE SEEN; FAITH TRUSTS IN WHAT CANNOT BE SEEN

"Seeing is believing," they used to say. No more. What is seen may not be real at all. Television has ended that. Most of what we see on television has been changed. What we see is not what was there. Interviews are chopped up, rearranged, and filmed in front of a fake setting that is often added later and can be changed. We live in an artificial world.

I stayed in a hotel that overlooked another hotel with red tile painted on plywood that from the street looked real. I bought a CD that sounded like a full orchestra. In fact, all the sounds came from keyboards. Even musicians cannot easily tell the difference.

ILLUS. One day I was walking through one of the best antique stores in Denver. The owner is known as one of the most knowledgeable in the business. I noticed a little buggy that is rare and marveled to her that she had one. Then I saw the price. What should have been a \$2,000 to

\$3,000 buggy was under \$50.

I asked her how that could be. She told me it was a copy. I could not believe it. Nor could she. She confessed to me that she had bought it at a great price, thinking it was an original, only later to discover it was a copy.

The Getty museum in Los Angeles recently announced that a large number of its collection were fakes. A lot of men in America wear fake Rolex watches and a lot of people listen to music that is not the real thing.

Our salvation is not built upon something fake. Jesus Christ is real. Jesus Christ died for our sins. Jesus Christ offers us eternal life. Yet we cannot see Him. We cannot touch Him. We have no authentic pictures of Him, no recordings of His voice. Yet we are called to believe on Him. As more and more of our world that can be seen has become fake, the simple call to believe on Him whom we have not seen becomes more and more important.

III. FLESH TRUSTS IN THE EVER-CHANGING; FAITH TRUSTS IN THE UNCHANGING

How much junk do you own that was up-to-date when you bought it but is now worthless? How many eight-track tapes and tape players do you own? How many record players are stuffed in your closets? How many cassette tapes, 78 rpm records? No generation has experienced more change than we have. Change hits us daily.

ILLUS. A man who traveled across central Africa told about riding in a truck carrying clothes to isolated villages. The driver said the huge baled bundles of clothes were "dead man" clothes. The visitor asked why he called them that.

The driver explained that the only time there are any clothes available is after someone dies. Before the person is buried, the clothes are removed and sold or given to someone who has no clothes. The driver could not imagine a place where people tossed out clothes because they were out of style.

IV. FLESH TRUSTS IN WHAT IS HAPPENING; FAITH TRUSTS IN WHAT WILL HAPPEN

This kind of trust is spiritual pulse-taking. We all do it some. When nothing appears to be happening, we begin to take our spiritual pulse.

ILLUS. Earl Lee had a neighbor in Pasadena, California, who planted roses for the first time. Nothing was happening to them, so he dug them up to look at the roots. Sure enough there was growth on the roots but not on the stems. He replanted them and still nothing hap-

pened so he dug them up again. Eventually he killed all his rosebushes by constantly checking to see if they were growing.

Spiritual pulse-taking does not encourage spiritual growth. It is more likely to hinder it. If your spiritual life has been up and down, up and down, it's time for you to move your life on to the sure word of Jesus. It's time to move from feelings to faith. You can, with God's help, place your confidence in the promises of God and not in the stirrings of your flesh.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
 - Reflect on why you are a believer.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture Reading.....Ps. 121
Heb. 11:1-6
- Choruses....."What a Mighty God We Serve"
"He's Able"
"Celebrate the Coming"
"Seek Ye First"
"Open Our Eyes, Lord"
- Hymns....."How Firm a Foundation"
"The Solid Rock"
- Drama....."My New Coat Cost Seventy-two Dollars"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon....."Things to Remove from Your Life—
Trust in the Flesh"
- Closing Chorus....."Open Our Eyes, Lord"
- Benediction.....Jude 24-25

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on Jesus Christ.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target helps the congregation to remove, with God's help, dependence on emotions/feelings and to build on faith in the word of Jesus Christ.

It is essential that the pastor has a firm faith.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, may we stand in Your presence with great confidence as we worship You today."

Things to Remove from Your Life

Doubt

by Jim Christy

James 1:2-8

Nov. 1, 1998

"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6).

ILLUS. A few years ago in Vail, Colorado, the cables on a gondola carrying skiers up the mountain snapped, sending dozens of people flying into the air before crash-landing in the snow. Many of those skiers were killed or injured. The cables were repaired, inspected, and declared safe. The gondola has run safely since then.

I had the opportunity to ride with my young sons on that gondola one summer and decided against it. I looked at the cables. They looked fine, but there remained in the back of my mind the nagging memory of that accident. Of course, I have to admit I have no great desire to ride any kind of ski lifts.

We live most of our lives trusting things and people and systems. Every time you drive down a road, you are trusting the other drivers to stay out of your path. Every time you eat in a restaurant, you are trusting those who prepared the food to prepare safe, clean food. We trust engineers to know what they are designing, contractors to know what they are building, companies to sell what they say they are selling. We trust the utility companies to keep the water, gas, and electricity flowing.

We trust the laws of physics to work. The apple falls to the ground, not into the clouds. The winds move from west to east in our hemisphere. Oxygen is picked up in our lungs by our blood and carried throughout our bodies. Fire burns organic materials.

We trust people to be what they claim to be, what they promise to do. We entrust our lives, our money, our families to others. We trust these things. We can trust God even more.

One of Jesus' disciples, Thomas, had the nickname "Doubter," because he was so skeptical of everything and everyone. There are many Thomases living today—and all of us have times when we become a "Thomas," a "doubter." Yet God summons us to quit being doubters. We are called not to doubt when everything says to doubt, when nothing seems to have happened. Doubting God leads to spiritual problems.

I. DOUBT IS LIKE A WAVE IN THE SEA, ALWAYS CONTROLLED BY WHOEVER COMES ALONG OR WHATEVER WIND BLOWS (V. 6)

One of the most painful realizations of life is that we have to trust someone. When we do not trust God, we set ourselves up to trust a whole lot of foolish people. Money is a good example of how spiritual doubt works. Our nation is filled with stubborn folk who insist they know how to spend money and are constantly getting sucked into foolish schemes.

II. DOUBT SHUTS THE DOOR ON RECEIVING WISDOM AND DIRECTION FROM GOD (V. 7)

The Bible takes us in a different direction here. It points out the consequences of doubt. Doubt shuts the door on good things.

ILLUS. I took my family to eat at a restaurant on the top of a 700-foot tower. We rode to the top in an elevator. The day we were there, elevator maintenance men were around. The elevator travels on the outside of the tower with a glass wall looking out over the land. One lady in the elevator went into hysterics, crying with fear. She doubted the safety of the tower and the elevator. All of us returned safely to the sidewalks below.

Fear and doubt prevent us from having many good things happen in our lives. Doubt that God *can* help us, doubt that God *cares enough* to help, doubt that God *will* help us, shuts many wonderful things out of our lives.

III. DOUBT LEADS TO A SPIRITUAL CONDITION CALLED DOUBLE-MINDEDNESS (V. 7)

Once more the Bible points out a serious consequence of doubting God, double-mindedness. It is getting on a horse and riding off in all directions, or coming to a fork in the road and taking both forks. It is being tossed about like a toy boat on a windy lake. First double-mindedness goes this way; then it goes that way. Today you think and believe one thing. Tomorrow you will think something different.

ILLUS. Bob Dylan is known for his experiments in many religions. He has tried many religions, including evangelical Christianity. He tried out each one on his terms. He sampled the religions but never fully embraced them. His life has tossed from one thing to another. When we don't allow God to guide our lives, we have no choice but to bounce from one thing to another.

IV. TRUSTING GOD TO GIVE YOU WISDOM OPENS DOORS TO THE FUTURE

A. Trust brings great joy (v. 2).

God's wisdom leads to joy, great joy. Seek, learn, and follow the wisdom of God, and it will bring joy to you. Here are some things that bring joy to a Christian's heart.

1. Someone becomes a Christian.
2. A Christian shows real changes to better things in his or her life.
3. I sort out what is important from what is not important.
4. I respond to evil with good.

5. I help someone.

6. I overcome temptation through Christ.

ILLUS. A man worked as a waiter in a lodge halfway up a mountain that was used as a resting place for groups of climbers before they made the final ascent. Climbers would arrive at the lodge, weary from the climb. After a few minutes, the guide would call them to get ready for the final climb. Nearly every time the waiter would watch as two or three of the climbers would decide to remain in the lodge while the others went up the mountain.

After the group was gone, those remaining would laugh and relax. They seemed to be content. After a while one of them would look out the window and mention that the climbers had made it to the top. Little by little the lodge would grow quiet. By the time the climbers burst into the lodge on their way down, those waiting were sullen. Their joy had vanished while those returning expressed joy that would last the rest of their lives.

B. Trust brings perseverance or the ability to hang in when things get tough (v. 3).

Jesus called John the Baptist the greatest of all the prophets. He had a large following. When Jesus came, John lost nearly everyone. Yet not once did he give up.

C. Trust leads to maturity and completeness (v. 4).

People whom we most admire are those who have gone through the fire and remained strong. We admire those people who let God guide them, giving them wisdom in facing each day and each situation.

ILLUS. In the early years of aviation, pilots flew planes with no instruments. They were never sure how fast they were traveling, in what direction they were going, or how high they were flying. Stories of these early pilots are filled with a strange phenomena that they experienced when flying through clouds. Once a pilot flies into clouds, it is no longer possible to see the ground, the sun, or another plane. The pilot cannot tell in what direction the plane is going. Many pilots experienced the shock of coming out of a cloud headed straight toward the ground. Some would exit a cloud headed back the way they had entered the cloud. Some pilots came out of clouds flying upside down. Others were sideways. All pilots had to find out the direction they were headed when they came out of the clouds and to make quick corrections.

After a while, word got around that if you did not want to crash into the ground, keep the engine revved up. Except, if the engine was too revved up, the plane would make a loop and then head at great speed right into the ground.

One day a pilot put in his plane what is called a gyroscope. This spinning contraption never changed directions. Turn it upside down and it would still point up. Turn it sideways and it would still point up. Turn it to the right and it

would still point up. For the first time, the pilot could fly through a cloud and know in which direction the aircraft was moving. Like all new things, many pilots refused to put this silly spinning thing in their planes. Many pilots continued to crash nose first into the ground. Yet pilots continued to think they could get through the clouds without one.

Today those gyroscopes have been replaced with complicated signals. No pilot worthy of flying would consider going into a cloud without help.

Christians are amazingly stubborn about sensing the need for God's help and believing that God will help. We can be a people of "doubters." If you stop doubting and begin believing, God will help you succeed.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Congregation Meditation for Worship

List the things about God and your faith of which you are sure.

Opening Prayer

Scripture Reading.....Ps. 100

Rom. 4:18-25

Choruses....."We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"

"He's Able"

"Celebrate the Coming"

"In Moments like These"

"Open Our Eyes, Lord"

Hymns "How Great Thou Art"

"A Mighty Fortress"

Drama "Maybe Yes, Maybe No"

Worship with Tithes and Offerings

Pastoral Prayer

Sermon "Things to Remove from Your Life—Doubt"

Closing Chorus..... "Open Our Eyes, Lord"

Benediction Num. 6:24-26

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the daily struggle to have faith in God, when doubt so easily creeps in.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target calls the congregation not to allow the temptation to doubt to get a foothold in their lives.

It is essential that the pastor preach personal faith, not his or her doubts.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, remove our doubts about You and what You can do as You strengthen our faith."

Things to Remove from Your Life— the Practice of Sin

by Jim Christy

1 John 1:6—2:1

Nov. 8, 1998

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin" (1 John 2:1).

INTRO

Mike Tyson bit a half inch out of Evander Holyfield's ear. This may be the perfect picture of what is going on in our world today. We are being pulled, manipulated, used, pushed into corners of private desperation, and we don't know what to do. Like Tyson, we can snap, tearing apart those around us, chewing them up and spitting them out, bringing on yet more problems. Many, many people live on the edge. The line that keeps them civil is thin. On this thin line sin pushes us one way or the other.

ILLUS. Tyson grew up in Brooklyn, one of many children. He never knew his father. His mother had little time for him. At the age of 6, he used a razor to slice open an older brother's arm while he was sleeping. At the age of 10, Tyson delighted in stealing women's purses and robbing men at gunpoint of all their clothes.

After being jailed over a dozen times, he was sent to reform school where a boxing trainer adopted him and began teaching him how to put fear and terror in others, while taking pleasure in hurting others. He was schooled in hate, finding joy in delivering blows to the heart, to the kidneys, to the liver, to the ears. In prison, Tyson was said to have reformed, but his reformation had no repentance, no change, no forgiveness.

On the night of his fight with Holyfield, Tyson snapped. He says, when he realized he was about to lose and be humiliated before all the world, he took two bites out of his opponent's ear. He said he did it for his children.

When things do not go well, it's easy to go on the attack, trying to destroy others. That attack is sin. Sin destroys. The habit of sin must be removed from our hearts. We cannot excuse it by saying everyone does it. Or that it comes naturally. Sin is awful. It is deadly. It takes everything good and ruins it. Everything! The whole reason Jesus came to the earth was to destroy

the works of the devil, which includes sin or rebellion against God.

I. SIN DESTROYS

A. Sin destroys our relationship with God (1 John 1:6).

The idea that we can be a partner with the devil and his ways and have God, too, is absurd. Sin destroys any relationship with God. Sin will do that to anyone. Sin will do that to you if it is not brought under control.

B. Sin destroys our relationship with one another (1 John 1:7).

Tyson said there is no one, absolutely no one, he can trust. Everyone is after his money, his fame, his power. The only ones he could trust were his tigers and lions that he keeps at his mansion in Ohio. He is alone. Sin has done that to him. Sin will do that to anyone. Sin will destroy your relationships if it is not brought under control.

C. Sin destroys our sense of self-worth (1 John 1:10).

Tyson's idol is Sonny Liston. Liston was once the heavyweight champion of the world. But his life fell apart. In 1971, his body was found with a needle stuck into a vein in his arm. He turned to drugs trying to escape from himself.

Sin destroys the person from the inside out. Sin will do that to anyone. Sin destroys any dignity you have if it is not brought under control.

II. SIN IS REAL

A. Sin is universal (1 John 1:8).

It is so easy to look at someone like Tyson and say, "I would never do that." You are not likely to ever have a situation like this, but you could have something of a similar nature.

One woman was so angry at her ex-husband that one day when she saw him and his new wife lying on the beach of a lake in Iowa, she drove over their legs.

A few years ago, the son of a Nazarene minister was shot and killed in this town by an angry man.

The Bible is clear—it says that all—everyone—all have sinned and come short of the glory of God! There is no one, not one, who has not sinned. Jesus alone, of all who have lived on this earth, is without sin. There has been no other. There will be no other.

Look at the wars that have been fought because of sin. Look at the homes that have been torn apart because of sin. Look at the number of police we must have, the number of prison cells, the number of vaults, the number of security systems, the amount of insurance because of sin.

Go to the most remote island. If there is one person there, you will find sin. Sin is found wherever there are astronauts in space vessels, sailors in submarines, CEOs in paneled offices, politicians in limousines, teachers in classrooms, workers in front of computer screens, worshippers in church. Sin is the companion of all earthlings.

B. Sin is threefold.

It is inherited; it is habitual; it is unintentional (1 John 1:8, 9, 10).

1. Sin is inherited.

Sin is a part of our nature. We are born *in* sin. We are born *into* sin. We are born *to* sin. We are born with a lean-

ing toward sin. It is our first nature. Evolutionists call it "animal drag." They know it's there and try to explain it as the animal still in us. Somehow, they tell us, in a few thousand more generations, the animal part will evolve out.

The Bible says the opposite. It says sin will be a part of everyone born into the human race as long as people are born because sin is real, not "animal drag."

2. Sin is habitual.

Sin that begins in our heart has a nasty way of becoming a habit in our actions. We lie and get away with it.

One of the most troublesome things that happens to teens is the awareness that they can lie to parents, to teachers, and to bosses and get away with it. Or they can steal from Mom's purse or Dad's billfold and not get caught. Later they learn more ways.

Tyson learned to do many evil things, and every time he escaped with a small price to pay—except what it has done to him. The great shock of life is how easy it is to sin and get away with it or, at least, look like you got away with it.

Once the habit is well-entrenched, it becomes a normal part of life.

3. Sin is unintentional.

In many places, the Bible speaks to this sin. In the Old Testament, it gives guidance to the person who unintentionally kills another. Killing is still killing, no matter how it happens. Yet there is a big difference between intentional and unintentional killing. No Christian must ever let unintentional sins be ignored once we know about them. We must confess them and ask for forgiveness immediately.

C. Sin can be handled (1 John 2:3-6).

1. All sin needs to be recognized for what it is.

It sounds simple to recognize sin in ourselves, but that is not true. It is amazing how difficult it is for us to admit we have sinned. Sin is not a trite little nothing.

Sin is so awful that it sent Jesus to the Cross. Sin is deadly. It is nothing to be proud of, nothing to keep around, certainly nothing to cover, to deny, to pretend does not exist. Of all people, Christians are the ones who most grieve over their sins. We are ashamed of our sins. As David the king said, his sins were always before him, bringing anguish to his heart. We must see and grieve over our sin.

2. Sin must be confessed.

We must not let sin remain our secret. We must confess it to God. God knows all about your sin. He does not have to be informed about your sin; you need to confess it. Confession is not for God; it's for you.

3. Sin must be turned from.

We must turn from it. Confession without turning from sin is not confession. It is only acknowledgment of sin.

4. Sin needs forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

Up to now, we have considered the things we must do to remove the habit of sin from our lives. All things mentioned up until now will not be enough. You can understand the awfulness of sin, you can see your own sin, and confess it to God—but that is not enough. God must do something for you. He must forgive. Forgiveness is more than an acknowledgement of your confession. Forgive-

ness includes God's tremendous power. God forgives with transforming power. This is the mystery of the gospel. When God forgives, He frees us from our sin. It is like a man pardoned and released from prison.

5. Sin needs cleansing (1 John 1:9).

Our scripture adds one more thing. It speaks of cleansing. If we confess, He will forgive and then He will cleanse. Remember that I said, "Sin is powerfully addictive." Any of you who have ever gone through a treatment program for an addiction know that once you are through the addiction and truly complete the cure, you must never forget that you are still able to return to your addiction in only one act. It only takes one drink for an alcoholic to return to the habit, only one cigarette to return to smoking, only one trip to get hooked once more on drugs, only one eating binge to go off your diet. It takes only one return to an intentional sin of the past to move back into the habit of sinning. That is why God's cleansing is so important. God cleanses our hearts so that we do not have in our system the desire for sin.

Sin is an awful thing, a powerful force that will destroy everything and everyone it touches. The whole Bible is God's answer to sin.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- List the things you have done this week that are not good and that you would like to change.
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture Reading.....Ps. 1
1 Pet. 1:18-23
- Choruses "We Bring the Sacrifice"
"Holy, Holy, Lord Almighty"
"Glorify Thy Name"
"In Moments like This"
"Seek Ye First"
- Hymns "Cleanse Me"
"Whiter than Snow"
- Drama "It's OK, I'm Only Human"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon..... "Things to Remove from Your Life
—the Practice of Sin"
- Closing Chorus "Seek Ye First"
- Benediction Num. 6:24-26

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the need for the people to let God help them stop the practice of sin.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target calls the congregation not to allow the habit of sin to get established.

It is essential that the pastor understand the danger of habits of sin.

What It Means to Be a Christian: Being Saved or Born Again

by Jim Christy

Luke 1:67-69

Nov. 15, 1998

"Praise be to the Lord . . . because he has come and he has redeemed his people" (Luke 1:68).

INTRO

In Jerusalem Zechariah served in the Temple for one month. Usually he lived with his wife in the hill country several days' journey from Jerusalem. Both he and his wife, Elizabeth, were old and had no children. Both were devout believers in the living God and served Him in fear and holiness every day. During this month's service in Jerusalem, Zechariah was chosen through random drawing to carry incense, representing the prayers of the people, before the altar.

While he was alone offering up prayers and incense, the angel Gabriel appeared before him and told him he and Elizabeth would have a son whom they would name John. John the Baptist is how we would know him. This child of their old age would be the forerunner of the Promised One whom we know as Jesus Christ. John would prepare the nation for the coming of Jesus. When John was born, Zechariah sang this song of four transformations that the Christ would offer.

I. ZECHARIAH SANG OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him" (Luke 1:76).

John would prepare the people to have a heart transformation. God never does things without careful preparation. He prepares everyone before He does anything with them. God wants us prepared to come before Him so that we can understand what it means to come to Him. Your life is filled with little things that God has been doing to prepare you to receive the kingdom of heaven. You may have had little things happen like close calls, near-death experiences, financial troubles, witnessing a tragedy, or a wonderful thing like a sunrise, a brilliant moon, a falling star, the birth of a child, a scientific wonder.

Sometimes God prepares you with a song or with an overheard conversation. All these things, good and evil,

God uses to point us to himself, to let us know He is near. When God comes to you for the first time, it is essential that you know He has come. God is always preparing your heart, always preparing you so you can come before Him as a creature, seeking His help and His guidance.

ILLUS. A young man dreamed of doing great things in his life. Instead, he found himself living in the middle of a slum where there seemed no way out. For over two years he worked as a street sweeper, collecting a few coins to live on, sleeping in the streets, finding food wherever he could. He saw and experienced suffering firsthand.

One evening he entered a rescue mission to escape the cold. He had no idea what the mission was. As he sat there, he heard someone talk about how Jesus had suffered. He understood that suffering. Years later he realized that his two years living in the slums were times when God was preparing his heart so he could understand the price Jesus paid for him, so he could understand how great was God's love.

God is always preparing for His coming among us. He is preparing your heart for what He has next to say to you. The Bible tells us that no one comes to God the Father unless that person is drawn by God himself. The first thing God does in your personal salvation is to begin preparing you. Those unusual things that happen in your life are not accidents. They are God's activities in your life preparing you to hear Him speak to you.

II. ZECHARIAH SANG OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE MIND

You (John the Baptist) will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, "to give his people the knowledge of salvation" (Luke 1:77). A new attitude toward God must be directed by new ways of thinking based on knowledge of salvation.

Not only must the heart be prepared, so must the mind. You must have knowledge of what salvation means. This is a transformation of your mind.

If you could ask God for anything and knew He would grant it to you, much as a fictional genie grants three wishes, what would you ask of Him? Jacob asked for material things like money or land or jewels. King Solomon asked for wisdom. Moses asked for a grand speaking voice. Paul asked that a physical problem be removed.

All these requests were made because people do not know what God provides. They have the idea that He is a sort of order blank for all our physical needs. Hang around God very long and you will discover this basic truth about Him: God does not often provide to those who ask Him anything that can be provided by any other. God certainly will not give to us what we can get for ourselves.

ILLUS. Dr. Charles Mayo wanted to help the sick, so he learned what it took to help them. He discovered how to remove an infected appendix and repair a cleft palate.

You may want to be good, to be kind, to be generous, to be forgiving. To do those things, you need to know what God offers.

III. ZECHARIAH SANG OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF MORALS

You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for Him, to give His people the knowledge of salvation, "through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77).

This is a transformation of actions, a correction in morals. What used to be all right, now is sin and needs to be forgiven.

Gerber's motto used to be: "Babies are our business. Our only business." Salvation through the forgiveness of sins is God's business. His only business. Everything else that God does with us and for us leads to this one. He wants to forgive our sins.

Jesus came to the earth in human form for one purpose. He came to do the work God sent Him to do in order to bring salvation through the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus did not come to the earth to heal our bodies, though He can do that. He did not come to the earth to make us rich, though He can do that. He did not come to bring happiness, though He can do that. Jesus came to bring salvation through the forgiveness of our sins.

ILLUS. One day Jesus was sitting in a house with some religious leaders. Four men tore a hole in the roof to let a lame man down to Jesus. Jesus said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven."

The religious leaders murmured to themselves that Jesus had the nerve to forgive, for only God can forgive. They were right—only God can forgive. They were wrong in not recognizing that Jesus was God.

Jesus brings salvation through the forgiveness of sins. "Forgiveness" is a power-filled word. It does not mean something as trite as two children fighting and one hits the other in the face and makes him cry and you, as a good parent, tell the one who hit the one now screaming loud enough for the neighbors two blocks away to hear, that he is sorry. The hitting son says to the hit son, "I'm sorry."

The hit son says, "OK."

An hour later you go through the same ritual once more. This is not how Jesus does it.

Forgiveness brings with it transformation of actions. You don't just keep on hitting and asking for forgiveness. Jesus grants forgiveness and transformation or freedom from the sins. That's what the religious leaders meant when they said only God can really forgive sins because only God can forgive with power to transform. Salvation through the forgiveness of your sins means you are given the inner power to change.

IV. ZECHARIAH SANG OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

"To guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:79).

Salvation never really takes hold of your life until it begins to change your relationships. How you treat others is the acid test of forgiveness because God's forgiveness leads to transformation. God transforms your relationships. Forgiveness is instant. In the twinkling of an eye, God forgives. Transformation takes a lifetime.

Zechariah describes this transformation in relationships as a path. You walk down the path. The path leads to

peace. God shows you the path. That is *His* part. Walking down that path is *your* part. Sometimes the path is to say you are sorry. Sometimes the path is to forgive. Sometimes the path is to forget. Sometimes the path is to give or to receive.

When Jesus was born, the angels sang of peace. Peace remains the most elusive dream of the entire world. In fact, it is generally assumed that wherever there is peace, someone has to always give in. In a marriage where peace reigns, both partners have learned to give in on different things or one gives in all the time. In a nation of peace, either one group controls or tension is always just below the surface.

What does it mean to be saved or born again? Zechariah realized what it meant. It meant transformation: transformation of the heart, transformation of the mind, transformation of morals, transformation of relationships.

Speaking to Nicodemus one night in Jerusalem, Jesus told him that if he wanted salvation, he would have to be "born again." Nicodemus laughed at the idea of crawling back into his mother's womb and coming out again. Jesus told him the being "born again" of which He was speaking was the new birth by the Holy Spirit that was a transformation, a change into a new person.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Congregation Meditation for Worship	
Reflect on this question: "Why will I go to heaven?"	
Opening Prayer	
Scripture Reading	Isa. 40:1-11 John 3:1-9
Choruses	"We Bring the Sacrifice" "Holy, Holy, Lord Almighty" "Glorify Thy Name" "In Moments like These" "Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee"
Hymns	"Heaven Came Down" "Because He Lives"
Drama	"The Proposal"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Pastoral Prayer	
Sermon	"What It Means to Be a Christian —Being Saved or Born Again"
Closing Chorus	"Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee"
Benediction	Num. 6:24-26

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the assurance of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target calls the unsaved to get saved.

It is essential that the pastor feels in his or her heart that everyone must receive the new life in Christ to be a Christian and to enter heaven.

What It Means to Be a Christian: Growing in Grace

by Jim Christy

Col. 3:12-17

Nov. 22, 1998

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (Col. 3:12-14).

Last Sunday I spoke about what it means to be saved or born again. In a nutshell, to be saved or born again means to be transformed in your heart, mind, and daily life through the power of the gospel as Jesus comes into your life. Being saved or born again happens in the moment when you confess with all your heart that Jesus Christ is Lord of your life. God forgives you. One minute you are unforgiven. The next you are forgiven and something akin to a huge load is lifted off your shoulders. You are free from the chains of sin that mocked you. You have come to God personally and have experienced His powerful, forgiving presence.

Like all of life's good experiences, the first is the best emotionally. We speak of the delight and energy of the new Christian. Like all of life's good experiences, time erodes its newness. To have more first-time experiences, you push the edges for new experiences.

A car is an example. The first time you drive alone is quite an experience. The first time you put gasoline in your own car or the first time you wash the windshield is exciting. After a while the car gets dirty or you start noticing its flaws. It loses its first-time excitement. If you want to have a new fun experience with your car, you have to drive it faster, take more risks, or get a sound system. I know a lot of guys who own pickup trucks who are constantly adding things. It is amazing how many things can be added to a pickup to get a first-time experience.

We humans do not delight in the same thing day after day. It must change, and the change must be an improvement or we grow tired of the experience. We complain most about doing the same thing over and over again. Even the most unadventurous people get bored with sameness.

Nothing is more deadly to a marriage than routine. No

worker becomes more worthless than the one who does the same thing over and over again. People who travel for business hate having the same kind of rooms to sleep in and the same kind of food to eat no matter where they are. We place high value on the unusual, the unique, the different.

Christians face the same problem. That moment we were born again was a glorious moment. Most of us Christians point to it as the greatest day of our lives. But that moment does not always carry us along with fresh excitement. Faster than it seems possible, getting saved loses its initial impact.

Paul understood that Christians needed new, fresh, different experiences with Jesus Christ to keep the flame burning and the life filled with commitment. Many places in his writings, Paul points out the daily freshness and newness in Christ.

In today's scripture, Paul gives six things that will keep your experience with Christ fresh and new. The list may surprise you because it goes the opposite direction from what you might think it should go. The world's most common way to add freshness to life is to do something very selfish. Paul writes that true newness comes from something quite different. Let's look at these six things that you can do to keep your spiritual life in Christ as special today as it was the first day Jesus came into your heart.

I. THE FIRST ASPECT THAT HELPS US TO GROW IN GRACE AND TO MAKE EACH DAY AS A CHRISTIAN FRESH AND NEW IS COMPASSION

"Compassion" means the capacity to see people and situations in light of others' needs and to act accordingly.

Think of how many people there are in this world around you. In your lifetime, you will never run out of people. Each day will bring new people into your life. Each new person adds a new dimension to your life. The most fulfilled people have learned to see life through the eyes of others.

II. THE SECOND THING THAT HELPS US TO GROW IN GRACE AND TO MAKE EACH DAY AS A CHRISTIAN FRESH AND NEW IS KINDNESS

Kindness is the act of treating everyone with respect. Everyone. Kindness must not be limited to our chosen few. It must not be given only to those who treat us kindly.

ILLUS. I was headed into a grocery store in a rush. A lady was coming from the other way in an obvious rush also. I saw that I was going to arrive at the door about three seconds before she did. I saw her speed up and then slow down when she realized I would get there first. Her frustration and anger were obvious. Suddenly I stopped and let her enter first. It confused her and she mumbled a "Thank you." Kindness always changes things in new and fresh ways.

III. THE THIRD ITEM THAT HELPS US TO GROW IN GRACE AND TO MAKE EACH DAY AS A CHRISTIAN FRESH AND NEW IS HUMILITY

Humility is the willingness to see yourself as God sees you.

God made you. He likes what He made. Humility is not putting yourself down, discrediting what you think, what you desire. God placed those things in you for a purpose.

ILLUS. In an interview, Michael Jordan acknowledged he was probably the greatest basketball player of all time, that he was very rich, and that he was not a good baseball player. He has learned to accept what God has given him.

Humility sees both strengths and weaknesses without allowing either to get out of focus. Once you accept who you are in Christ, what you can and cannot do, the more refreshing daily life becomes for you and the people around you.

IV. THE FOURTH THING THAT HELPS US TO GROW IN GRACE AND TO MAKE EACH DAY AS A CHRISTIAN FRESH AND NEW IS GENTLENESS

“Gentleness” means to avoid using your strength or powers to harm someone weaker than you. You cannot be gentle unless you are strong.

V. THE FIFTH THING THAT HELPS US TO GROW IN GRACE AND TO MAKE EACH DAY AS A CHRISTIAN FRESH AND NEW IS PATIENCE

Patience is the self-discipline to hang in there until the job is done.

ILLUS. Years ago I took the Dale Carnegie course. I don't remember much of it, however I do remember a little saying. We spent one entire session repeating it over and over again. The saying was this: “There are men who are in the ranks who are going to stay in the ranks. Why? I'll tell you why. They don't have the ability to get the job done.”

How many things have you left undone? Some things aren't worth your time and effort. They need to be abandoned. What about things you feel God wants you to do? There is nothing quite like finishing something that has taken much patience to complete. That moment is as fresh as any.

VI. THE SIXTH THING THAT HELPS US TO GROW IN GRACE AND TO MAKE EACH DAY AS A CHRISTIAN FRESH AND NEW IS A FORGIVING SPIRIT

A “forgiving spirit” means to stop placing blame on others. When we forgive, all things become new for us, just as when we were first forgiven by Jesus. God forgives us to free us. We forgive to free ourselves, not to free the other person. In our moment of forgiving another we let the forgiveness of Jesus flow over us once more. That's why Jesus included in the Lord's prayer, “Forgive us . . . as we also have forgiven.”

Jesus showed us from the Cross that there is no action taken against us or against someone we love that cannot be forgiven. The great power of the gospel working in us is revealed by our willingness to forgive others. No act brings a new day like the act of forgiving.

Each of these six areas of growth for you as a Christian has unending potential. No one of these is completely

practiced by any one of us in our lifetime. They are like knowledge—the more you develop them, the more aware you become of how little of these qualities you possess.

These six character qualities must constantly be nourished or they will wither, dry up, and blow away.

Also, these six quality characteristics of a Christian must be kept in balance. To have one and not the other five distorts the Christian life. Paul gives us the way to hold all six qualities in balance. That occurs through love: love of God, love of others, love of myself.

As with everything in the Christian life, these graces cannot occur through your own power. They must be molded and made by the power of Jesus Christ at work in you.

There's Paul's list. Six areas to grow in grace that together can make every day a new day, a fresh day, a first-time experience day. Humility, compassion, forgiveness, patience, kindness, and gentleness. Let God help you build them into your heart and life.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- Reflect on this question: What spiritual truth have I incorporated into my life this last week?
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture Reading.....1 Sam. 3:10-21
Gal. 3:26—4:7
- Choruses“We Bring the Sacrifice”
“Holy, Holy, Lord Almighty”
“Glorify Thy Name”
“Open Our Eyes”
“Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee”
- Hymns.....“Holy, Holy, Holy”
“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow”
- Drama.....“Fixing the Old Klunker”
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon“What It Means to Be a Christian
—Growing in Grace”
- Closing Chorus“Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee”
- BenedictionNum. 6:24-26

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the leadership of God in our minds and hearts.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target is calling the saved to grow in grace. It is essential that the pastor is growing in the grace and nurture of Jesus.

OPENING PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, lead us into all truth. We know You are the truth. May we know You better each day.”

What It Means to Be a Christian: Conviction and Confrontation

by Jim Christy

Rom. 7:15-25

Nov. 29, 1998

"For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do"
(Rom. 7:15).

"When I want to do good, evil is right there with me" (Rom. 7:21).

INTRO

Just as certain things happen in life that are predictable, so certain things happen in the Christian life that are predictable. For instance, in growing up, a child in a good environment will attach to parents. When a mother or a father holds his or her baby, they attach. This is normal, natural, and predictable.

In your new life in Christ, some things are normal, natural, and predictable. One important thing that happens as you mature in Christ is conviction with confrontation. It comes that moment when you are convicted of wrongdoing and are confronted with what you are going to do about it. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. In today's scripture the apostle Paul is writing to the church in Rome about this very issue.

I. PAUL POINTS OUT THAT A CHRISTIAN CHOOSES TO DO GOOD

"When I want to do good" (Rom. 7:21). Wanting to do good and following Jesus are the same tune. Can you imagine someone claiming to be a Christian and bragging that he or she intends to do evil? That is impossible. Christians are deeply committed to doing good to all people who touch our lives.

ILLUS. A reporter was invited to go to North Korea to see what was happening. He saw orphanages caring for children abandoned by parents who died of starvation outside its gates. He walked through hospitals that had no medical supplies. He drove through wide streets that had few vehicles. Everywhere he went through the town with his government chaperons, he encountered middle-

aged, white-haired, thin men from the West who were passing out food, clothes, and medical care. The guides tried to avoid them, but they were everywhere. They were men from Christian organizations that cared about the starving people in North Korea. They were doing good to those in need.

II. PAUL NOTES THAT OFTEN A CHRISTIAN CHOOSES TO DO GOOD AND ENDS UP DOING EVIL

"Evil is right there with me" (Rom. 7:21). "For I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (vv. 18-19).

We do not have the strength within ourselves to do the good we choose to do. Self-planned good rarely does much good.

ILLUS. In the 1970s, north central Africa was suffering what North Korea is suffering today. Pop singers put together what they called Aid Africa. Millions and millions of dollars were raised for food, medical supplies, and equipment to transport charitable aid.

About one year after the concert, one singer made a trip to the area to see how the effort had helped. When he arrived in the countries, he was shocked by what he saw. Much of the food was sitting on the docks, rotting and being consumed by rats. He traveled into the countryside and saw truck after truck that had been purchased to transport the food, rusting along the road, abandoned where it had run out of gas. The singer came home so bothered he determined never to help in another cause.

Many Christians intend to do good but end up doing evil. Evil or wrong actions quickly become habits.

III. PAUL SHOWS US IS THAT A CHRISTIAN WHO CHOOSES TO DO GOOD AND ENDS UP DOING EVIL IS ASHAMED

"What a wretched man I am!" (Rom. 7:24). Paul speaks of the awareness of spiritual failure. Nothing makes a Christian feel worse than to begin something good that turns out evil.

IV. PAUL, THROUGH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, REALIZES THAT A CHRISTIAN WHO CHOOSES TO DO GOOD AND ENDS UP DOING EVIL NEEDS TO BE DELIVERED

"Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

These little outbursts of doing evil need to be contained. They destroy relationships, trust, and peace.

When I was growing up we referred to people who have outbursts that it was like walking on eggs around them. One false step and they broke up around you, creating a mess. Paul knew the only way Christians could cease doing evil when they wanted to do good was for them to be delivered.

V. THE CHRISTIAN WHO CHOOSES TO DO GOOD AND ENDS UP DOING EVIL CAN BE DELIVERED THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

"Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25).

You want to do good? Instead, you end up doing bad? What's the answer? Jesus Christ. He can deliver you. It's

that simple. Jesus Christ can and will deliver you. It is not magic. It is not some trick or allusion. The power of Jesus Christ is at work in you.

I mentioned at the beginning of my sermon that some things in your spiritual life are predictable. As a Christian you can be sure that, as the days pass, you will become aware that you are not acting like you intend or want to act. You may find that you are more cruel in attitude and action, more unkind in your relationships, more self-centered and self-seeking than you realized. When these things happen, you feel embarrassed and ashamed. You feel guilty. You seek forgiveness. This pattern of failure, guilt, confession, and forgiveness is a natural part of Christian growth.

However, something more begins to happen. You begin to notice a pattern in your life. You are doing more and more evil than good. You allow evil ways to win more often. This is the crucial point in your spiritual life where the Holy Spirit begins to point out your entrapment. In a way, you have come to a fork in the road. You are confronted with a decision. Will God be allowed to deliver you from your body of death?

I have watched many Christians come up to this point of conviction and confrontation by the Holy Spirit and resist. I have watched some persons come to that point and quickly, easily let God take over. Those who resisted letting God have control had no immediate changes—but, over the weeks and months, they began to drift spiritually. Those who let God take over had no immediate changes either but, over the weeks and months, they became stronger and stronger in their faith.

Somewhere in your spiritual walk, you will arrive at this place where you see a pattern developing of good intentions ending in bad actions. God will reveal it to you. Then He will ask you to place those tendencies in His hands. He will ask you to let go of them. He will ask for them.

When God convicts and confronts you with this developing habit, it is up to you to let Jesus Christ deliver you.

ILLUS. Brennan Manning tells a story about a family in France who had two sons. The older son was brilliant, handsome, and loved by everyone. The younger son was hunchbacked, short, and had no friends.

The younger son had a beautiful voice. He sang all the time, filling the farmhouse and fields with melodies of praise. From his youngest days, he sang and his voice was a part of home.

The older boy went to college where he was quickly accepted. In his senior year, he was elected student council president. His younger brother arrived on campus that same year. He made no friends and soon became the butt of many hecklers.

One day a gang of guys started chasing him across campus. He could not escape them. They tossed him to the ground, tore off most of his clothes, and wrote vulgar words on his hunchback.

All the time this was happening, his brother was sitting in his student president office watching. He never did a thing. Soon the younger brother dropped out of school and returned to the farm. When he returned he sang no

more. Though his mother and father often asked him to sing and asked him why he refused, he never spoke of that horrible day.

The older brother went on to be a successful businessman in Italy. Yet each time the older brother tried to pray, all he could see was his brother stripped and jeered on the college commons and himself sitting at his desk watching it all.

Finally he knew what he must do. He told his boss he had to have a week off. He boarded a train and returned to that farm. He arrived in the evening. His brother was in his room. He went to that room, knelt before his brother, and confessed his sin against him, asking him for forgiveness.

The two brothers put their arms around each other and cried and laughed and found forgiveness and peace. They talked far into the night. About four in the morning, their father and mother were awakened by their house being filled with song. The younger son was singing again.

God will do marvelous things in your life when you let Him have the body of death that pulls you down.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

- Congregation Meditation for Worship
- Reflect on this question: "Does Jesus have all of me?"
- Opening Prayer
- Scripture Reading1 Kings 9:1-4
Rom. 12:1-2
- Choruses "We Bring the Sacrifice"
"Holy, Holy, Lord Almighty"
"Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen in Me"
"Open Our Eyes"
"Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee"
- Hymns "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
"Holiness unto the Lord"
- Drama "Get on Board, Little Children"
- Worship with Tithes and Offerings
- Pastoral Prayer
- Sermon "What It Means to Be a Christian
—Conviction and Confirmation"
- Closing Chorus "Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee"
- Benediction 1 Thess. 4:23-24

PASTORAL PRAYER

Focus your prayer on the Holy Spirit's ministry to our hearts.

CREATIVE WORSHIP IDEAS

PASTORAL PREPARATION

The sermon target calls the saved to be entirely sanctified. It is essential that the pastor is clear in his or her experience of entire sanctification.

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord Jesus, purify our hearts so we can serve You as You would have us serve You."

Highpoint

Sunday Night Preaching Resources

When does the high point of the week occur? For some, it may be the weekend itself—those days when one's time is one's own. For a growing number of people there is the awareness that a time is needed when there is opportunity to focus on the coming demands of the new week. Sunday night is that time when many people hunker down within the cocoon, squeezing out the last minutes of freedom in the comfort of home. But for many others, it is a time when they begin preparing their response to the challenges of the coming week. Sunday night church is seen by many pastors as a time to help equip their congregations for effective living. *Highpoint* provides busy pastors an excellent array of sermons and ideas for transforming Sunday night into the high point of the week.

The Power of Small Packages

My mother was 5'1" and my father was 6'3". Standing together they made quite a picture. Mom and Dad were members of the Depression Generation . . . their language often betrayed them. When referencing the disparity between their heights, Mom referred to them as "Mutt and Jeff." I suppose Mutt and Jeff were comic characters. I never saw their syndication, but I heard their names invoked many times.

When her diminutive height was compared to that of my father, Mother always said, "Well, dynamite comes in small packages!" Although she was a Southern woman, Mother possessed "her opinions." My tall, New Yorker dad could well rue the day when he ran afoul of one of "her opinions!"

Derl Keefer has explored the explosive power of two rather minuscule manuscripts from the library of Holy Books. Truly it may be said, "Spiritual dynamite often comes in small packages!" The first 10 sermons for this Sunday night preaching resource come from the Books of James and 1 Peter. Keefer unlocks the transformative power of life-changing truth as he develops these preachable sermons for practical application on Sunday nights. Each sermon is accompanied by a variety suggestion that will enhance the message's potential.

A sermon is a powerful tool when a preacher passionately

presents it, and its message is confirmed by the probing presence of the Holy Spirit. Derl Keefer has plundered the passages of Holy Writ, extracting preachable truths for busy ministers. He too is a pastor as well as an author and editor. He stands before a congregation fully aware of the awesome responsibility as well as the privilege inherent in the proclamation of scriptural truth.

I have known Derl Keefer for many years. I know of no one better able to craft a sermon for use by busy preachers than Pastor Keefer. May this quarter's presentation of *Highpoint* enrich your resources and enhance your Sunday evening options for presenting the timeless truths of God's Word.

September
October
November
1998

DAVID J. FELTER
Editor, Highpoint
Sunday Night Preaching Resources
KANSAS CITY



The Claims of Holiness

Acknowledging God's holiness is uniform throughout Christendom. Statements regarding the Holiness of God is safely cached in the Creeds, housed in the hymns, and tucked away in our traditions. In the Holiness Movement, we have committed to moving beyond stasis phrases of acknowledgment to dynamic investment in living expressions modeled on biblical revelation.

Robert Browning once wrote:
*I say, the acknowledgment of
 God in Christ
 Accepted by thy reason, solves
 for thee
 All questions in the earth and
 out of it,
 And has so far advanced thee to
 be wise.**

Rev. Derl Keefer begins this series of sermons from James with this statement: "As we claim God we also are looking for more in our experience of Him." These Sunday night preaching resources will take your listeners into the heart of practical religion. The wisdom of James is practical as well as applicable to real-life situations in our time. When you combine this with the variety ideas presented by Pastor Keefer, you have at your fingertips, a resource for expressing the message of everyday holiness living in dynamic concepts that link the biblical revelation with Christian profession and practice.

Derl Keefer has been senior pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in Three Rivers, Michigan,

since 1983. He is married to Karen and has two adult children, Julie and Jeff. Derl is also chairman of the Michigan District Sunday School Ministry and has been since 1987. He writes sermons and illustrations for various clergy magazines and manuals, including: *Preacher's Magazine, Resource, Preaching Magazine, Clergy Journal, Minister's Annual Manual, Abingdon Preaching Annual*, and others. Keefer has recently developed an independent ministry called Lighthouse Ministry as a resource for ministers.

May God bless your efforts on Sunday nights. However you conduct these services in your location, let these outlines enrich your array of possibilities for evening celebration.

*From, "A Death in the Desert," stanza 21, *The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning* (1895), 390.

Sermons for Sunday Night

DERL G. KEEFER
 Senior Pastor,
 Three Rivers Church
 of the Nazarene
 THREE RIVERS,
 MICHIGAN



THE CLAIMS OF HOLINESS

James 1:19-27

INTRODUCTION. Ray H. Hughes says, "The holiness person masters the world, while the carnal person is mastered by the world."

As we claim God, we also are looking for more in our experience of Him. The moment of entire sanctification is really only the depot of departure on this incredible journey that never stops.

There are some important things that must be done as one lays claim to this experience of holy living.

- Listen when God speaks.
- Examine the activity of God in life.
- Put faith in God's promises.
- Allow God to mold your beliefs, behavior, and character.
- Follow His leadership.
- Get ready to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

I. THE CLAIM OF HOLINESS—NOT A VAIN RELIGION

A. What is a VAIN religion?

1. External and punctilious performance
2. Acts in the sight of people
3. Bound in selfishness
4. Substitutes ethics for true righteousness

Illustration: The great political leader of India, Mahatma Gandhi, found himself seated on a locomotive next to an evangelical preacher. As the train sped through India the preacher sped through the gospel message attempting to convince Gandhi of Christianity's superiority. As the pair came close to the end of the journey, the preacher pushed Gandhi to accept Jesus as Savior.

"Jesus!" exclaimed Gandhi with a pretended look of surprise, "I didn't realize you were talking about Jesus! I presumed you were telling me about some successful oil tycoon from Texas!"

Often we talk about all the benefits of Chris-

tianity that we forget to talk about Jesus! What a tragedy.

B. Results of a VAIN religion

1. Deceives people
2. Becomes a braggart
3. Moves away from God
4. Has a wrong social concern

Illustration: Tony Campolo writes that in the movie *Oh God!* John Denver plays a young man who receives messages from God that were related for everybody else. In one scene, Denver goes to an evangelistic meeting to hear a certain preacher who exemplifies all the worst things about preachers. As the evangelist delivers his sermon, the Denver character interrupts him and says that God has a special message just for the preacher!

The evangelist halts the entire service and announces to the congregation, "This young man has come with a message directly from God!"

All eyes are focused on Denver, and there is a hush that comes over the crowd.

Denver looks straight at the preacher and with a strong voice says, "God wants you to shut up because you're embarrassing Him!"

A vain religion embarrasses God. As Campolo writes, "Sometimes we have been pompous. Sometimes we have said things about God that undoubtedly have made God shudder. Which of us can deny that? Even as we are trying to follow Jesus, we sometimes behave in ways which must make God and Christianity seem ridiculous to those outside the faith."¹

II. THE CLAIMS OF HOLINESS—A PURE RELIGION

A. What is pure religion?

1. Keeps itself undefiled
2. Couples holiness with ethics
3. Acts in the sight of God
4. Bound up with God

B. Results of true religion

1. Corrects life
2. Brags on God
3. Moves toward God

4. Has a correct social concern
 Preaching Thought: Holiness is not dos and don'ts in life but rather a conformity to God's character in the very depths of our personhood. This conformity is made possible only as we unite with Jesus and allow His Spirit to guide us.

III. THE CLAIMS OF HOLINESS CLEANS-ES

- A. Keeps Christ in us
- B. Keeps temptation overcome
- C. Keeps sin destroyed

Quotable Quote: "God has one destined end for mankind—holiness! His one aim is the production of saints. God is not an eternal blessing-machine for men. He did not come to save men out of pity. He came to save men because He created them to be holy."²

1. Tony Campolo, *Following Jesus Without Embarrassing God* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), 3.

2. Oswald Chambers, quoted in Albert Wells, comp., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 88.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 1

Have three people ready to testify as to their specific experience of entire sanctification. Spread them throughout the service.

Have a teen lead in the responsive reading "Sanctification" on page 510, *Sing to the Lord*.

LIFE—FAKING IT OR FAITHING IT

James 2:14-26

INTRODUCTION. About the turn of the century there was an old trestle bridge standing at the Niagara Falls. The trains would creep along because they would shake so badly as they passed over on the bridge. People sat in absolute silence fearful that the trestle would collapse. One old man would come aboard just as the train started across the bridge, distributing religious tracts. He would then stand at the back of the train and in a clear crisp voice cry out in the stillness, "If your faith is in Jesus, you have nothing to fear."

In those moments, people didn't need to fake a relationship with God but have a vital faith. So it is in all life!

I. AM I FOOLING MYSELF IN THINKING WORKS ALONE IS ALL IT TAKES TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

- A. Secular organizations are humanistically helpful.
 - 1. Government Agencies
 - 2. Philanthropic Agencies
 - 3. International Agencies
- B. Christian organizations are humanistically helpful.
 - 1. Missions Agencies
 - 2. Evangelical Agencies
 - 3. Local Church Agencies

Preaching Point: Jesus was sensitive to the needs of those around Him. Those who were hungry—He fed. Those who hurt—He healed. Those who were lonely—He befriended. Those who cried—He comforted. Those who were lost—He found.

What many of us need is a garage sale in our lives to clean out the accumulated junk and self-serving purpose.

II. AM I FOOLING MYSELF IN THINKING THAT FAITH ALONE IS ALL IT TAKES TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE?

- A. Faith in a Loving God
- B. Faith in a Loving People
- C. Faith in a Loving Church
- D. Faith in a Loving Spirit

Quotable Quote: "In the final analysis, it is not

all that important that you and I understand—see—every detail of our lives, but it is supremely important that by faith we yield control of every detail to the Spirit. A successful Christian life doesn't need the rationality of sight, but it does need the faith of surrender."*

III. I AM NOT FOOLING MYSELF WHEN I KNOW THAT WORKS AND FAITH GO TOGETHER.

- A. Faith Brings New Life—Works Brings New Energy
- B. Faith Brings Freedom—Works Brings Legitimacy
- C. Faith Brings Hope—Works Brings Action

CONCLUSION: Faith and works are inseparable. Mere verbalization of faith is not enough. Mere repetition of religious formula does not insure salvation. The person who claims to have faith but does not evidence it in his or her life must question the authentic claim to that faith.

James never questions that faith is the instrument of salvation, but he insists that if faith is real, it will manifest itself in action!

*Patrick M. Morley, *Walking with Christ in the Details of Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 190.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 2

Ask someone from a community social action agency to come in and give a brief talk on how the church can respond to the needs of the community through volunteerism.

TAMING THE TONGUE

James 3:1-12

INTRODUCTION. A medical doctor usually takes the body's temperature under that funny-looking organ stuck between the mouth's palate called the tongue. By examining the tongue of a patient, physicians find out the diseases of the body and the philosophers discover the diseases of the mind and the theologians the diseases of the heart.

James deals with the spiritual perspective of the tongue.

I. THE TONGUE IS A COMMUNICATIVE ORGAN OF INFLUENCE

- A. Communication is a transmitting, impartation, or sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information.
- B. Christian teachers have been gifted with the ability to communicate.
 1. Teachers instruct the facts of Christianity—not myths or fallacies.
 2. Teachers edify the truth of Christianity—stamping faith and practice.
 3. Teachers mold lives of Christians by their words.

Quick Thoughts:

- The school is the factory of humanity. Sunday School is the factory of Christianity.
- The Talmud tells of a famine that stopped because of the prayers of an obscure and humble man. Others' prayers had proved unsuccessful. When asked who he was that his prayers should have such influence, he said simply, "I am a teacher of little children."

II. THE TONGUE CAN BE A NEGATIVE COMMUNICATOR OF INFLUENCE

- A. Your words reveal your character.

Pondering Point: If you are negative, vile, and a cheap thinker, you will be a negative, vile, and cheap talker.

- B. Destructive criticism is pointless and detrimental.

Pondering Point: Jesus did not die on the Cross

so that we could be like vultures and feed on the carcasses of other people's failures.

- C. Your words can be fatal with a fascinating attraction to evil.

Pondering Point: The damage the tongue can inflict is like the damage of a forest fire. It is wide-ranging and uncontrollable. Once a word is spoken, there is no getting it back. Nothing is more impossible to kill than a rumor, nor is there anything more impossible to obliterate than an idle false story.

Warning label: James is addressing Christians—not non-Christians. That says a lot to the church of today.

III. THE TONGUE CAN BE A POSITIVE COMMUNICATOR OF INFLUENCE

- A. The positive tongue can witness for Jesus.

Illustration: A turning point in the formative years of John Bunyan came when he overheard three poor women sitting in the morning sun, talking about the things of God. What if they had been gossiping about their neighbors or rolling some morsel of scandal under their tongues, how would Bunyan have been influenced? Fortunately he heard them talk about the new birth, God's work in their hearts, and how God comforted and blessed their lives; how Jesus refreshed their spirits daily. When Bunyan went to work fixing the pots and pans of his neighborhood, the ladies talked, filling his wondering mind and heart positively!

- B. The positive tongue is controlled by the positive Jesus.
- C. The positive tongue builds character.
- D. The positive tongue has abundance of words to say for the good.

CONCLUSION: I believe that with God's control of the tongue . . .

1. Nations could be changed. Instead of deceitful lies—honesty could govern.
2. Families could experience healing. The truth is that more families are split by what is said and done.
3. Neighbors could be friends.
4. People could be influenced to smile, laugh, giggle, and be happy.
5. Lives could be made new through witnessing the awesome love of God!

Variety Ideas for Sermon 3

Prior to the sermon have the teens of the church give the old "gossip" skit. It will serve as a reminder to the congregation as to how negative talk can be.

After the sermon, have the people find one person that has helped them in their walk with Christ and then give three positive thoughts about him or her. This will be done as individuals. A twist to this idea is to select one person to come forward and have the people tell the positive items about that person.

HOW TO DEFEAT THE DEVIL

James 4:1-10

INTRODUCTION. My wife had a dream when we got married. It was that I would be as good as her father when it came to being a MR. FIX-IT. It wasn't long after our marriage that she realized her dream was a nightmare! She discovered I knew nothing about fixing things around the house. Several years after we were married she purchased a book as a gift for me titled *How to Be a Handyman*. I assumed it was a gag gift and I got it out occasionally for a few laughs. Today it sits on a shelf somewhere downstairs in the "work room." The Bible is a how-to Book, but it is intended to be used and not to sit on a shelf. We need the Scriptures for strength and power for God.

Some thoughts on how to defeat Satan come from James's quill through the divine inspiration of God.

I. THINK ON GOD—ASK HIS HELP

- A. Dwell on the positives of God with the mind of Christ.

Illustration: Dr. William Bucholz relates the story of overhearing two physicians discussing a paper delivered at a national seminar of cancer specialists. One complained that he couldn't understand the recovery rate of his patients versus those of his friend Bob. His was 22 percent while his buddy Bob's was 74 percent.

Bob said that they both used the same drugs, hydroxyurea, oncovin, platinol, and etoposide. Bob said that he tells his patients that putting the first letters of the drugs together spells H-O-P-E. He said to his friend, "I emphasize that they have a chance!"

- B. Dwell on the mind of Christ by expecting the best.

II. GAZE UPON THE RIGHT SIGHTS

- A. Look for the good in people.
B. Look for the good God.

Chorus of Significance: "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"

III. LISTEN TO THE RIGHT SOUNDS

- A. Listen for the hurts of society.

- B. Listen for the lost of humanity.
C. Listen to the sighs of your neighbor.
D. Listen to the voice of God.

IV. SPEAK THE RIGHT WORDS

- A. Speak words of Salvation.
B. Speak words of Purpose.
C. Speak words of Eternity.
D. Speak words of Allegiance.
E. Speak words of Kindness.

V. GO TO THE RIGHT PLACES

- A. Go to places that need help.
B. Go to places that lift the Spirit.
C. Go to places that challenge the mind.
D. Go to places that exercise the body.

Illustration to the Point: The riots in Los Angeles several years ago overshadowed a story that got small print. The people of Newark, New Jersey, held a large parade.

Dozens of convertibles drove down the streets occupied with waving people. Reclining inside of them was a federal judge, a mother with six children, a church choir of 30 people who normally rode in wheelchairs, rich and poor, famous and obscure. On the sides of the cars were signs that indicated that each of the riders had been saved by the Newark Fire Department. Behind the convertibles marched the hundreds of firefighters wearing their medals. Hundreds of thousands cheered curbside as they passed. It was a day of celebration as the city honored the people who daily risked their lives to save others.

Imagine the joy that will be in heaven as the saints of God come marching down the streets following their Lord and Savior, having disregarded threats, imprisonment, torture, and consequences by spending their lives pulling others out of the fire of hell.

VI. BELONG TO THE RIGHT PERSON

- A. Give Jesus first place in life.
B. Give the Spirit full control.
C. Give God the keys to your life.

CONCLUSION: Dwight L. Moody used to tell the story about a converted old miser whom a neighbor in distress asked for help. The miser wanted to prove that God had

transformed his life, so he went to the smokehouse to get a whole ham to give to his neighbor. On the way down the path the old devil whispered, "Give him the smallest one you have." A spiritual and mental battle ensued. Finally the miser got the largest one he could find to give away. "You are a fool," the devil said, and the farmer replied, "If you don't keep still, I'll give him every single ham in the smokehouse!"

That is how you defeat the devil!

Variety Ideas for Sermon 4

At the end of the sermon, ask those who are struggling with constant defeat to come forward. Have paper and pens ready and have them write on the paper their most difficult struggle, then take that paper and wad it up and throw it into a container. Have a board member ready to pray with that individual at the altar for power and strength to defeat the devil.

PRaising JESUS!

1 Pet. 1:3-9

INTRODUCTION. Peter proclaims praise should accompany the God and Father of Jesus by the people of the world! The Greek “euloge” literally means “to speak well of” so that in order to praise Him we acknowledge God’s goodness. A child expressed it well, “Jesus is the best photograph God ever took.” Thus any praise that comes to God also comes to Jesus.

1. Praise through verbal response. A vocal “Amen” or “Praise the Lord” or “Hallelujah” is always appropriate.

2. Praise through nonverbal reaction. Our feelings and thoughts cry out for expression through responsive activity.

Peter draws a blueprint of praise through his writing. His Epistle diagrams the picture of praise. Though the audience is in the midst of satanic attack through slander, ostracism, violence, hatred, suspicion, and worldly ruin, yet Peter calls for praise. He reminds them that Jesus is worthy of praise and here are the reasons.

I. PRAISE JESUS FOR HIS LOVING ACTION (v. 3)

A. His Loving Action—Mercy

1. Mercy—Help for those who cannot help themselves.

- a. Help by giving to missions.
- b. Help by giving to church.
- c. Help by giving to community.
- d. Help by giving to individuals.

2. Mercy—Prayer for those who need God.

- a. Pray for those needing hope.
- b. Pray for those needing healing.
- c. Pray for those needing holiness.
- d. Pray for those needing happiness.

B. His Loving Action—Salvation

1. His action took Jesus to the Cross.
2. His action brings reconciliation between God and man.
3. His action comes by confession.
4. His action offers forgiveness.

Illustration: G. Campbell Morgan tells the story that after one of his meetings a miner

came to him and expressed that he wanted to be a Christian. The miner was having trouble believing that if he just asked Jesus to forgive him that Christ would forgive. “It is too cheap,” is what he said. Morgan said, “My dear friend, have you been working today?” The man looked at him and said, “Certainly, I was down in the pit.” “How did you get there?” Morgan asked. “The way I usually do. I got into the cage and was pulled to the top.” How much did you pay to come out of the pit?” Morgan queried again. “Pay? Of course, I didn’t pay anything.” Morgan then asked, “Were you not afraid to trust yourself in that cage? Was it not too cheap?” “Oh, no,” he said, “it was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink that shaft.” And without another word that admission broke upon him and he saw that he could have salvation without money and without price. It had cost the infinite God the greatest of price to sink the shaft and rescue lost humans. It took the Cross and Jesus on it for people to be forgiven.

Praise God for His salvation!

II. PRAISE JESUS FOR HIS INHERITANCE (v. 4)

- A. The inheritance is one of faith.
- B. The inheritance is one of incorruptibility.
- C. The inheritance is one of undefilement.
- D. The inheritance is one of eternity.

Song of Praise: John Newton expressed it well when he penned, “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, / Bright, shining as the sun, / We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise / Than when we’d first begun!”

Our inheritance can already be on reserve by faith in the invisible God seen through the Son Jesus and revealed by the Holy Spirit.

III. PRAISE JESUS FOR HIS PROTECTION (v. 5)

Peter uses an interesting verb: *phroureo* signifying “to keep watch” or “to keep under military guard.” The true disciples of Christ are under the continual watchful care of God, and the inheritance is guarded by God. We who are Christ’s can be thankful for His keeping power and protection.

IV. PRAISE JESUS FOR HIS REFINEMENTS (vv. 6-7)

- A. Refinements come through trials.
- B. Refinements come through temptations.
- C. Refinements come through circumstances.
- D. Refinements come through people.

Illustration: Horace Mann reminds us that temptation is a fearful word. It can be the beginning of infinite evil. It is the ringing of an alarm bell that vibrates through all eternity. It’s like the sudden loud cry of “Fire!” under the window of life. As soon as we hear it, we should rouse to instantaneous action and brace every muscle to its highest tension.

CONCLUSION: Dr. J. H. Jowett decades ago looked out his window one day and saw a half dozen “sandwich men” walking the streets of London looking thoroughly starved and wretched. On their backs they carried the advertisement to every onlooker, “The best dinners in London.”

Jowett commented, “Famished wretches advertising the best dinners in town! Cheerless men and women advertising ‘the joy of the Lord.’ Heralds in whom there is no buoyancy advertising the light of life! No, it is the cheery spirit, the praiseful spirit, that offers the best commendation of the grace of God.”

Variety Ideas for Sermon 5

Have a good old-fashioned “popcorn” testimony service where people give a praise to Jesus.

Follow the praise sequence in the *Sing to the Lord*, Nos. 121-24.

FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

1 Pet. 2:1-10

INTRODUCTION. Foundations vitally affect any structure of permanence. They are what buildings are constructed on and without them there is no stability. While I was in Israel on a tour, I saw many Palestinian ruins, nothing was left except the 2,000-year-old foundations.

Let's look at some of the foundations that we can build on in life.

I. OUR FOUNDATION IS JESUS

Illustration: A poor man in North Carolina saw a big, ugly stone lying limpid in a brook. He took that heavy lump of rock back home to use as a doorstep. One day a geologist stopped at his home and saw that chunk of rock and examined it. To the geologist's surprise it turned out to be the largest piece of gold at the time east of the Rockies.

A. Many people looked at Jesus as just an ordinary piece of human clay, but He was so much more!

1. Jesus is more than a Galilean peasant.
2. Jesus is more than a prophet.
3. Jesus is more than a good man.
4. Jesus is more than one of the deities.

B. Many people look at Jesus and see who He really is in life.

1. Jesus as the Son of God
2. Jesus as the Lamb of God
3. Jesus as the Messiah of God
4. Jesus as the Perfection of God

II. OUR FOUNDATION IS LOVE

Thought: "I love you." Three words that everyone wants to hear. How awful life would be if no one ever said that to you. Our hearts long for those words to be expressed by a spouse, a friend, a child, or a parent. Those three words hold our future. We need to see the practical side of love. Not just the verbalization. Be a person, a family, a church of action. Do something about the needs of others. Show God and the world what you mean by love! Do it today. Don't put it off.

Remember what John said, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

- A. Love is filled with admiration.
- B. Love is filled with meekness.

Quick Thought: Meekness is that we are emptied of selfish ambition and arrogance.

- C. Love is filled with contentment.

Quote: "Allowing other pursuits or possessions or people to take the place of God's kingdom in our lives will only guarantee confusion, failure, emptiness, and dissatisfaction" (Greg Laurie in *Every Day with Jesus*). Our contentment comes by allowing God first place in our hearts.

- D. Love is filled with service.

Quote: "Love has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. This is what love looks like" (Augustine).

III. OUR FOUNDATION IS GOODNESS

No Christian can be the way he or she used to be. There are things that must be stripped off. Peter says that just like a filthy dirty shirt must be stripped off and discarded, so must those things that are unchrist-like.

A. Honesty must replace dishonesty.

George Washington quote: "I hope that I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles: the character of an honest man" (Albert Wells Jr., *Inspirational Quotations* [Nashville: Nelson Publishing, 1988], 90).

- B. Sincerity must replace hypocrisy.
- C. Cooperation must replace bitterness and strife.
- D. Self-esteem must replace enviousness.

IV. OUR FOUNDATION IS TRUST

- A. Trust is based on believing.
- B. Trust is based on daily experience.
- C. Trust is based on the person we know.

CONCLUSION: When General U. S. Grant arrived at Chattanooga, Tennessee, to take command of the northern forces, he found them depressed, discouraged, and hard-pressed. The men were on short rations, and the

horses were starving. The city was surrounded on every side by the southern forces. Grant was on crutches from an accident he sustained in New Orleans, but the hour he arrived the conditions for the North changed. He gave immediate orders for breaking through the southern lines to secure relief. Within five days of that order, the line was broken and the food supply became abundant. An encouraged army was ready to move against their enemy and the most important ingredient was confidence. They now knew they could have victory.

How like this is to the coming of Christ, the Commander-in-Chief of life. Resources are unused, courage at low ebb, disheartenment saps the life, but in comes the Commander, Christ, and leads us at once to a more abundant life. Our foundation is the Lord of Hosts!

Variety Ideas for Sermon 6

Have a person dressed in contractor's clothes come forward and at each point of the sermon have them build a foundation and label some of the building material with the points of your sermon.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1 Pet. 2:4-12

INTRODUCTION. There is no such person as a free-lance Christian. Not to be a part of the visible family of God is simply a contradiction of the Christian life.

Several years ago I heard a disgruntled clergyman on a Cincinnati station say, "Organized religion (that is the church) is too political and is nonfunctioning."

The truth is that the "institution" of the church does have its problems, but it is still God's instrument of evangelism, worship, fellowship, and power.

A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and saw no walls. He said to the Spartan king, "Where are the walls that you boast so much about?" The Spartan king pointed to his bodyguard of magnificent Spartan troops. "These," he said, "are the walls of Sparta, and every man of them is a brick of the wall."

If a brick lies by itself it does no good. It can only become of use when it is put into a building. As Christians, we are built into the very fabric of the church.

I. THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH IS TO WORSHIP CHRIST

Quick quote: "True worship . . . is never the unaided action of man, even the devout man. It is rather the attitude and expression which the Holy Spirit prompts and guides . . . The Spirit is the key person in true Christian worship" (Floyd Filson, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord*).

- A. The true Christian in every service of worship ought to pray.
- B. The true Christian in every service of worship ought to sing.
- C. The true Christian in every service of worship ought to praise.
- D. The true Christian in every service of worship ought to participate.
- E. The true Christian in every service of worship ought to unite.
- F. The true Christian in every service of worship ought to love.

Many years ago in the old *Sunday School Chronicle* magazine there was a story of a whaler who went ashore one Sunday and attended chapel services. After the worship was over, the minister spoke to him and asked if he received anything out of the service. "The fact is, sir," said the captain, "all the while you were preaching I had whales on my mind. There is no room in my heart for anything but whales."

So many of us are like that whaling captain.

The reason we have not received anything out of worship services is because our hearts are too full of business to listen to God.

II. THE CHURCH OF GOD IS A COVENANT OF CHRIST

Thought: Dr. James Parker observes that the New Testament church is the historical continuation of the Old Testament, Israel. The basis of the church's life in both Testaments is the covenant that God drew up with Abraham. The fundamental idea of biblical ecclesiology is the church as the covenant people of God. The covenant is a relationship of promise and commitment that binds two parties together.

- A. The covenant relationship is a corporate relationship.
- B. The covenant relationship is a permanent relationship.
- C. The covenant relationship is a redeemed relationship.
- D. The covenant relationship is a God-known relationship.
- E. The covenant relationship is a confirmational relationship.

III. THE CHURCH OF GOD IS GUIDED AND EMPOWERED BY CHRIST

Important Idea: "The reason some of us are such poor specimens of Christianity is because we have no Almighty Christ. We have Christian attributes and experiences, but there is no abandonment to Jesus Christ. When we get into difficult circumstances, we impoverish His ministry by saying, 'Of course He cannot do anything,' and we struggle down to the deeps and try to get the water for ourselves. Beware of the satisfaction of sinking back and saying, 'It can't be done'; you know it can be done if you look to Jesus. The well of your incompleteness is deep, but make the effort and look away to him.'"*

When Christ is guiding and empowering the church, the congregation will experience:

- A. A love that dominates differences.
- B. A victory that will not be stifled.
- C. A growth that cannot be stopped.
- D. A joy that must be shared.
- E. A future that is bright.

IV. THE CHURCH OF GOD IS ONE OF PROCLAMATION

- A. Proclamation that Jesus is Lord.
- B. Proclamation that Jesus forgives.
- C. Proclamation that Jesus restores.
- D. Proclamation that Jesus renews.
- E. Proclamation that Jesus completes.
- F. Proclamation that Jesus transforms.

CONCLUSION: My church is the place where the Word of God is preached, the power of God is felt, the Spirit of God is manifested, the love of Christ is revealed, and the unity of the Spirit is perceived. It is the home of my soul and the altar of devotion and the center of my affection! I desire it to have a place in my heart and mind. I promise to support it in the manner that the Bible prescribes. It will have my zeal, care, and prayer. I will be part of the church of Jesus Christ!

*Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour and Co., 1935), 58.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 7

Pass out sign-up sheets for those who will promise to pray regularly for the programs of the church:

- Building program: "Building Buddies"
- Missions program: "Mission Moments"
- Sunday School programs: "SS Supports"
- Teen program: "PTA—Parents and Teens Association"
- And so forth

BROKEN CHAINS—FREEDOM

1 Pet. 2:13-17

INTRODUCTION. The man had a dream—a vision to unite Europe and Asia, but he met opposition everywhere he turned. He pitched his idea to people in Portugal, Spain, England, and France, but each of them refused his sales pitch. After reassessing his position and reorganizing his thoughts, he returned to Spain to talk with the queen who agreed with the vision. Christopher Columbus got what he wanted and discovered a new land called America.

What evolved the next 300 years was a nation passed like a hot potato from one controlling country to another. During this time, the pioneering spirit had a taste of freedom. Freedom to live like they wanted to live. Freedom to worship God in the way they felt He ought to be worshiped. Freedom to care about people and laws and so many other things. *But* the truth is that the freedom they came to enjoy began having restrictions around it by an English monarch who wanted ultimate control. After the monarch put chains around the country, the people of America rebelled and declared their independence. After years of struggle, their objective of freedom came into existence.

For many people, spiritual freedom comes after years of struggle when Christ comes into life.

I. FREEDOM BREAKS THE CHAINS OF COMPULSIVE SIN

A. Breaking the chains of continued sin.

Illustration: The old *Sunday School Chronicle* tells that an old boatman was asked one day, "If anybody fell from the pier into the water, would he be drowned?" The sailor replied, "No, it is not falling into the water that drowns a person . . . It's the staying there!"

The truth is, it's not the falling into sin that damns a man. It is refusing to return to the Father in penitence and humility that drowns a person spiritually.

B. Breaking the chains of continued disobedience.

Quick thought: If we disobey God, we will pay in remorse, regret, and failure. Obedience and love are our rightful obligation to God.

C. Breaking the chains of continued compromise.

1. Compromise of ethics
2. Compromise of morals
3. Compromise of standards
4. Compromise of philosophy
5. Compromise of theology
6. Compromise of hearts

Christ has come to set us free from the compulsive grip of sin and its power.

II. FREEDOM COMES THROUGH DOING THE RIGHT THINGS IN LIFE

- A. A need for a revival of righteousness
- B. A need to be fair to all
- C. A need to respect and love
- D. A need for honesty and integrity
- E. A need for goodness

Poem by F. W. Faber:

*For right is right, since God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.**

III. FREEDOM COMES BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

- A. God's Spirit gives us life.
- B. God's Spirit gives us power.
- C. God's Spirit gives us hope.
- D. God's Spirit gives us infilling.

Truth: The Holy Spirit is called that, not because He is holier than the other persons of the Trinity but because His special function is to cleanse and sanctify the heart by faith, to cultivate holiness in each person.

CONCLUSION: G. B. F. Hallock tells that on August 1, 1834, the emancipation of 700,000 of British colonial slaves took place. Throughout the colonies the churches and the chapels were thrown open, and the slaves crowded into them the night before. As midnight approached, the slaves fell on their knees and waited breathlessly for the moment to come when they would experience freedom. When 12:00 sounded from the church bells, they sprang to their feet, and through every island rang the glad sound of thanksgiving to God for the chains break-

ing from their lives.

Greater far is the freedom that comes to those who believe in Christ. There is also as much joy and thrill because this freedom never ends but only expands daily.

*G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931), 619.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 8

Have a drama about the wild man Jesus healed in Luke 8:26-39. Have special music and congregational hymns focus on the topic of "Freedom."

A BEAUTIFUL CHRISTIAN

1 Pet. 3:1-16

INTRODUCTION. As a college freshman, I had a very good friend who just happened to be the freshman class president. One day he asked, "Derl, how would you like to be the driver for our class banquet speaker? She is the former Miss America winner, Vonda Kay Van Dyke." I responded with a definite, "YES!"

My excitement mounted on the day of the banquet. My duties included driving to the airport in the brand-new car on loan to us for the special occasion from one of the local car dealers in Bethany, Oklahoma. As Miss America arrived, the crowd cheered. We hustled into the car, and I slid behind the wheel and pressed the accelerator. As I started to drive, suddenly a motorcade of police vehicles started in front and behind me. It was all exciting for an 18-year-old college freshman! Miss Van Dyke was sitting right in the middle of the backseat . . . right in sight of the rearview mirror. It was difficult to keep my eyes on the road because my eyes kept looking in the mirror. The years have quickly passed, and I'm now in my 50s! I haven't seen Miss Van Dyke since that day I chauffeured her to the school, but I imagine she is a beautiful lady.

The truth is that beauty is only skin-deep. What we need are the beauty marks on the inside that will never fade, age, or wrinkle!

Peter understood the principle of Christian beauty.

I. CHRISTIAN BEAUTY INCLUDES A HARMONIOUS SPIRIT

Getting along with others is a way of demonstrating our Christian spirit to a fragmented world.

A. A harmonious spirit includes sympathy.

Illustration: Our world hungers for compassion. The truth is that most of the time we can be of little help except to sympathize with a situation. A pastor tells about an experience he had with a poor mother. On his visitation, she burst into tears, telling him things that were beyond his wisdom to solve. The pastor said that he felt a fool, for he did not know what to say to her. After a while she surprised him

by saying, "You have helped me so much. You have given me just the help that I needed." The minister said, "It was at that moment that I realized that what she needed was my sympathy, not my wisdom for her problem to be resolved."

B. A harmonious spirit includes brotherly love.

Thought: To paraphrase Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "A Christian should be a striking likeness of Jesus Christ. Christ's life should be written out in the words, action, and *holy love* of His people."

C. A harmonious spirit includes courtesy.

Quote: "Courtesy springs from the heart; if the mind prompts the action, there is a reason; if there be a reason, it is not courtesy; for courtesy has no reason. Courtesy is good will and good will is prompted by the heart full of love to be kind. Only the generous man is truly courteous—he gives freely without a thought of receiving anything in return. The generous man has developed kindness to such an extent that he considers everyone as good as himself—and treats others not as he should like to be treated but as he ought to be treated" (Drew's Imprint).¹

II. CHRISTIAN BEAUTY INCLUDES ACTION

A. Christian action includes being a blessing.

1. Being a blessing by not returning evil for evil
2. Being a blessing by not returning insult for insult
3. Being a blessing by returning good for good
4. Being a blessing by returning compliment for compliment

B. Christian action includes being a lover of life.

1. Lover of life in a positive sense
2. Lover of life in a holiness sense

C. Christian action includes demonstrating life.

1. Demonstrating through goodness

Quick quotes: "How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world" (Shakespeare). "He who believes in goodness has the essence of all faith. He is a man of cheerful yesterdays and confident tomorrows" (J. F. Clarke).

III. CHRISTIAN BEAUTY INCLUDES HOPE

A. Hope includes righteousness.

Illustration: "Jesus glorified God by giving himself for the work of His redeeming love. God's glory is His holiness, and God's holiness is His redeeming love—love that triumphs over sin by conquering the sin and rescuing the sinner. Jesus not only told of the Father being the righteous One, whose condemnation must rest on sin, and the loving One, who saves everyone who turns from his sin, but He gave himself to be a sacrifice to that righteousness . . . let simple obedience mark our whole life. Let humble, childlike waiting for direction, a Christlike dependence on the Father's showing us His way, be our daily attitude . . . Let God's glory shine out in the holiness of our life."²

B. Hope includes meekness.

Quick quote: "The meek man gives back love for hate, kindness for unkindness, sweetness for bitterness" (J. R. Miller).

CONCLUSION: The beauty contest is on and *you* are the contestant!

1. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1931), 194.

2. *Time with God* (Dallas: Word Bibles, 1991), 249.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 9

Just before the sermon have a "Beauty Parade" of all the babies in the church. Have someone take pictures of the babies and give them to the parents. Then launch into the sermon on "A Beautiful Christian," using the parade as your introduction.

RENEWING COMMITMENT

1 Pet. 4:1-11

INTRODUCTION. The message was painted in huge, bright red letters on the subway wall, "Christ is the Answer." Scrawled below in black lettering were the words "What is the question?"

Peter's world knew the question. It was Jesus who answered life's questions. They were aware that if they became committed to Jesus, they faced suffering, persecution, physical abuse, deprivation, social insecurity, and possible supper for Rome's lion population!

Peter aids us in understanding that commitment through the text.

I. COMMITMENT RENEWAL INCLUDES AFFLICTION (v. 1)

A. Affliction as a blessing in disguise.

Quick point: Many things that come into our lives seem unjust, difficult to bear, and undesirable but often prove to be blessings in disguise. Job would be a good example.

B. Affliction comes to *all*.

C. Affliction deepens life.

Margret Bottome stood on the bridge over the Harlem river. A vessel was steaming its way up the river. A friend said there was a time when no boat of that size could come up the river because the river was too shallow. Margaret asked what caused it to be deepened so vessels could sail on it. He answered, "Blasting."

When we ask God to give us the power to bear suffering, we may not at first see this glory of usefulness can only come as the Lord's came, through suffering. The capacity to endure suffering comes as we deepen our lives through the blastings!

D. Affliction brings opportunities.

II. COMMITMENT RENEWAL INCLUDES SEEKING GOD'S WILL (v. 2)

A. Seeking God's will through prayer.

B. Seeking God's will through inner desire.

C. Seeking God's will through identifying with Christ.

D. Seeking God's will through avoidance of lusting after the world.

A. W. Tozer related that God could use anyone, however flawed, as long as his or her heart was clean. That exhortation is true when it comes to seeking God's will. Hearts must be clean in order to seek and discern God's will.

III. COMMITMENT RENEWAL INCLUDES A HATRED FOR SIN (v. 3)

A. Hatred of sexual sin

B. Hatred of evil desires

C. Hatred of abuse to alcohol (drugs)

D. Hatred of idolatry

Quick quote: Billy Sunday, "One reason sin flourishes is that it is treated like a cream puff instead of a rattlesnake."

We are sinners by nature and practice. We are as far from God as we can possibly be. As Christians, we must hate sin with all that is within us!

IV. COMMITMENT RENEWAL INCLUDES PRAYER (v. 7)

A. Prayer includes petition.

B. Prayer includes remorse.

C. Prayer includes action.

D. Prayer includes yielding.

E. Prayer includes exaltation.

F. Prayer includes responsibility.

Illustration: When my wife and I owned a little cottage, it had a pump instead of a regular faucet. I was not used to the fact that I had to "prime" the pump in order to get it to work. Since we weren't there often, the water would get low and we would have to put water into it and pump hard. It took quite awhile to get the water to come up.

It's like that in prayer. If we are instant in prayer, every little circumstance awakens the disposition to pray. The words and the desire are always ready. If we neglect prayer, it is difficult for us to pray because the water in the well gets low!

V. COMMITMENT RENEWAL INCLUDES SERVICE TO OTHERS (vv. 8, 10)

Sandy Audey says, "It's loving and caring and sharing with others in the name of Jesus."

When I attended World Youth Congress for the Church of the Nazarene, I heard Tony Campolo challenge those Nazarene young people to be "revolution-

aries" for Jesus, changing the world they live in for Christ. He told them they needed to speak out against "ideas, ideals, philosophies, theologies, institutions that would dehumanize or dechristianize us." He stated, "The world needs a church that will struggle against the principalities and powers and call them into conformity with the will of God." It is service we need in the name of Jesus.

- A. Service produces reality.
- B. Service produces satisfaction.
- C. Service produces usefulness.
- D. Service produces action.
- E. Service produces lasting affects.

VI. COMMITMENT RENEWAL INCLUDES GOD'S AUTHORITY (v. 11)

- A. Authority is cooperation.
- B. Authority is saving power.
- C. Authority is cleansing power.
- D. Authority is eternity power.

Quote: R. C. Sproul wrote, "The very word authority hints at a connection to the word authorship. God is the omnipotent author of His creation. He is the omnipotent redeemer of His creation. He exercises omnipotent authority over His creation."*

*Time with God (Dallas: Word Bibles, 1991), 19.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 10

At the end of the sermon, have people who represent the various programs of the church (Sunday School, trustees, stewardship, Caravan, quizzing, teens, etc.) at tables with information about the program. After the benediction, have the congregation go to the various tables and sign up for a commitment to what they can do best to help.

FOUNDATIONS OF BAPTISM

Acts 2:37-40

INTRODUCTION. A minister was called to his new parish and on his first Sunday he preached on baptism. The next Sunday he did the same. Three months passed and each Sunday he preached on the subject of baptism. The congregation became less than enchanted by his continual preaching on baptism. Finally tired of it, they asked him to choose a new theme.

He said, "Well, I didn't realize that you all felt that way. You pick out the text, and I'll preach on whatever you pick out."

After a committee meeting, they picked out the text and the chairman said, "Pastor, we've picked Matthew 3:10: 'And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees'" (KJV).

He got up the next Sunday, read that text, and said, "Amen. That's wonderful. They laid that axe at the root of the tree. The only reason anybody would lay an axe down at the root of a tree is to take the axe to cut down the tree, to dam up the creek, to get the water deep enough to have a baptizing!"

"For many Christians, especially Protestants and more especially those in the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, sacramental practice seems meaningless and irrelevant . . . one seldom hears sermons on the meaning of baptism, despite the fact that in the New Testament there are more allusions to baptism . . . This near-silence from the Wesleyan/Holiness pulpit regarding baptism is ironic in view of the emphasis the same pulpit places on the Great Commission and on the event of Pentecost, in each of which baptism is highly significant."¹

The sacrament of baptism must be accentuated and understood.

I. THE FOUNDATION OF BAPTISM IS RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

- A. Jesus finds us in spiritual need and marks us with conviction.
- B. Jesus finds us in spiritual need and marks us with grace.

- C. Jesus finds us in spiritual need and marks us with redemption.
- D. Jesus finds us in spiritual need and marks us with covenant.
- E. Jesus finds us in spiritual need and marks us with cleansing.

Illustration: Let an individual go to a psychiatrist and what happens to him or her? An adjusted sinner. Let that same person go to a physician and what does the person become? A healthy sinner. If that same individual achieved wealth and riches, what does that person become? A wealthy sinner. If that person joins a church, signs a card, and turns over a new leaf, what does he or she become? A religious sinner. But let that person go in sincere repentance and faith to the foot of Calvary's cross, and what does the individual become? A new creature in Jesus Christ, forgiven, reconciled, with meaning purpose in his or her life and on the way to marvelous fulfillment in God's holy will.²

II. THE FOUNDATION OF BAPTISM IS HOPE WITH JESUS

- A. Hope in the name of Jesus
- B. Hope in the name of the Trinity
- C. Hope in the death of Jesus
- D. Hope in the blood of Jesus
- E. Hope in the experience of Jesus
- F. Hope in the new world
- G. Hope in the faith we have in Jesus

Quote: Dr. Richard Howard wrote: "When we, through faith, enter into Christ, we enter into His death. This means that the believer appropriates by faith the death that Christ died for him. He participates or shares in Christ's death. He dies along with Christ. All men died provisionally with Christ when He died on the Cross, but only those who by faith accept that death die experientially with Christ."³

III. THE FOUNDATION OF BAPTISM IS THE BODY OF JESUS

- A. The Body of Christ personally
- B. The Body of Christ corporately
- C. The Body of Christ eternally

D. The Body of Christ unites

Thought: An E-mail from a friend contained a wonderful line, "I keep trying to live in the eternal realizing there is no time there." The Body of Christ, His Church, is visible and time oriented in one sense; however, the church is invisible and living in the eternity of life.

Quote: "One of the most vivid metaphors of the Church in the New Testament is Paul's reference to the Church as the Body of Christ. When this metaphor is coupled with the correlative image of Christ as the Head of the Body, a striking picture of the Church emerges. Each individual Christian is a part of Christ's body, living in harmony with the other parts, and under the control of the head."⁴

1. Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991), 119.

2. Albert M. Wells Jr., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 174.

3. Richard E. Howard, *Newness of Life: A Study in the Thought of Paul* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1975), 101.

4. *Ibid.*, 106.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 11

Ask each baptismal candidate to write out his or her testimony of faith. As he or she enters the baptismal tank, either the candidate or a relative or friend can read it, or copy it and have it on an overhead, or have the candidate tape it ahead of time and play it over the sound system as he or she enters the water or before he or she is poured or sprinkled.

THANKSGIVING IS THANKSLIVING

1 Pet. 1:3-12

INTRODUCTION. The United States celebrates a holiday known as Thanksgiving! For Americans, it is a wonderful holiday as it conjures up so many good feelings and memories. The pilgrims came to a strange and wild country not knowing what they would find. The winters were so cold and the wind had such icy blasts that it was extremely difficult to find food and to simply live. Amid the harsh reality of life the pilgrims invited their Indian friends and had a celebration dinner to praise God for His love . . . in spite of all the hardships!

Peter wrote to a church that was under religious bondage and persecution from the Romans. The civilian authorities menaced the Christians because they would not submit to Roman emperor worship by saying that "Caesar is Lord." Instead, the Christians proclaimed that "Jesus is Lord." Two hundred and fifty years Rome dedicated itself to the extermination of a religion that would not accept the divinity of the Roman emperor but only Jesus the Heavenly Emperor.

Peter's document is not a gray, sorrowful stoicism that can only be described as a "grin and bear it" philosophy. Archibald Hunter caught the authentic spirit of Peter's message by saying that those early Christians were "buoyed by an expectancy" of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away.

What Peter is expounding in his letter is that thanksgiving is really thanksgiving!

I. THANKSGIVING IS THANKSLIVING IN A NEW LIFE (v. 3)

A new life in Christ swells from the heart and bursts out of our lips as Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Jesus brings newness to our lives.

A. A New Birth

Illustration: Greg Laurie in his book *Life. Any Questions?* tells about reading of a man whose name had been mistakenly printed in the obituary column in a local newspaper. He charged down to the newspaper office and asked to see the editor.

"This is terrible, because of your error I am going to face embarrassment and possible loss of business. How could you do this to me?"

"This was a horrible error, and I am really sorry. It was a mistake and, of course, was not intentional," the editor said.

"I don't care! I want something done about this error! I want it done immediately!"

The editor came up with a "plan" to save the embarrassing situation. "Look, mister, cheer up. Tomorrow I'll put your name in the birth column, and you can have a fresh start in life."

The new birth gives us that "fresh start" we all need!

- B. A New Inheritance
Perishable versus imperishable.
 - C. A New Home
Quick quote: "To believe in heaven is not to run away from life; it is to run toward it" (Joseph D. Blinco).*
 1. Heaven will be free from fear.
 2. Heaven will be open to our questions.
 3. Heaven will be a place of unstoppable love.
 - D. A New Hope
- II. THANKSGIVING IS THANKSLIVING IN FAITH (v. 5)
- A. Thanksgiving is the initial gift of salvation.
 - B. Thanksgiving is the vibrancy of visionary outlook.
 - C. Thanksgiving is the audacity of abundant life.
 - D. Thanksgiving is the assurance of eternal life.
 - E. Thanksgiving is the concept of reconciliation.
 - F. Thanksgiving is the tenacity of pursuing life.
 - G. Thanksgiving is the risk of the redeemed.
 - H. Thanksgiving is the power to see us through.

Illustration: I heard a story about a first grade teacher who stood at the door bidding her pupils good-bye as they moved on to the second grade. "Teacher," one of the boys said, "I sure do like you. I'd like to stay in first grade FOREVER, but I've been promoted. Boy, I sure wish you knew enough to teach me in the second grade."

In the school of faith, it's time that we move on and it is the Holy Spirit who will give us help through primary faith, sustaining faith, and progressive faith.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 12

At the conclusion of the sermon, dismiss the congregation and go to the fellowship hall where a thanksgiving meal has been prepared. At the mealtime, have several give testimonies of thanks and have special music with the same theme. Include children and teens during this time of thanksgiving.

*Albert M. Wells Jr., *Inspiring Quotations* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), 86.

A COMMUNION MEDITATION

Luke 5:12-15

INTRODUCTION. Dr. H. W. Jowett wrote: "I saw two men fishing on the banks of the same river. One had placed his rod in position, and fixed in a heap of stones, and then sat down to smoke. The other made the line thrill with living touch, and sent life into the very bait as it trembled on the water. The mechanical fisherman caught little or nothing; the fisherman with the living touch had powers of almost compulsory allurements. The fish which we have to catch as fishers of men know the difference between life and earth, between mechanism and soul. The heart yields to the touch of affection."¹

The Bible tells us that Jesus touched people's lives and He touched them repeatedly. The four Gospels inform us that over 30 times Jesus' touch transformed human life.

I. THE TOUCH OF LOVE

Thought: The biblical account tells of a man with the most dreaded of ancient diseases—leprosy. Anyone who had this affliction was to stand up when anyone drew near him or her and shout out, "Unclean, unclean." Jesus drew them in close enough to touch.

A. Jesus' touch broke with tradition.

1. The "church" good-folks would not go near him or her.
2. The priests would not go near him or her.
3. The person's family would not go near him or her.

B. Jesus' touch identified the man's problem.

Thought: Jesus on the Cross identified with humankind's ultimate problem. His love touch is what we all need. That love says, "I care for you!"

II. THE TOUCH OF LIFE

Here was a man full of leprosy. He was on the garbage dump of life when he came into contact with Jesus. His life for all practical purpose was empty, destroyed, useless, and then Jesus came along and changed its meaning around.

A. Life comes when we are willing to be changed.

B. Life comes when Jesus powerfully touches us forever. Power will come as the way is paved with prayerful commitment (Derl Keefer).

Quick ideas:

1. "Religion can offer a burial service, but Christ offers every man new, abundant, and everlasting life" (Wilma Reed).
2. "Life is a lesson in humility" (James M. Barrie).
3. "Saying yes to God means saying no to things that offend God" (Morgan Derham).

Maude Louise Ray wrote *My Task*:

*To love someone more dearly ev'ry day,
To help a wandering child to find his way,
To ponder o'er a noble thought, and pray,
And smile when evening falls
This is my task.
To follow truth as blind men long for light,
To do my best from dawn of day till night,
To keep my heart fit for His holy sight,
And answer when He calls.
This is my task.²*

III. THE TOUCH OF LIBERTY

A. Jesus gives instructions on worship.

1. Sacrifice from our mouths. PRAISE.

Samuel Brengle said, "Praise is almost the only thing we do on earth that we shall not cease to do in heaven."

2. Sacrifice from our lives.

Augustine told that the "Christians should be alleluia from head to foot."

3. Sacrifice from our hearts.

There is the sacrifice of offering. "All we can hold in our cold dead hands is what we have given away" (Anonymous).

B. Jesus gives instructions as to witnessing.

The healed man followed the instructions of Jesus to go and show himself to the priest. Imagine what that moment must have been like as the cleansed leper shared the excitement of Jesus' healing.

CONCLUSION: Jesus wants to touch your life and heal your body! Let's close with the song "He Touched Me."

2. Vernon McLellan, *Timeless Treasures* (Here's Life Publication, 1992), 193.

Variety Ideas for Sermon 13

Prepare tables ahead of time and designate one person to be the leader. At the conclusion of the sermon dismiss the congregation to the fellowship hall where the tables have been prepared with juice and bread. Have the leader share a testimony and ask if anyone else would like to give a testimony as well. Then have prayer requests and then share Communion as the pastor gives the directions.

1. G. B. F. Hallock, *Five Thousand Best Modern Illustrations* (New York: Richard Smith Publishers, 1931), 704.

*Holiness theology didn't begin
with John Wesley.*

Holiness theology began with

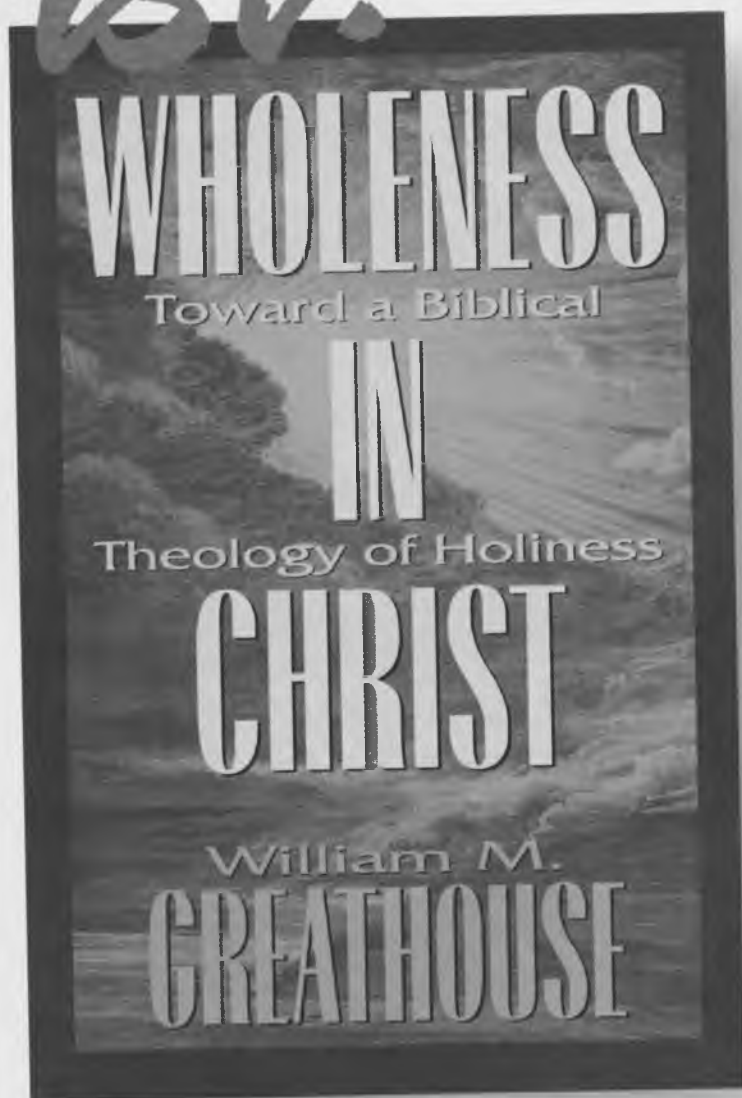
Christ.

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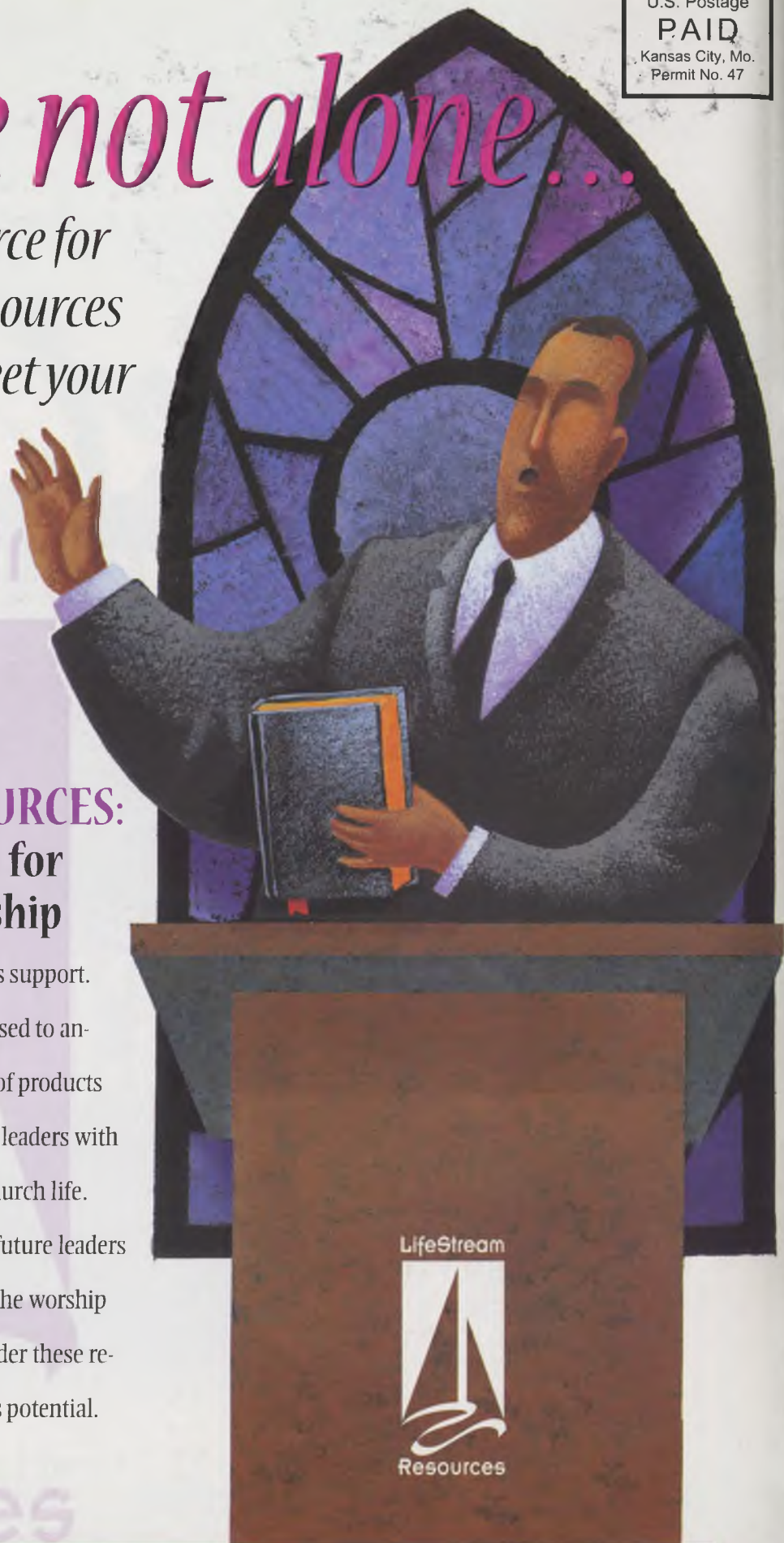


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