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Contents

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2006

FRONTLINE MAGAZINE

VOLUME 16 • NUMBER 6

6 Where Is Christ in Christmas?

Scott Aniol

Believers have cause for concern regarding the increasing secularism of modern society, but we must be careful not to make “putting Christ back in Christmas” a Biblical obligation.

10 The Seeking Shepherd

Charles Mellring

When the Good Shepherd, the Seeking Shepherd, in concern, compassion, and care, sets us free, we are free indeed!

11 The One Lost Sheep

Mark Johnson

I cannot do anything to make God love me any more or any less, because His love is not based on *my* behavior, or *my* faith, or *my* attitude—or on anything else about *me*. God’s love for me is based solely on *who He is*—the kind of God He is.

16 The Light of the World

Stephan Caesar

It is not wisdom and education that can turn sinful, rotten humanity around—it is the message of the gospel, a message found nowhere else but in the Bible.

22 Book Review

Layton Talbert

14 Always Yes

Aaron Blumer

There is a prayer that God always answers with a “yes,” no matter who you are or what kind of life you have lived.

18 God’s Gracious Gift

Warren Vanhetloo

All we have and are, we have received from a giving, gracious God.

Departments

4 Mail Bag

5 On the Front Line

A Psalm from the Shepherd’s Fields
John C. Vaughn

20 On the Home Front

25 Wit & Wisdom

David Atkinson

26 Ladies’ Circle

Stranded on Christmas Eve
Barbara Harper

29 The Evangelist’s Corner

Bringing Others to the Truth
Jerry Sivonksty

30 At a Glance

The Book of Hebrews
Layton Talbert

33 Newsworthy

Robert Condict

35 Global Focus

Pearson Johnson

37 Chaplain News

Dan Hall

39 Behind the Lines

An Unparalleled Announcement!
Chuck Phelps



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In my opinion the *FrontLine* article "A Sovereign Mandate" has some valid points, but it also has flaws. Do we just lie down and let the military brass run over us, or do we use every legal means that we have to preserve our freedoms? If our government is "we the people"—are we not "the people"? And if we are the people, then we ought to BE the people who actively participate in the system.

If an executive order is available to us, should we not use it? But if the executive order is not a top-of-the-line defense, should we not also go for a congressional decision—and should not that congressional decision be nothing less than a bold reaffirmation that our liberty to worship as we wish is a GOD-GIVEN liberty—not a government-granted one?

Regarding God's sovereignty—it is true, God is sovereign; but does God's sovereignty negate our responsibility? Do we deny God's sovereignty when we go to the polls in November? Do we deny His sovereignty when we try to overturn abortion or special rights for gays? I think not. Then why

are we denying God's sovereignty by using every legal means at our disposal to accomplish our goals in this issue at hand? The fact that we are active in our political/constitutional concerns does not mean that we are depending on our government; it means that we are depending on our God to use us as we pursue every means possible to protect our God-given liberties. The apostle Paul used every legal means for himself—is it wrong for us to do so also?

It is true that praying in Jesus' name should not be an issue for debate, argument, or legislation—but it has become that. Do we therefore back out of debate and discussion?

Another thing: who made the rule that the battle for praying in Jesus' name should not be waged in courtrooms and congressional floors? And who made the judgment that the battle is most effectively waged on the front line only? Consider the logic of that! Do not generals and captains wage war on the strategy boards long before the troops begin firing shots from foxholes?

*Pastor David Harper
Wakarusa, IN*

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A Psalm from the Shepherd's Fields

John C. Vaughn

David wrote many psalms in many circumstances, but the 23rd is the most well known and most beloved of all. It was born in the shepherds' fields and guides us into deeper love and trust for our Great Shepherd. We return to it again and again, not to look for previously unseen and spellbinding meaning (though we sometimes find it!), but to rest in its well-known truth. Come again to this psalm of the Shepherd's field and gaze on Him there.

The psalm begins right where the Christian life begins, with a personal relationship with the Shepherd. This is no mere metaphor, for David did not say, "The Lord is like a shepherd." He, like the confident Christian, proclaims, "Jehovah is *my* Shepherd." Because Jesus Christ protects him and provides for him just as a patient, watchful shepherd does for his sheep, the Christian realizes, "I shall not want—I have everything I need to do God's will for my life." The present reality of that marvelous first verse leads right into the future tense of verses 2 and 3.

He will share His life *with* you, providing rest and refreshment as He "makes you lie down in green pastures" and "leads you beside still waters." He will give His life *for* you, providing restoration as He "brings back your soul" giving you eternal life. He will put His life *in* you,

producing revival, as He "leads you in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Your personal relationship with Christ begins at salvation and should grow closer as you grow older. A deepening relationship with your Shepherd includes more talking *to* Him as well as talking *about* Him. Notice the shift from "he" to "thou" in verse 4 as the psalmist considers not only his life but also his death.

David did not say, "The Lord is like a shepherd." He, like the confident Christian, proclaims, "Jehovah is my Shepherd."

The Christian doesn't need to fear the tomb. Natural life leads to the grave, but the grave has lost its sting. The resurrection of Jesus Christ ensures you that death's mere "shadow" cannot harm you. Your Divine Shepherd will not leave you. You have nothing to fear, for He is with you! You are secure in Him, for your Divine Shepherd will not lose you. Take comfort in His protection as He guards you with His rod and guides you with His staff.

He is the Good Shepherd indeed. Not only are you free from the fear of the tomb, but you need not fear any torment. The same love that casts out our fear of death removes the torments of life. Every form of physical hunger, though very real, is diminished at the table of God's blessings for the heart. Physical injury, though often severe, should only remind you of the healing ointment for your soul. In all of life's turmoil, take refreshment in His tonic for the soul; let Him "anoint your head with the oil" of His gladness, and let your "cup run over"

with His blessings.

First John 4:18 tells us, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." There is the key to the Shepherd's care—His love! We know that "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." There is no greater love. Christ Himself said so in John 15:13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." He proved it on the cross and explained it in John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

In Christ, you will never walk the Shepherd's fields alone. You have a Helper as long as you are here. His "goodness" will guide your steps, and His "mercy" will be there when you stumble. There is no fear, no shame, no dissatisfaction in being one of God's sheep when you rest in your Shepherd's love. David served in the shepherds' fields while God was preparing him to reign as king. You must serve in your Shepherd's fields while God prepares you to reign with Him as King. This psalm from the shepherds' fields has comforted saints through the centuries, providing help right here and promising a home up there.

As we reflect on the marvel of our Savior's birth announced in the shepherds' fields, let us take comfort and courage that those who labor in His fields today will soon hear the announcement of His return, and we "shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever"!

Where Is Christ in Christmas?

Scott Aniol

Introduction

Christmas—a very mention of the word produces delight and expectation in the hearts of people everywhere. Or does it? For some Christians, Christmas is a much-anticipated season to celebrate the birth of Christ. For others, it is also a time to encourage family closeness and tradition. But still others refuse to celebrate at all, insisting that the season is rooted in pagan ritual and should be avoided.

Added to this controversy is the growing concern of many Christians to “put Christ back in Christmas” even while the expanding secular culture of commercialism is forgetting the Babe in the manger altogether. For instance, a national survey indicated that “just over a tenth of Americans today believe Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the focus of Christmas, with almost nine out of ten people saying the holiday has become less religious” (WorldNetDaily, Dec. 2002).

Much of the controversy for Christians, however, is largely due to ignorance and speculation. Add varying misinterpretations of Scripture to these, and you have a recipe for confusion. For believers on any side of the issue—whether a synthesis of celebrating Christ’s birth and family tradition, an insistence upon focusing on Christ alone, or a rejection of the season altogether—a clear understanding of history and the Bible plus reasonable common sense must rule any discussion of Christ and Christmas.

History of the Celebration

Much of the controversy surrounding Christmas is rooted in historical speculation. Countless arguments against celebrating Christmas have included stories of Druid tree worship, pagan festivals, and human sacrifice. A brief sketch of the history of the Christmas celebration may shed some light on the controversy.

Opponents of Christmas often insist that the Christmas celebration and many of the traditions that people use today have their roots in pagan worship traditions. They argue that early Roman Catholics merged their Christmas celebration with already established pagan feasts, compromising with the pagans in order to pacify them and maintain peace in the empire. Even if this were true, it would not necessarily discredit celebrating Christ’s birth on December 25th today (see Conclusion #3 below). Nevertheless, there is very little concrete evidence to support such claims.

It is true that Christians did not formally celebrate the birth of Christ until the fourth century. The only significant event that the early believers celebrated was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, evidence suggests there was a more calculated decision to celebrate Christ’s birth on December 25 than simply compromising with a pagan festival. In fact, some would argue that many Christians settled on December 25 as the birth of Christ *before* the formal pagan festival was instituted by Emperor Aurelian in 274.

Whether the Christmas celebration or the pagan festival came first, no one can argue with the fact that the celebration of Christ's birth eventually degraded into a raucous festival of drinking and revelry. In fact, after the Protestant Reformation, many Protestant believers were so concerned with what the Christmas celebration had become that they banned the festivities altogether. Christmas was outlawed in England in 1645 under Oliver Cromwell but was reinstated when Charles II ascended to the throne. Strong Puritans in early America outlawed Christmas from 1659 to 1681. Anyone caught celebrating was fined five shillings. This rejection of Christmas in early America actually helped the Revolutionary troops when General Washington attacked Hessian soldiers in Trenton, New Jersey, after crossing the Delaware on Christmas Day in 1776. Washington's troops surprised the German soldiers, who made a big deal of Christmas and were engaged in a drunken celebration of the event. Moreover, after the Revolutionary War, Americans were especially suspicious of any English tradition. In fact, Congress was in session on December 25, 1789, the first Christmas under America's new Constitution.

This all changed in the early 19th century. During this time, unemployment was high and gang rioting often occurred during the Christmas season. Class conflict was at its peak in America, and the lower classes would frequently stage violent protests during this time of year. These disturbances during Christmas motivated certain members of the upper class to begin to change the way Christmas was celebrated in America.

In 1819, American author Washington Irving published *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*, a series of stories about the celebration of Christmas in an English manor house. In these stories, Irving literally "invented" Christmas traditions, portraying this English squire as a kind man who invited peasants into his home for a "traditional" Christmas celebration. Also during this time, English author Charles Dickens penned *A Christmas Carol*, the classic holiday story emphasizing kindness and giving to all. With these publications, Americans re-invented Christmas and transformed it from a disorderly day of drunken indulgence into a family-centered day of giving and nostalgia. These sentiments have characterized the Christmas season since that time, but unfortunately, commercialism and greed have crept in and poisoned much of the good.

The Christmas Tree

Similar to arguments against the Christmas celebration itself, controversy surrounding the Christmas tree almost always

includes an insistence that trees were objects of pagan worship in winter solstice festivals. There may be some truth to these claims, but should believers reject legitimate uses of anything that has at one time or another been worshiped by pagans? Additionally, because evergreen trees remain green throughout the winter season, they have historically reminded people that the rest of the green plants would grow again when the sun was stronger and summer would return. For people around the world, evergreen trees have symbolized life and growth without any connotations of worship.

Trees have also had significance for believers, and most of the traditions connected with the Christmas tree today began as Christian customs. In the Middle Ages, about the 11th century, religious theater was born to help the illiterate masses understand the truths of Scripture. One of the most popular plays concerned Adam and Eve, their fall, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden was represented by a fir tree hung with apples. It represented both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The play ended with the prophecy of a coming Savior, and for this reason this particular play was often enacted during the Christmas season.

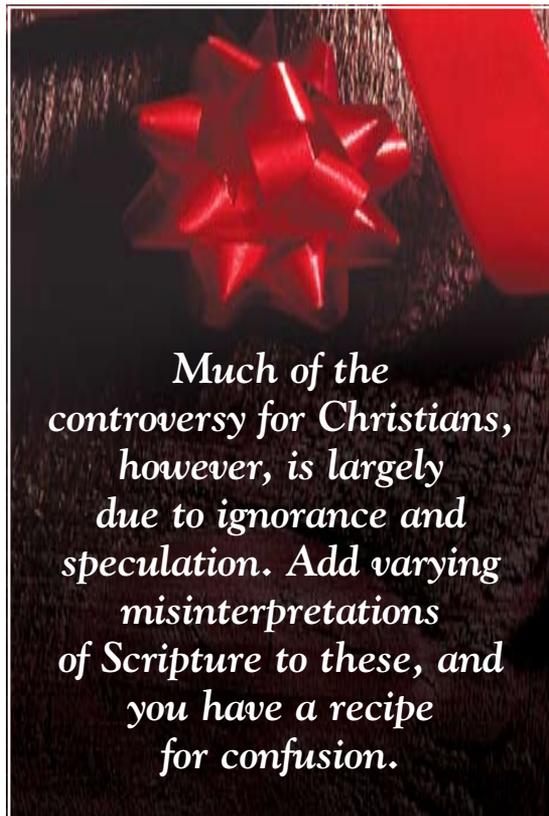
The one piece of scenery—the *Paradeisbaum* (the Paradise Tree)—became a popular object and was often set up in churches and private homes. It became a symbol of the Savior. Since the tree represented not only Paradise and man's fall but also the promise of salvation, it was hung not merely with apples but also with bread or wafers representing the crucified body of Christ, and often sweets representing the sweetness of redemption. The wafers were later replaced by little pieces of pastry cut in the shapes of stars, angels, hearts, flowers, and bells.

Eventually other cookies were introduced bearing the shapes of men, birds, roosters, and other animals. Martin Luther was the first to add lighted candles to a tree to recreate the beauty of stars twinkling amidst evergreens.

German and English immigrants brought the Christmas tree to America. Here, too, fruits, nuts, flowers, and lighted candles adorned the first Christmas trees, but only the strongest trees could support the weight without drooping. Thus, German glassblowers began producing lightweight glass balls to replace heavier, natural decorations. These lights and decorations were symbols of the joy and light of Christmas for many.

Santa Claus

Certainly the most offensive Christmas tradition to many Christians is Santa Claus. Even some believers who participate in other Christmas practices have



Much of the controversy for Christians, however, is largely due to ignorance and speculation. Add varying misinterpretations of Scripture to these, and you have a recipe for confusion.

strongly negative attitudes toward Jolly Old St. Nick. Again, some of this reaction is rooted in misunderstanding and ignorance.

The original St. Nicholas was a priest in the late third and early fourth centuries in what is now modern-day Turkey. He was known for his kindness, which included giving away all of his inherited wealth and traveling the countryside helping the poor and sick. He was also a strong opponent of Arianism and was persecuted during the reign of Roman emperor Diocletian. He later found more religious liberty under the rule of Emperor Constantine the Great and attended the first Council of Nicaea in 325. One of the best known St. Nicholas stories of kindness is that he saved three poor sisters from being sold into slavery by providing them with a dowry so that they could be married (he left gold coins in the stockings that the girls had left by the fire to dry). People began to celebrate his kindness on December 6, the anniversary of his death. Even after the Protestant reformation, St. Nicholas was revered, especially in Holland.

Dutch families who immigrated to America in the 1770s brought with them the tradition of honoring St. Nicholas on the anniversary of his death. The name "Santa Claus" evolved from his Dutch nickname, *Sinter Klaas*, a shortened form of *Sint Nikolaas*. The folklore surrounding this mysterious saint remained suspect for many non-Dutch Americans until the publication of a silly poem called "An Account of a Visit from St. Nickolas," attributed to a descendant of Dutch immigrants named Henry Livingston Jr. The poem quickly grew popular and soon became known by its first line, "'Twas the Night Before Christmas.'" Livingston's poem is largely responsible for the modern image of Santa Claus, a "jolly old elf" who descends down chimneys to give gifts to children, and his miniature sleigh led by eight flying reindeer, which Livingston also named. This pleasant picture of Santa Claus was further ingrained in American culture with a series of engravings by Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly* and a set of paintings by Haddon Sundblom that appeared in Coca-Cola ads between 1931 and 1964.

Replacing Christ?

One other significant modern Christmas practice that upsets believers is replacing "Christmas" with "Xmas." Many Christians insist that this is an attempt to take Christ out of Christmas. However, since the Greek letter that begins the word "Christ" is a capital X (chi), "Xmas" is simply

a shortened form of "Christmas" that has been used for hundreds of years in religious writings. The word "Xmas" is so common in advertising most likely because "Xmas" and "sale" have the same number of letters, and "Xmas" is significantly shorter than "Christmas."

Conclusions

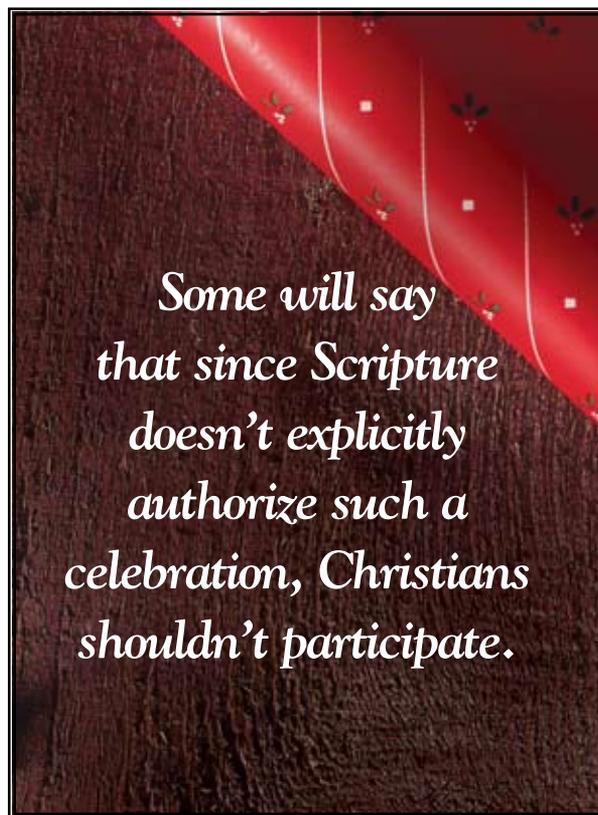
Arguments against celebrating Christmas or at least eliminating certain Christmas practices abound. Some will say that since Scripture doesn't explicitly authorize such a celebration, Christians shouldn't participate. But such logic carried consistently would prohibit myriads of other modern church practices, including, for instance, Thanksgiving. Others will try to appeal to Old Testament Scriptural passages that talk about cutting down wood for worship (Jer. 10:2-5; Isa. 40:19, 20; 44:14-17) to demonstrate that the Christmas tree is idolatrous and forbidden by God. However, even a cursory study of these passages will show that they forbid idolatry and not other legitimate uses of trees. Still others will cite the historical roots sketched above and insist that there is nothing Christian about Christmas. But anything neutral or good can be distorted and used by Satan for evil. This does not necessarily corrupt the activity itself.

After careful study and consideration, believers can use the following conclusions to help guide their attitudes toward Christmas:

1. There is nothing "holy" about Christmas. Colossians 2:16, 17 clearly states that it

is wrong to insist upon observing a particular religious festival. There is no Scriptural command to officially celebrate the birth of Christ, and if someone decides not to participate in Christmas activities, he is not disobeying Scripture. Furthermore, Christians should be careful not to view celebrating Christmas as a prescribed religious duty or a necessity for holiness. Believers have cause for concern regarding the increasing secularism of modern society, but they must be careful not to make too much of "putting Christ back in Christmas" as a Biblical obligation.

2. The general celebration of Christmas began innocently but developed into something displeasing to the Lord. History is clear that the raucous drunken orgies that grew out of the Christmas celebrations were certainly sinful and displeasing to God, and any pagan worship connections that may have existed in Christmas customs were ungodly.



3. The modern “re-invented” Christmas is sufficiently disconnected from its historical antecedents. While certain historical roots of Christmas were clearly corrupt, the motives behind the season’s “re-invention” and the subsequent outcome were, for the most part, wholesome and beneficial. Sentiments of giving and peace that abound even among unbelievers during this time of year are a clear demonstration of the common grace of God.

4. Christians should guard against the rampant commercialism and greed that dominate the modern Christmas season. Unfortunately, the vices of a culture driven by mass media and commercialism have slowly eclipsed much of the good that the season has to offer. Believers must not allow themselves and their families to be overcome with greed and materialism through the influence of pop culture. Additionally, some of the traditions surrounding Santa Claus may be harmful for Christians. For instance, telling children that they should be good because “Santa is watching” is deceptive at best and may actually confuse their views of God. How many professing believers view God as a “jolly old man” who threatens punishment for misbehavior but will always give gifts in the end?

5. The Christmas season can be a wonderful time for remembering Christ’s birth and the reason for His coming. While the Bible does not explicitly command believers to celebrate the birth of Christ, there is certainly nothing wrong with doing so. In fact, much profit can come from such an observance. Christmas can be a time to refocus one’s mind on Christ and the reason for His coming. The Christmas season can also be a ripe time for evangelistic opportunities.

6. The Christmas season can be a wonderful time to encourage family closeness and to foster wholesome

family traditions. Even unbelievers recognize the wholesome family sentiments of the Christmas season. This season is a wonderful time for relaxation and enjoyment with family members. Establishing family or church traditions during the season is a profitable exercise.

7. The celebration of Christmas is an issue of legitimate Christian liberty. Christians should look to the principles of Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8–10 when deciding how they will participate in Christmas customs. Every believer must be convinced in his own mind (Rom. 14:5), and he must not judge others who come to different conclusions on the matter (Rom. 14:3, 4, 13). There is nothing inherently wrong with celebrating Christmas or with a tree, presents, Santa Claus, or other traditions. Any one of them could be used for evil, but a person’s attitude and motives in their use determines their value.

Therefore, a believer can legitimately decide to do away with any observation of Christmas, or he can limit his observation to explicitly “religious” activities, or he can participate in all or some of the Christmas traditions and use them for wholesome purposes. Whatever one decides, he must not judge others who come to different conclusions.

Scott Aniol is associate pastor of First Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois. He is a frequent speaker on the topics of music and worship.

*Many have ascribed the poem to an Episcopal minister and theology professor, Clement Clarke Moore. Recent literary investigation, however, has revealed that it is more likely that Moore took credit for the poem for its financial profit (he didn’t claim authorship until the poem was well published) and that the poem was actually written by Henry Livingston Jr. See “Yes, Virginia, There Was a Santa Claus” in Don Foster, *Author Unknown: On the Trail of Anonymous* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), p. 222.

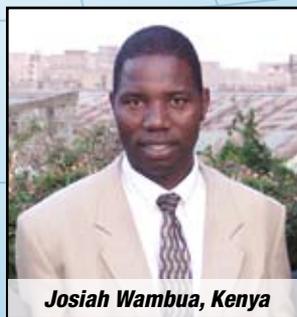
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The Seeking Shepherd

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:4-7).

The Word of God continually reveals aspects of truth that should encourage and enliven our devotion and dedication. Certainly, aspects of oft-taught and well-known parables should revitalize our discipleship.

In Luke 15 Christ teaches about the lost sheep, then the lost silver, and finally the lost son. Let us look a little more closely at the first of these parables, the lost sheep.

Christ pictures a shepherd, probably lying in his precautionary position as the “door” of the sheep. (The necessity of such a position was painfully brought home to the writer when he learned the hard way that if he was to keep his campers inside the cabin, the only sure way was to move his cot across the doorway!) Can you see the shepherd lying there, counting sheep—not to get to sleep but to be certain all were safe?

He realizes he has not one hundred, but only ninety-nine in the fold! Christ says the shepherd now becomes the seeker, leaving the ninety-nine and going after “that which is lost.” As he goes about from one possible place to the next, he thinks he hears something. Hark! Is that weak bleat the cry of my lost sheep?

Further searching and careful listening lead him at last to where his lost sheep is to be found. Verse 5 relates that the shepherd “layeth it on his shoulders,” which tells us that this was a young sheep—a lamb—small and light enough to be borne upon the shepherd’s shoulders.

The shepherd’s tender hands discover something else: instead of smooth waves of lamb’s wool, he feels briars, branches, and bits of various kinds of defilement. We need to remember that being a part of this world



Charles J. Mellring

(and, still worse, to return to its influence), we cannot escape unscathed from its stains and its stench. Like that sheep, we sometimes require the foot-washing of John 13:10.

I remember an occasion when my toy poodle became stranded in a clump of burdocks. The stickers in his curly fur kept him from escaping—indeed from walking at all—without a “shepherd’s” help. What a task, cutting away those burrs, freeing the poodle to walk again! But when the Good Shepherd, the seeking Shepherd, in concern, compassion, and care, sets us free, we are “free indeed”!

Now the shepherd calls a meeting. It is a gathering for the purpose of celebration and rejoicing. “My sheep, which was lost, I have found!” Is it not fitting for us to rejoice over the redemption of any sinner, as well as the restoration of any who has strayed?

Thank God for the seeking Shepherd! Ought we not to praise Him for His concern in becoming the Son of man in order that we sons of men might become the sons of God? And ought we not to praise Him for His shepherd’s care when He seeks to bring us back from selfishness to service, from foolishness to faithfulness?

May we remember that the lost sheep was one of His flock; as indeed the lost silver in the succeeding parable was one of ten pieces already owned; and that the man we call the “prodigal” was—and never stopped being—a son of his father. God is concerned with our consistent obedience (cf. John 14:15; 15:14). He equates obedience with our love and friendship to Christ.

But in those times—and they do come and will come—when we are “lost” as far as our fruitfulness and faithful service go, we must let the Holy Spirit remind us and reprove us as we need, in order for there to be rejoicing over our repenting.

The Son, the seeking Shepherd, rejoices over a lost sheep (Luke 19:10); the Sovereign, the Father, seeks truly repentant worshippers (John 4:23); and the Spirit, who lives in and never leaves any of God’s true “sheep,” seeks to glorify Christ (John 16:14).

Charles J. Mellring is a retired pastor and freelance writer living in Guy Mills, Pennsylvania.



THE ONE LOST SHEEP

From Victory to Defeat

Having been born into a Christian, Bible-believing family and saved at a young age, I chose a path early in life that led me to Christian service. Upon graduating high school, I went off to a conservative Christian college where I prepared for the ministry and then went into full-time Christian service.

After three very bad experiences in the ministry, I found myself “flat on my face,” defeated, depressed, angry, and bitter toward both God and man. After the third bad experience, I moved my family to South Carolina where I got a job in a woodworking shop. During the next couple of years I was so depressed and numb with pain that I have little recollection of what went on. Each day was just a blur. I thought antidepressants might help, but they did not do much for me.

I was harsh and constantly angry with my family, and did not want anything to do with anyone, especially Christians! I was ingrown and just wanted to be left alone like a wounded animal that crawls into a hole and won't come out—one that, if you reach out to try to help it, responds by attacking you.

My attitude toward the Lord was this: “God, I have tried to serve You with my life, and this is what You do to me! You ruined my life!” I decided that I would just quit, and I literally walked out on Christianity. I believed that if this was the way God and other Christians treated people, then it was not real, and it was not worth living for. In my view, God was aloof, uncaring, unloving, and impossible to please, just waiting for me to mess up so He could knock me over the head. Christianity, it seemed to me, was merely a way of life that people tried to conform to, and some were better able to conform than others.

All of my life I had tried to live the way I thought a Christian should live so that God would be pleased with me, but I never felt that I was good enough for Him. For me it was *hard* to be a Christian. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Christianity, to me, was anything but “easy” or “light.”

Living for Me

I decided to live solely for myself, doing whatever pleased me, so I withdrew from my church, my friends,

my family, and my wife. I went to work, did my job, and lived the way I wanted to live, much as a lost man might. I reasoned that no one else was going to make me happy, so I had to please myself. For seven years I lived totally for myself, making my family miserable. I got to the place where I was totally numb to anything spiritual, and what my wife, my kids, my church, my pastor, or even God Himself thought about me did not matter to me in the least. I was enjoying the freedom to live the way I wanted, and no one was going to stop me.

However, there were people who genuinely cared about me. My wife as well as some friends prayed faithfully, never giving up on me. One friend in particular spent a great deal of time with me, constantly inviting us over to fellowship with his family. Although he let me know that the way I was living was wrong, he was always patient, loving, and kind, and he never had an attitude of condemnation toward me.

After a few years of living an unfulfilling, self-centered life, I became very discontent in my marriage and decided that I would end it. When I told my wife that I was going to leave, she begged me to take some time to think about it, so I agreed to postpone it for one week.

That week turned out to be the turning point for my wife. God had allowed her to come to the place where she was utterly helpless, and the only thing she could do was to cry out to Him, and He made Himself known to her in a miraculous way. He showed her that no matter what I might decide to do, whether good or bad, He loved her and the kids and would take care of them. She experienced in full measure “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” and found that God really is enough. He gave her grace (something we had always heard about but had never experienced), and it totally changed her. In this deepest valley of her life, she had perfect peace. She had assurance that everything would be okay regardless of what I did because she now had a clear picture of the God who loved her and promised to take care of her no matter what.

The change in my wife was undeniable. Despite the many things I had done to hurt her, she freely forgave me and continued to be loving toward me. I could tell that the peace she had found was genuine. Although I never mentioned it to her, I could not help noticing it.

After that week I told my wife that I had decided not to leave. But she knew that she could not depend on anything

I said. I could still decide to leave at any time. Yet, trusting in the God who had shown Himself real to her, she had a calm steady, even joyful spirit, and I noticed it. She accepted the fact that I might never change, yet her joy and peace continued during the unsettling next couple of years, for she had learned that security is found in God alone. And while I continued to live in the same self-indulgent way, she just got sweeter and more submissive and more loving toward me.

Chinks in My Armor

Meanwhile, over the next two years, once in a while a preacher, a friend, or my wife would say something that would slip through a chink in my armor, and I would find myself thinking about it. And all the while my wife and friends were still praying for me.

My wife continued to live with me as the Bible admonishes women to live with their unbelieving husbands in 1 Peter 3:1-4: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without [a] word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."

Although she knew full well that I had no interest or discernment in spiritual matters, she would ask me spiritual questions because she knew that this was the right thing to do. She also asked me to make decisions concerning the family and submitted to me even if she did not agree. If she was afraid of a certain decision I made, she simply prayed and trusted the Lord, who never allowed us to make a foolish or sinful decision.

All of these things began to work in my heart and to have an influence on me. No one could have guessed that what they were doing or saying was having any effect on me because I never said anything. In fact, I really did not feel any different at all. Since I still felt nothing, I was completely unaware that anything was happening within me. At one point, I told my wife that if I ever did get right with God, it would be a miracle. She agreed!

A Wrong View of God

One night, when my wife and I were talking, I started on a tirade about God, saying some very ugly things about Him, to the effect that, if He is real, He is really mean. He had ruined my life, and I thought He was just capricious and vindictive. My wife, choking back tears, said, "Oh, I feel so sorry for you. God is not at all like that. He is good. He is kind and loving and forgiving, and He has been good to you." As I thought about it, I realized that what she was saying was true. God had been good to me. He had given me so much, but I was just focusing on what I perceived as bad in my life.

In June of 2000, Dr. Jim Berg held a seminar at our church, titled "Created for His Glory." My wife had paid for all of us to go, so I went. I was not afraid of hearing anything that might disturb me because I knew how cold

I was and that nothing he said could touch me. I was there just to satisfy my wife.

During the first three nights of the seminar, Dr. Berg talked about the attributes of God, of which I already knew, having studied theology for years. But then he gave a detailed description of just what kind of God He really is. When he talked about the power of God, I sat there, thinking, "Yeah, He is powerful, all right: He sure got me!" When he talked about the sovereignty of God, I thought, "Yeah, He's in charge all right, and He sure messed up my life!" I was so hard and cold and cynical.

Then, on Wednesday night, Dr. Berg began to talk about the *love* of God. Now, from childhood, I had been taught that God loves me. I clearly remember singing "Jesus Loves Me" as a toddler. I knew all about this love thing and did not believe a word of it! I saw God as anything but loving toward me. "He might love others," I thought, "but He doesn't care anything about me."

God's Perfect Love

But that night, Dr. Berg explained God's love in a way that had never occurred to me before. Tying in His love with all of His other attributes, he pointed out this:

- Because God is infinite, His love is also infinite—there is no end to it, and He cannot run out of love!
- Because He is perfect, He cannot ever love me any more or any less than He does right now.
- Because God is immutable, He cannot change; therefore, His attitude toward me will not change.

In order for God's love to change, He Himself would have to either improve or get worse, which can never happen. He testifies of His own character in Malachi 3:6: "I am the Lord, I change not," and James 1:17 tells us, "With Him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Hebrews 13:8 assures us that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."

We may change, circumstances may change, but God? Never! What a revelation! I had never thought of these things before.

As my wife and I were talking about it later that night, I began to *see*—to understand for the first time in my life the love of God as it *really* is. The more I talked about His love for me, the more the Holy Spirit began to reveal it to me, and for the first time in my life, I began to experience the reality and the magnitude of the wonderful love of God. It was so overwhelming that I began to weep uncontrollably. I could hardly breathe, weeping so hard, as I was flooded, filled, and swept away by the wonder of God's great love for me.

For the first time in my life, I saw that He really loved ME! Exactly as I was! It was life-changing, and I will never get over it. That night God Himself stepped in, opened up the windows of Heaven, and poured out His love all over me. I was thoroughly saturated with it.

A Changed Man

There were immediate and permanent results:

1. I was totally broken about my sin. I saw the horrifying magnitude of my wicked living and my

blasphemy against God—and I was so broken. The confession of sin just spontaneously poured out of my broken soul, and I genuinely *repented!* I did not have to think, “Oh, I need to be repentant now”—*nothing* could have stopped the tears of sorrow and regret for my sin against God.

2. I was filled with gratitude for God’s mercy and forgiveness. To think that the Almighty, Infinite God of the universe would forgive this little insolent punk who had been shaking his fist in His face was too much for me. I was overwhelmed with His goodness and mercy toward me. I knew that He had forgiven me, and I was so grateful.

3. I was overwhelmed with pity and love for all the people in the world, saved or lost, who have never experienced this wonderful love, and I had a great burden to tell them about it.

4. I was filled with *real* joy and peace. I knew that God loved me, and would take care of me as His dear child.

The very next day the Lord confirmed in my heart the reality of what He had done in my life the night before when the company I worked for began to lay off employees, letting about forty people go that afternoon. I had no doubt that I would be among those to be laid off since I was new and inexperienced. I prayed, “God, I don’t know what You are going to do in my life, but whatever happens, it will be okay because I trust You.” And I really did which was wholly unlike me! Before, I would have been anxious, making plans for what I was to do next, preparing my resume, etc. But this time, I had complete rest in my soul! This was no accident. I believe He allowed that situation at work to happen just to show me that what He had done in my life was real.

For the first time in my life, I understood that being a Christian is not about me. It is totally about Him. I understood for the first time that I do not have to try to *earn* God’s love because He already loves me with an infinite, unchangeable and perfect love.

There is absolutely nothing I can do that would make God love me any more or any less because His love for me is not based on my behavior or my faith or my attitude or anything else about me. God’s love for me is based solely upon who He is, the kind of God He is. It has nothing whatsoever to do with me. This truth is so liberating, and there is incredible peace, joy, and comfort in understanding this because it takes the “me” completely out of the picture and lets me rest in the assurance that He loves me and that this will never change.

Just as I delight in my own children, so God delights in me. He does not simply tolerate me: He actually likes me! He wants to spend time with me! These truths are both comforting and liberating. I no longer feel that I have to try to please Him in order to get Him to accept me; now I want to please Him because he has *already* accepted me in the Beloved.

I finally understand what Jesus meant when He said, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” It really is, because it is not *my* burden, anymore—it’s *His!* Praise the Lord!

Since Then

It has been six years since God opened my blind eyes and revealed His great love for me. Now I am joyful and content with my life, viewing the world through new eyes, and nothing is the same. I look forward eagerly to each new day because every day is an exciting new opportunity to know Him more and be filled to overflowing with the glory of His wonderful love.

The words of this sweet hymn have become the theme of my life, for they describe me:

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so!
Oh, this full and perfect peace!
Oh, this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.

Heav’n above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green!
Something lives in ev’ry hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
Birds with gladder songs o’erflow,
Flow’rs with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine.

The biggest blessing that came from this experience is that God has restored my family. The last two of my children have been saved since then, and all of them are experiencing a Christianity they had never known before. Each family member now has a sense of the reality of the love of God for him or her personally because each one has seen it demonstrated in my life and my wife’s life.

One of my favorite portions of Scripture is found in Joel 2:25. After God had sent His “army” of destructive insects to utterly destroy the crops of His disobedient and rebellious people, He made a promise to them that would be fulfilled whenever they turned back to Him. God told them, “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.” That is what He has done for me and my family. What a merciful and loving God He is!

I can take no credit for anything that has happened. God has done it all. I was a sheep who had wandered off to his own way. But by His grace, I have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of my soul!

Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

1 Peter 2:25: “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

Glory to His Holy Name!

Mark Johnson lives in Taylors, South Carolina, with his wife of twenty-five years. They are active members of Faith Baptist Church.

Always YES

It happens to all alert Bible readers sooner or later. We are reading and enjoying a Bible story when it suddenly seems to take a wrong turn. Of course, we know it couldn't be wrong. It's the Bible! But it doesn't feel right to us. At that point many of us ponder, pray, and do some digging, and, eventually, we find that it was, naturally, our thinking that was taking the wrong turn.

I had one of these experiences recently while reading through 1 Kings. In chapter 21, Ahab, the famously bad king of Israel (the northern tribes) has one of his many pathetic and slightly humorous episodes of weaseliness. Things take a rather deadly turn, and soon Elijah is pronouncing doom on Ahab's house. Ahab, no surprise, becomes suddenly devout and begs God for mercy.

This is where I began to feel a little irked: "Wait a minute, this isn't right. God actually *grants* Ahab's request? He gets away with his decadence? That's not how the story is supposed to go!" God's response to Ahab is recorded in 1 Kings 21:28, 29: "And the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days: but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

The story would have a different ending had you or I been in God's place that day. My answer might have been "Forget it, Ahab. It's too late to come asking for favors now. Drop dead."

But God's answer to Ahab's prayer is "yes," and if Ahab could receive a "yes" answer from God, it's hard to imagine anyone who could not. Maybe this is the point of the story. There is a prayer that God always answers with a "yes," no matter who

you are or what kind of life you have lived.

The prayer that God always answers with a "yes" is one that has three conditions. All three conditions must be met before the "yes" is guaranteed. But we can meet all three easily if we are willing.

1. It is the prayer of a sinner.

The first condition is one we all have down already. The prayer God always answers with a "yes" must be the prayer of a sinner. To fully appreciate this in Ahab's life, we have to go back to the beginning of 1 Kings 21. The story that unfolds here displays Ahab's character in all its greedy but pathetically weak glory.

The king notices a piece of property belonging to one Naboth. It's good land and is close to the palace, and Ahab's greed is awakened. He offers Naboth money (21:2), but the property has more than monetary value to Naboth. It has great family significance for him, and he will not part with it for any price (21:3).

Ahab goes home and pouts. "He laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (21:4). I doubt his display of woe truly moved the heart of Jezebel, his wife, but the situation looks to her like it might be fun, and she offers to fix everything and make poor Ahab happy again (21:7).

And “fix everything” she does. When we reach 21:16, she has arranged Naboth’s execution for blasphemy and proudly announces to Ahab that he is now free to take possession of the land. Without hesitation or remorse, Ahab does. But no sooner does he arrive but Elijah shows up to spoil the fun, pronouncing judgment on Ahab and his house.

Here is where we find a very strong statement about Ahab’s status as a sinner: “And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD” (1 Kings 21:20).

Ahab was not merely a sinner: he was a particularly fine example of the species. He had “sold himself” to sin. The writer of 1 Kings goes out of his way to make sure we see this, repeating and intensifying the description in verses 25 and 26: “But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel.”

Ahab deserved a special place in the sinners’ hall of fame. Yet, amazingly, it is this man who moves God by humbling himself in prayer. The prayer that God always answers with a “yes” is a prayer that comes from a sinner.

2. It is a prayer for mercy.

The second condition that must be met to guarantee a “yes” answer from God is this: the prayer must be a plea for mercy. Ahab’s motivation for humbling himself before God was Elijah’s pronouncement of doom in verses 21–24. It is aimed specifically at Ahab’s house and predicts a complete and very ignominious destruction, complete with post-mortem dishonor by means of dogs and vultures.

Ahab’s response (v. 27) is not all that impressive to us. It sounds like more pouting. “He rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.” But, in reality, this was prayer. We are not told what he said to God, but the “body language” is clear enough. Considering the source, Ahab’s prayers would not have equaled those of Daniel many years later. But they would have been feebler examples of the same cry for mercy: “I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan. 9:3)

Daniel’s “supplications” here were pleas for mercy for his nation (see also 9:18), and God’s answer was “yes.” He assured Daniel that the nation would not be utterly

destroyed or even permanently disabled, but, eventually, fully restored.

God answers “yes” to the prayers of sinners seeking mercy. Provided that one other condition is met, His “yes” is guaranteed.

3. It is a prayer of true repentance.

The third condition is that the prayer must spring from genuine repentance. While there is little in the passage to assure you and me that Ahab “meant business” here, God saw the authenticity of Ahab’s repentance. God reports to Elijah, “Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days.” Rather it comes in the days of his children. It’s mercy because Ahab will not be around to see it happen. No doubt, Ahab hoped for better, but given who he was, this was great kindness from God.

Naturally, we all feel that we’re made of nobler stuff than this Ahab creep. So it feels a little wrong to us that he finds mercy from God in this story. But the *reason* he does reveals a beautiful truth about God. There is something He, in all His holiness and perfection, finds irresistibly attractive: a humble, repentant heart.

Psalm 34:18: “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

Psalm 51:17: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

Isaiah 57:15: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Ahab still died a bloody and ignoble death (1 Kings 22:37, 38). Though his repentance was genuine, it was apparently limited to the particular sins involved in the Naboth affair, and Ahab continued to make foolish decisions. But at least once, he really did pray for mercy and really did find it. And if he did, surely anyone can. Surely we can.

There is one prayer God is always eager to say “yes” to: the prayer of a truly repentant sinner seeking mercy. Has some sin of yours disrupted your fellowship with God? Don’t let shame or guilt or fear keep you at odds with Him. Seek His mercy and cleansing today. If Ahab could find it, so can you.

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*Ahab
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The Light of the World



Stephen Caesar

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus told His followers, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). Christianity has indeed been the light of the world, always standing in opposition to the world’s great evils, be it slavery, abortion, infanticide, human sacrifice, or any such atrocity.

The mutineers of the British ship *Bounty* in the eighteenth century provide a particularly notable example of the beneficial nature of Christianity on sinful humanity. Led by Fletcher Christian, the mutiny on the *Bounty* overthrew the ship’s brutal commanding officer, Lt. Bligh. After Bligh and his loyal officers were set adrift, Christian led his followers to tiny Pitcairn Island in the Pacific Ocean, where they settled, along with six Tahitian men and several women.

The February 1988 issue of the journal *Smithsonian* featured an article on the fate of the settlers. “At first,” the journal reported, “Pitcairn was the Eden that Fletcher had envisioned.” However, according to Pitcairn Islander Andrew Young, a surviving descendant of one of the mutineers, things soon went dreadfully wrong. Young told *Smithsonian* that “the six Tahitian men were treated like slaves. . . . They were not allowed to own land and after a few years there were quarrels over the women.” As a result of this treatment, the Polynesian men rose up and killed some of the mutineers, including Fletcher Christian, and the remaining mutineers in turn killed the Polynesian men with the collusion of the women. Four years after landing on Pitcairn, only four original mutineers remained—sailors named Young, Adams, Quintal, and McCoy—as well as the Polynesian women and the children they had born to the mutineers.

Soon a new sin beset this island of Eden—drunkenness (cf. Rom. 13:13). McCoy, who had once worked in a distillery in Scotland, discovered how to brew a strong alcoholic drink from the roots of the native ti plant. Quintal went berserk while drunk on this concoction,

and Young and Adams killed him in self-defense. McCoy, in a drunken fit, jumped off a cliff into the ocean with a rock tied around his neck (cf. Matt 18:6). Adams, who by now had become an alcoholic, experienced what *Smithsonian* called “a religious vision,” and he quit drinking.

A Bible that had been brought from the *Bounty* sparked off Adams’ conversion. When

Young died of asthma, Adams, now a Bible-believing, soul-winning Christian, was the only surviving member of the original mutineers who had settled on Pitcairn. Under his guidance were ten Polynesian women and twenty-three children. Andrew Young, the descendant of the ill-fated asthmatic, told *Smithsonian*, “Luckily for us, Adams set the standards early on for being industrious and good Christians, and although he had a limited education himself, he taught all his descendants to read and write from the *Bounty* Bible.”

This couldn’t possibly be a more appropriate assessment of the true nature of the gospel of Christ. Jesus, for example, said, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes” (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21). In Acts 4:13 we read, “Now when they [the Pharisees and the Sadducees] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” It is not wisdom and education that can turn sinful, rotten humanity around—it is the message of the gospel, a message found nowhere else but in the Bible. Christianity is truly the hope and light of a sin-sick world, just as it was the hope and light of sin-sick Pitcairn Island.

Stephen Caesar is a freelance writer and professor living in Arlington, Massachusetts.

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God's Gracious Gift



Warren Vanhetloo

God is a giving God. His giving is beyond our full comprehension. His giving is not an occasional decision on His part; it is characteristic of His very nature. He gives because of who and what He is, not because of who or what we are.

God's giving is of grace. None of His abounding gifts to angels or to men are deserved. God owes no man anything. God does not need to repay a favor or seek another's favor. He does not give to gain. He does not give out of any obligation. All that God has ever given has been an expression of His free grace.

Men may give tit for tat. Aunt Sally will give me something special, and so I must give her something special. A gift exchange is often nothing more than that, a gift *exchange*. Even when the gifts are not appreciated, we say, "It's the giving that counts." God's good gifts may be unappreciated, but they are never impractical.

People who can afford to do so sometimes search out an unusual gift. It may be something the recipient will greatly treasure. It may only be something that strikes the giver's fancy. It may be given only for the momentary laugh of others when it is unwrapped. A few gifts leave the impression that the one giving it has taken the opportunity to display his great wealth, his exquisite expenditure for the occasion.

We can examine our own hearts to weigh the stimulus for our giving. We cannot see or comprehend the depth of the love of our gracious God that is manifest in His amazing giving to all men, and to His own.

God has given life. That's something no man can give. Parents have conveyed that life to us, and we should be grateful to them. But God gave it in the first place, and each new life is a part of His provision. We have ability to give thanks to our Creator each new day. We especially rejoice with each new life placed into our care. Life is precious, without question! And having eternal life is a marvel meriting our full appreciation.

God has given mankind an amazing world to enjoy and in which to prosper. Though disrupted by Satan, the regularity of the sun, moon, and stars is an asset every generation can depend on. The seasons, the rainfall, fruit in its wondrous variety, the riches of this world yet untouched by the Enemy are abundant provisions by our good God.

And the variety of His handiwork! It's beyond comprehension that every fingerprint is distinct, that each leaf is somewhat different from every other leaf, that DNA patterns are not only distinct but have the potential of bringing to fruition an individual slightly distinct and yet distinctly human! That we behold such gifts of His grace stirs our sense of wonderment. Then, when we realize that He had a design, a purpose for each one of us, we are stimulated to rejoicing and thanksgiving beyond measure.

This world, even disrupted by effects of sin, is so wondrous a gift of grace that our minds endeavor in vain to contemplate the environment of our eternal abode. Such graces have not even entered into the hearts of men.

Eternal gifts that await us are greater than our minds can conceive, but as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow morning.

In all history, no people has been as wondrously blessed by the good Lord as have we, who by His grace have been born in America or have had the privilege of residing in this nation. History books record mostly battles and conquests. More than any other nation, past or present, God has given America liberty and freedom. We appreciate and enjoy our freedom so much, we would like to see the rest of the world so blessed. The spread of democracy does not guarantee the arrival of freedom. The spread of the gospel can produce the hearts and minds to enable liberty to function freely.

Our nation has been free from the destruction of wars, with some exceptions, especially the terrorists' war waged against us. We have not deserved such by our merit, whereas other nations and peoples have suffered severe destructions, even genocide. We can thank the God who controls history for His special goodness to us. His gift of an undisturbed peaceful life is one we should treasure and endeavor to protect.

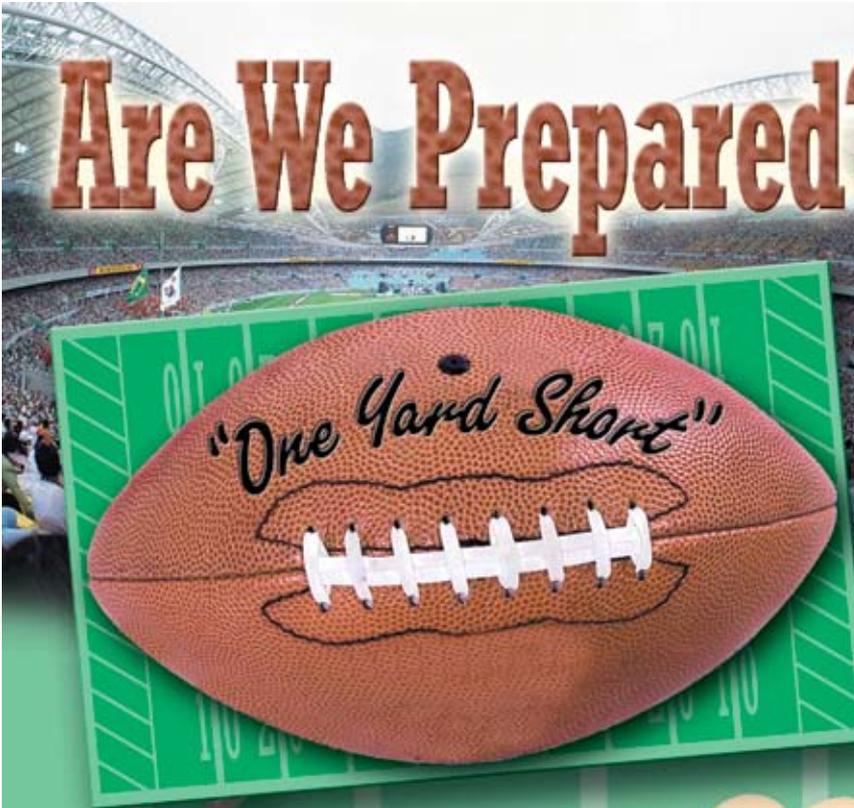
We in this century can be thankful for numerous "conveniences" of life. Inventions and productivity have been the apparent means; the providential control and guidance of our gracious God has been behind the scenes. We are the generation most favored through centuries of existence with more "stuff" to enhance daily life than we can assemble.

Medications and health care. The world may think of these solely as advances in science, as the achievements of human discovery. Of course, they were there all the time, a part of original creation. They are to be included in our list of God's gracious gifts. We should be thankful for the existence of them, for the discovery of the value of them, and for the abundant availability of medications and surgical advances for our benefit.

Every breath I take is a grace gift from my loving God, and when I fail to take another, the greater gifts awaiting in glory will be mine. I can and should thank my God for every special gift of life. All I have and am, I have received from a giving gracious God. In turn, I give Him thanks continually;

He deserves it. And as His child, I try to emulate His gracious giving in my love for the brethren, in giving to others, and in particular as I am able to give to the poor and needy who can give nothing in return, but deserve my love and care, because that's the way my Lord treats me.

Warren Vanhetloo, A.B., B.D., Th.M., Th.D., D.D., Adjunct Instructor in and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology, taught at Central and then Calvary Seminaries for over thirty years. He is now retired and residing in Michigan.



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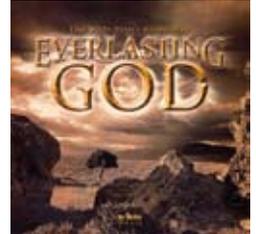
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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

God's Fellow Workers on Romans

Friday night and I'm home alone. My wife is at a ladies' missions meeting down at church. My oldest daughter and her husband left this afternoon for the WILDS, and my other two girls are away working in a neighborhood children's evangelism ministry.

So it's a quiet evening for tackling something I've needed to do for awhile, and that's to put together a helpful bibliography for those preparing to preach through Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The reason I say I've needed to do this "for awhile" is because it's been a full four years since I wrote an article for this column entitled "Approaching the Preaching of Romans" (*FrontLine* November/December 2002). Unfortunately, there wasn't space enough then to include an informative (and I'd hoped, inspirational) chat about the best tools for expositing this richest of all New Testament books. Maybe tonight I can finish that project.

I need to say at the outset that I certainly don't endorse every position taken by the commentators I'll recommend. Nor am I sympathetic with any compromised ministry associations they may have. Like many of you, I wish that there were major works by Fundamentalists that would preclude the necessity of our having to look elsewhere for good sources. Thankfully, there's an increasing awareness of our need to put time and resources into making it possible for Fundamental men to write substantive works, but for the foreseeable future we're going to need to continue using the works of brethren whose associations we can't approve. Hopefully we'll do so with discernment and not lose our

Scriptural objectivity toward them simply because they've written some good books.

Principal Part of the New Testament

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits"
(2 Tim. 2:6)

Before highlighting a selection of excellent helps, let me just urge the necessity of taking our people systematically through the Book of Romans, not just once, but even several times during the course of our ministries. That's because Romans serves a unique function in the canon of Scripture. William Tyndale, the first to give us Romans in a printed English testament, emphasized that *this epistle is the principal and most excellent part of the New Testament*. The French reformer John Calvin felt that *When anyone gains a knowledge of this Epistle, he has an entrance opened to him to all the most hidden treasures of Scripture*. Philip Schaff, everyone's quintessential church historian, heralded Romans as *the clearest and fullest exposition of the doctrines of sin and grace and the best possible solution of the universal dominion of sin and death in the universal redemption of the second Adam*. And Frederic Louis Godet, whose commentary, though dated, is still highly valued, ventured, *The probability is that every great spiritual revival in the church will be connected as cause and effect with a deeper understanding of this book*.

It's because of these characteristics that Romans has been historically the object of as much or more devout study by leading theologians and expositors as any book of the Bible. That's what makes it possible for any one of us to access world-class expositors ourselves before preaching it to our people.

The Options

Commentaries are of different types. Some are almost strictly devotional; that is, they're mainly the product of a warm, spiritual heart's meditation, and they're written almost entirely for the sake of applying those meditations to the hearts of other believers. This kind of commentary is typically written by a pastor. At

Inside

Bring . . . the Books—Key books for the pastor's study 5
 Straight Cuts—An exegetical study 6
 Windows—Themed sermon illustrations 7

the opposite end of the spectrum are commentaries dedicated to discussing the book's text in the original language. This kind of commentary is almost always written by an academician.

In between are two other sorts of commentaries that generally prove to be the most valuable to preachers. A significant step beyond devotional works, sets of printed sermons by expository preachers can amount to a running commentary on a Bible book. These can be of real interpretational value. Finally, and one more step removed from devotional works, are expositional commentaries based upon the original language text but written in such a way that a man need not have a mastery of the language in order to profit from the book. These are sometimes called "expositional" commentaries in order to differentiate them from what are termed "technical" works on the Hebrew or Greek text.

... Romans has been historically the object of as much or more devout study by leading theologians and expositors as any book of the Bible. That's what makes it possible for any one of us to access world-class expositors ourselves before preaching it to our people.

The Inner Circle

I want to start with the category of expositional works and suggest that after reading through Romans several times with nothing but an opened Bible, you spend a morning skimming back through the epistle section by section with Herman Hoyt's *The First Christian Theology* (1977). Past president of Grace Theological Seminary and Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, Hoyt was evidently a master educator, because his work on Romans is hugely helpful for its size (only 187 pp.). Its unique credentials for being your first guide through Romans are its (1) accurate section-by-section summaries in a (2) clearly marked expanded outline format based on a (3) dispensational, premillennial handling (especially of Romans 11). I'd be surprised if you don't come to *love* this little book.

Then you're going to want at least two or three really top-drawer expositors to discuss the text paragraph by paragraph and line by line. Pride of place goes to Douglas Moo's *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996) in the New International Commentary on the New Testament series. Moo gave twelve years to writing this work of over a thousand pages, and it shows. The meaty footnotes display a broad acquaintance with

the literature on Romans, both ancient and contemporary. Moo's discussions, even while untangling the thorniest syntactical or theological knots, are unusually clear and logically presented. His stance throughout is theologically conservative and unquestioning of the text's inerrancy. Occasionally he takes a position that many of us would not—for instance, that Romans 7:14–25 describes Paul's preconversion experience. But generally he does so after lengthy, respectful, balanced discussions. In the case of Romans 7, this amounts to over nine thoughtful pages, and includes the caveat that Christians do indeed struggle with sin in the manner described by Paul. Moo just doesn't believe that Romans 7 is written to discuss that particular struggle.

In 2002 Baker Academic Books issued a briefer work on Romans by Moo that is specifically focused on theological survey (*Encountering the Book of Romans*). This is an attempt to do on a more extended academic scale what Hoyt's survey does on a simpler, popular level. It includes stated objectives and study questions for the reader, as well as shaded inserts discussing key theological issues. It makes a good second-opinion overview after Hoyt but doesn't subdivide its discussions as manageably as the latter.

Moo's commentary will no doubt be the standard now for years to come. But there are at least two more relatively recent commentaries that also deserve to be consulted week in and week out during a series on Romans. The older of the two is Leon Morris's *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1988). A little more than half the size of Moo's work, Morris's nonetheless has all the same strengths—informed footnotes, lucid discussion, and conservative stance. In fact, although Moo is indispensable, Morris may be actually the first commentary you find yourself turning to, if for no other reason than that it demands less time and concentration.

I think what you'll find is that reading Hoyt first (for paragraph-by-paragraph survey), turning to Morris next (for analysis of the sentences), and then using Moo (for still more expanded discussions of the same sentences), creates an exciting and expanding sequence of enlightening teaching.

There's one more expositional work that I'd strongly urge be included in a core library on Romans, if for no other reason than to create a fuller discussion of debatable interpretations. It's Thomas Schreiner's *Romans* (1998), in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. Running to just a hundred or so pages less than Moo, it has the same strengths, including commitment to textual inerrancy, but frequently arrives at different grammatical or interpretational positions. For instance, regarding Romans 7, Schreiner defends the proposition, contra Moo (and Morris, who takes the passage to refer to a regenerate man's struggle with sin), that Paul isn't attempting to distinguish believers from unbelievers but is reflecting on whether the law has the ability to transform *anyone*, regenerated or not. Or as another illustration of Schreiner's counterpoint to Moo, the

latter interprets Romans 8:26 to teach that the Holy Spirit actually “groans” in a “language of prayer” intercession within a believer, whereas Schreiner argues that the groanings are the believer’s own, albeit originating from the Holy Spirit.

Even Schreiner’s overarching theme is different. Moo defends the theme of “the gospel,” whereas Schreiner opts for the more ultimate topic of “God’s glory,” especially as it’s displayed in His saving righteousness. Schreiner’s outline for the book is also slightly tighter thematically than Moo’s, and much more so than Morris’s. So it’s not as though reading Schreiner is redundant if you’ve read the others. And I find that “listening in” on the debates of really knowledgeable men about the finer points of theology sharpens my own perceptions, not only about the question under discussion, but also about theology in general. I carry away from the discussions a much-increased awareness of the need to consider carefully every option, weigh sufficiently all the evidence, and be slow to get dogmatic until I have done so. I might also add that the ease with which our people may now electronically access a variety of preachers and theologians increases the necessity of our informing ourselves about the varied interpretations of our texts.

The biggest drawback to Schreiner is format. Verse references are difficult to find. Often I flip pages backward and forward and backward again trying to locate Schreiner’s discussion of a particular verse or phrase. It’s frustrating. To make it worse, Schreiner’s writing is not as sequentially clear as Moo’s. Nevertheless, his commentary is definitely a work to be reckoned with. He’s done extensive work elsewhere on Paul’s theology (*Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, InterVarsity, 2001) and especially on his doctrine of the Law (*The Law and Its Fulfillment*, Baker, 1993). These broader studies add contextual breadth to his *Romans* that’s invaluable.

Before moving to another class of commentary, I want to say at least a word about five older commentators that conservatives highly esteem. The first is almost synonymous with Romans studies up until the last few decades: Charles Hodge (*Romans*, Banner of Truth rpt., 1972). Hodge taught Pauline Epistles at Princeton for fifty-six years (1822–78). His class on Romans was valued by the students as a *sine qua non* of their educational experience. Just a generation ago, Wilbur Smith, probably the world’s foremost authority on good religious books (he had something like 25,000 of them in his personal library), offered that *when one is studying the Epistle to the Romans, no matter what commentary he has on the shelf, if Hodge is there, he will soon learn to turn to it first*.

Just last night a medical doctor friend who did ninety some hours of seminary work before going into medicine (and therefore ought to know his commentaries!) reminded me that when he taught through Romans at our church years ago he found Hodge to be invaluable, especially in the broad analyses with which he begins

each new section. These generally consist of just a paragraph or two that explain the argument of the section within its context from beginning to end. If they were combined by themselves in a single book, it would amount to something along the line of Hoyt’s survey, but even more expositional in nature.

Then there’s the even older work first published (I believe) in 1839 by Robert Haldane. Haldane was a Scottish Baptist (can you believe that!) who engaged in extensive evangelistic and revival work in his native Scotland in the early 1800s. Later he spent three years in Geneva, Switzerland, teaching on the college level. His commentary is the fruit of that teaching, combined with a fervent, devout evangelical spirit.

A third older, expositional work is one I briefly mentioned earlier, the commentary by Frederic Louis Godet (Kregel rpt., 1977). This nineteenth-century Swiss reformer was also a professor New Testament exegesis. He stood firmly against theological liberalism and helped found a conservative church. One of the strengths of all of Godet’s commentaries (he wrote works on Luke, John, and 1 Corinthians as well as Romans) is his careful attention to the logical progression of a book, passage by passage. On some passages he’s nearly the only commentator to give any extended discussion of this.

Then I’d highly recommend the former assistant superintendent of Moody Bible Institute, William R. Newell. He was an outstanding Bible teacher, used not only to instruct thousands of believers but also to bring many lost people to Christ. His nearly 600-page commentary (Moody, 1938) is a delight to read, even though its comments occasionally drift from the text. He’s unafraid of applying passages forcefully, providing a preacher with a necessary balance to works distressingly devoid of unction. In addition, he’s dispensational and premillennial.

Lastly in this category of expositions, I’d recommend John Murray’s *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1959). Actually, it’s probably one of the top four or five of its category, although a little ponderous. The format, however, is easy to follow, and the text is unencumbered with a minimum of footnotes and peripheral discussions.

Commentary on the Greek Text

For those with the ability to follow a commentator on the Greek text, there’s really only one truly great commentary: C.E.B. Cranfield’s two-volume *Romans* (T. and T. Clark, 1975 and 1979) in the International Critical Commentary series. I suppose that it will someday be bettered, but it’s difficult to see how. Be warned, Cranfield is not an inerrantist. Far from it. Of a textual variant he writes, *It would seem that we are justified in regarding it as a simple mistake, whether of Paul himself or of Tertius* (1, 237). Neither is Cranfield entirely orthodox. His view of the incarnation is *that the Son of God assumed the selfsame fallen human nature that is ours, but that in His case that fallen human nature was never the*

whole of Him—He never ceased to be the eternal son of God (I, 382).

What we're using Cranfield for, however, isn't what he thinks the text *means*, but his obvious mastery of the lexical and syntactical nuances of what it *says*. (Having said that, I need to clarify that this isn't to say that a man's theological presuppositions don't influence his exegesis. But in Cranfield's case, you'll nearly always find that the orthodox view of a text's meaning is offered as a possibility along with any doctrinal aberration he embraces personally. In other words, our view as Fundamentalists tends to get a pretty exegetically objective hearing from him.)

For textual analysis, Cranfield is without peer. Take for example a critical expression found at both the opening and closing of the book, "obedience to the faith" (1:5) or "obedience of faith" (16:26). This expression is precisely the same in the Greek text. Paul states it as the objective of his apostleship among all nations (1:5). So it's no small issue as to what it means. In fact, because it combines the words "obedience" and "faith," it has massive implications for both justification and sanctification.

Moo and Schreiner discuss the two major views ("faith's obedience" or "the obedience which is faith") and each concludes that both must be included—that is, that faith is the obedience to the gospel that God requires (Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8) and that genuine saving faith obeys God. Cranfield, however, lists and discusses seven (!) grammatical possibilities, concluding that "the obedience which consists in faith" is the right meaning. He rightly explains, *Paul's preaching is aimed at obtaining from his hearers true obedience to God, the essence of which is a responding to His message of good news with faith. It is also true to say that to make the decision of faith is an act of obedience toward God and also that true faith by its very nature includes in itself the sincere desire and will to obey God in all things.*

Expositional Sermon Series

Since the days when Donald Grey Barnhouse's were the messages that everyone thought of when a printed set of sermons through Romans was wanted, there have been two preachers whose printed expositions on Romans have exceeded the profitability of even what Barnhouse did. The first is David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who preached through Romans successively on Friday nights at Westminster Chapel in London over the space of 13 years (1955–68) but was prevented by failing health from advancing further than chapter 14.

Lloyd-Jones' messages have been printed by both Banner of Truth and Zondervan. They are characterized by careful handling of the original text,

penetrating analysis of its theology, and expansive application to men and women in the modern world. The sermons, however, are not difficult reading. I might add, as well, that on some of the finer points of a text's meaning, Lloyd-Jones is almost the only thorough help one finds.

I hesitate to push these sermons too hard due to the number of volumes (fourteen) and the accompanying expense. But really, it would be difficult to overrate the value of this preaching. It's not merely the sermons' thoroughness, but even more so their preacher's towering intellect combined with deep spirituality. In his annotated bibliography of books for ministers, Cyril Barber says, for instance, of the sermons on Romans 8:17–39, *As examples of expository preaching, these must rank among the choicest works of Christendom and should be accorded a place alongside those of Calvin, Jewel, Manton, and Sibbes.* Even if you were never to preach through Romans, I feel certain that if you purchase a volume merely for your own profit and begin to read through it a few pages at a time during your devotional time . . . you'll rise in the presence of God.

The other printed set of sermons that you'll find invaluable is the four-volume set by James Montgomery Boice (Baker Books). Boice was pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia from 1968 until his death in 2000. His preaching through Romans consists of 239 messages. They are not as exegetically thorough as those of Lloyd-Jones. Boice will often take only the main points of his text and then expand upon them from either Biblical or systematic theology. So one does not have here the same kind of line-by-line exposition that makes Lloyd-Jones so valuable. However, in some senses Boice's sermons are actually more helpful than Lloyd-Jones's. They are particularly good at sorting accurately through complex theological issues in language laymen can follow. Boice also draws frequently on church history for illustrations. I'd have to say that if there's only one printed set of sermons a man can have on Romans, this probably is his best choice weighing all things (practical helpfulness and cost, particularly).

The Issue of Dollars

Mentioning cost compels me to add a final word of encouragement to those who are really strapped financially. I myself was in that very position for many years, especially during twelve years of college and seminary work and then the lean ministry years immediately following. But I can testify that if a man will take this need before the Lord like every other matter of his "daily bread," and if he will make grateful and earnest use of what God then supplies, he will find his Heavenly Father pleased to place in his hands the tools he needs to do faithful work in cutting straight God's precious Word. In this as in all other areas, we often have not because we ask not. 



Mark Minnick is pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina, where he has served on the pastoral staff since 1980. He speaks frequently in churches and at conferences across the nation and ministers regularly on mission fields around the world.

Bring . . . the Books

Spurgeon and the Battle for Gospel Preaching

The unusual ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon has been chronicled in scores of biographies related to his life. One aspect of his ministry has received little attention—the controversy surrounding his practice of openly inviting all to respond to the gospel. The details of this controversy have been set forth by Iain Murray in his book *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Banner of Truth, 1995). In our day, a similar controversy is unfolding. Ironically, both sides claim Spurgeon as a champion for their views. Some whose preaching has a strong emphasis on human responsibility are inaccurately labeled as Arminian or even semi-Pelagian. On the other hand, those who espouse the Biblical teachings that Calvin later adopted are accused of holding a twisted and deadening theological system. Opposing beliefs are so misrepresented as to be unrecognizable to those said to hold them. Spurgeon found himself embroiled in similar circumstances. Perhaps what he experienced will help both sides live together in truth and harmony.

Though he clearly did not espouse Arminianism, Spurgeon exercised a charity toward those with whom he disagreed that is sadly lacking in the present controversy.

There is no soul living who holds more firmly to the doctrines of grace than I do, and if any man asks me whether I am ashamed to be called a Calvinist, I answer – I wish to be called nothing but a Christian; but if you ask me, do I hold the doctrinal views which were held by John Calvin, I reply, I do in the main hold them, and rejoice to avow it. But far be it from me even to imagine that Zion contains none but Calvinistic Christians within her walls, or that there are none saved who do not hold our views. Most atrocious things have been spoken about the character and spiritual condition of John Wesley, the modern prince of Arminians. I can only say concerning him that, while I detest many of the doctrines which he preached, yet for the man himself I have a reverence second to no Wesleyan; and if there were wanted two apostles to be added to the number of the twelve, I do not believe that there could be found two men more fit to be so added than George Whitefield and John Wesley. . . . I believe there are multitudes of men who cannot see these truths, or, at least, cannot see them in the way in which we put them, who nevertheless have received Christ as their saviour, and are dear to the heart of the God of grace as the soundest Calvinist in or out of Heaven.

Spurgeon also rejected Hyper-Calvinism and insisted on the necessity of preserving the theological tension found in Scripture regarding these matters.

The system of truth revealed in the Scriptures is not simply one straight line, but two; and no man will ever get a right view of the gospel until he knows how to look at the two lines at once. For instance, I read in one book of the Bible, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” Yet I am taught, in another part of the same inspired Word, that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.” I see, in one place, God in providence presiding over all, and yet I see, and I cannot help seeing, that man acts as he pleases, and that God has left his actions, in a great measure, to his own free-will. . . . That God predestines, and yet that man is responsible, are two facts that few can see clearly. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory, but they are not. The fault is in our own weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other.

I close with a portion of a message preached by Spurgeon on this topic in 1859 that is as relevant today as it was when it was first preached.

Even in Christian families, what evil will a distorted gospel produce! I have seen the young believer, just saved from sin, happy in his early Christian career, and walking humbly with his God. But evil has crept in, disguised in the mantle of truth. The finger of partial blindness was laid upon their eyes, and but one doctrine could be seen. Sovereignty was seen, but not responsibility. The minister once beloved was hated; he who had been honest to preach God’s Word, was accounted as the off-scouring of all things. And what became the effect? The very reverse of good and gracious. Bigotry usurped the place of love; bitterness lived where once there had been a loveliness of character. I could point you to innumerable instances where harping upon one peculiar doctrine has driven men to excess of bigotry and bitterness. And when a man has once come there, he is ready enough for sin of any kind to which the devil may please to tempt him. There is a necessity that the whole gospel should be preached, or else the spirits, even of Christians, will become marred and maimed. ☞

“. . . when
thou comest,
bring with thee
. . . the books”
(2 Tim. 4:13)

Dr. Sam Horn is Executive Vice President of Northland Baptist Bible College in Dunbar, Wisconsin.

This inspired text penned by the ancient prophet Habakkuk is quoted three times by two NT authors. In the NT, the prophet's profound utterance comprises the "soul of Pauline theology."¹ Boice comments, "This is a great text. It could even be called the great text of the Bible. To understand it is to understand the Christian gospel and the Christian life." Nevertheless, this text presents several challenges. First, does "just" refer to forensic righteousness, ethical righteousness, or both? Second, does "faith" refer primarily to an active sense of steadfast trust or a passive sense of faithfulness?

Though the word translated "just" often refers to the righteousness of God, the majority of times it is used in reference to man. The question is whether it is valid to categorize "just" in Habakkuk 2:4b as ethical righteousness. In the context of Habakkuk's prophecy, "just" implies a practical conformity to an ethical standard, namely God's. Hill concludes that "the fundamental idea" of the word is "conformity to a norm which requires to be defined in each particular case."² In this "particular case," Habakkuk contrasts the "wicked" with the "righteous" (1:4, 13), indicating that an ethical/moral concept of righteousness is primarily involved here. The *waw*-adversative in 2:4 indicates a contrast between one who is righteous and one who is arrogant.

However, ample support exists for interpreting "righteous" with a judicial sense as well. O. Palmer Robertson argues, "The concept of righteousness . . . in the OT develops a distinctive flavor in that it is bound inseparably to the idea of judicial standing. . . . Considering the legal bond lying at the foundation of Israel's covenant relation to God, how could it be otherwise?"³ Vos echoes this idea by insisting that a "judicial substratum" is to be observed throughout the whole assortment of contexts where "righteous" occurs. Though the primary intention of Habakkuk seems to be ethical, this does not preclude the idea that those who are ethically righteous conduct themselves as such on the basis of a judicially imparted righteousness in accordance with the paradigm of Abraham's belief and subsequent judicially righteous standing (Gen 15:6).

It is clear that "just" has two aspects. Habakkuk apparently assumes the judicial aspect based on OT usage and the paradigm of Abraham's belief in Genesis 15:6, but emphasizes the ethical or religious aspect in order to warn the unrighteous of their impending doom and encourage genuine faithfulness for those who are true followers of Yahweh.

The second tension is whether "faith/faithfulness" is active or passive. "By his faith" modifies the verb "shall live." "Faith" is, therefore, crucial to the survival of individuals ("his faith") who are genuinely righteous (both forensically and as a result ethically righteous). Though

"faith/faithfulness" carries a basic meaning of "firmness, steadfastness, [and] fidelity" (BDB; Gesenius), the meaning of the term and its importance for Habakkuk 2:4b should be determined largely from its use in the Hebrew Bible. Bryant has examined every occurrence of this term in the OT. He concludes, "The primary meaning is that attribute of God, closely associated with *hesed* (covenant faithfulness), which denotes steadfastness, unwavering faithfulness, loyalty to Yahweh and His Word."⁴ The prefixed preposition ("by his faith") presents "faith" as the instrumental agent of the life provided in the passage.

On the other hand, the active sense of "faith" is derived from the *hiphil* form of "believe," which means "trust." This relationship of the noun to the verb supports an active sense, indicating a "trust" that places unreserved reliance upon something outside of itself (Gen 15:6). "It must be carefully maintained that neither the Old nor the New Testament separate[s] faith from its fruits of faithfulness. The distinction between faith and faithfulness is somewhat artificial, for . . . in the long run they are the same thing. The Bible knows nothing of a true faith which does not hold fast its confidence to the end" (Bryant).

In summary, the antithetical parallelism in Habakkuk 2:4, 5 contrasts the character and destiny of the righteous (in both the forensic and ethical aspects) with the unrighteous Chaldeans and ungodly Judeans. The unrighteous/unjust individual displays a heart lifted up in pride, a wickedness of life, and his/her destiny is that of death and eternal destruction. The righteous one believes in Yahweh, is accepted by Him on the basis of imputed righteousness, and as a result is upright in life, destined to life in its fullest sense of divine favor.

Habakkuk 2:4b is justifiably used by Paul to support his argument for forensic justification by faith in an active sense (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11) since "righteous" and "faith" are such theologically loaded terms. Since Habakkuk primarily emphasized the ethical and volitional aspects of righteousness and faithful faith respectively, the writer of Hebrews is equally justified in applying Habakkuk 2:4 to persevering faith and progressive sanctification (Heb 10:28). Neither the OT nor the NT separates faith from faithfulness or a righteous standing from righteousness. Faith in the Biblical sense of Habakkuk 2:4b is by its very nature faithful, without which no man can please the Lord (Heb 11:6). ☞

**"Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth"
(2 Tim. 2:15)**

¹ S. L. Johnson Jr., "The Gospel That Paul Preached," *BSac* 128 (1971): 327.

² *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings*, pp. 82–83.

³ Robertson, "The Justified (by Faith) Shall Live by His Steadfast Trust"—Habakkuk 2:4," *Presbyterian* 9:62.

⁴ H. S. Bryant, "The Meaning of Habakkuk 2:4" (Unpublished Bachelor of Divinity Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1966): 20–26.

Windows

Where Do You Place Your Trust?

Not in Arrogant Posturing

Frank Koch relates an incident that occurred while he was serving on a U.S. Navy battleship involved in training maneuvers. For several days bad weather had encircled the squadron. Fog hampered visibility and caused the captain to remain on deck to watch the activities. Shortly after dark a light was spotted off the starboard bow. To avoid collision the captain sent the signal, "We are on a collision course, advise you change course 20 degrees."

Back came the reply, "Advisable for you to change course 20 degrees."

The captain sent another message, "I'm a captain, change course 20 degrees."

The reply came back, "I'm a seaman second class, you had better change course 20 degrees."

Now the captain was furious and commanded another message be sent: "I'm a battleship. Change course 20 degrees."

Back came the response. "I'm a lighthouse."

The battleship changed course.¹

Do we stubbornly assume our course is correct and others must change? Or do we humbly seek God's evaluation and guidance? "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23, 24).

Not in Individual Intuition

During World War II, at 3:10 P.M. on April 4th, 1943, a nine-man crew aboard an American B-24 bomber, the *Lady Be Good*, took off from an air base in North Africa for a bombing raid over Naples, Italy. After flying over the site, the plane turned and headed for home. A brief distress call was heard around midnight, but the plane never arrived, resulting in one of the most baffling investigations in Air Force history. Although the plane contained enough fuel for a twelve-hour flight and the mission required only nine hours, for years it was thought the plane had run out of fuel and crashed into the Mediterranean Sea. However the plane had plenty of fuel—enough to overfly the airbase by almost 450 miles and crash land in the Libyan Desert region of the Sahara. Here it was found almost sixteen years later, in good condition, by a British oil exploration team. When discovered, the instruments were tested and found to be in working order. So what happened? Apparently at the altitude the plane was flying, on that fateful night in April of 1943, an unusually strong tailwind caused the plane to reach its destination ahead of schedule. When the flight instruments acted strangely, indicating they had passed their base, the crew thought the instruments were damaged, malfunctioning, or being jammed by the enemy. They lost faith in their

guidance system and continued on, and thinking they were still over the Mediterranean they flew into the desert.

People must have a standard apart from themselves and must have faith in that standard. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6).

Although the *Lady Be Good* was found in 1959, it took another year to find the bodies of the crew. They had parachuted from the plane shortly before it went down in the desert. While desert survival experts stated that the crew could have traveled twenty-five-to-thirty miles, or at the most not more than fifty miles in the 130-degree heat, the bodies of five of the men were found nearly eighty miles from where a parachute harness was recovered. On the body of Lieutenant Robert Toner was found a diary recounting the courageous effort to survive. Eight of the nine crew men survived the parachute jump, and, assuming they had slightly over-flown their base, began heading northwest. With only half a canteen of water for the eight men, they pressed on for eight days. When five men could go no farther, three continued on. One man went another twenty-six miles, another man traveled a total of 114 miles, and the body of the last crewman was never found. If the crew had had a map of the Libyan Desert, they would have found an oasis to their south at a distance slightly more than what they traveled. If they had traveled south instead of north, they could have come across their plane, where water was stored.²

In light of man's limitations, he must rely on the Lord. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Not in Uncertain Riches

The snowfall ended early in the afternoon on February 5, 2006, leaving an eight-inch deposit north of Detroit. Millions of football fans were waiting for Super Bowl XL to begin. About 1200 miles to the south and east, a 124-foot super yacht, the *Princess GiGi*, moved along the edge of the Bahamas as the crew watched the game on satellite TV. The low pressure system that had dropped snow on Detroit was now causing the winds to pick up and the waves to swell with heavy, intense squalls appearing on the local satellite imagery.

But the crew was unconcerned. The *Princess GiGi* had proven seaworthy, having been to New England and even Alaska. The exquisite ship was adorned with marble floors, glossy Australian silkwood cabinets, a hand-

"To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, 'A window shalt thou make in the ark.'"

Charles Spurgeon

carved jade and mother-of-pearl inlaid foyer bulkhead, and the beds were covered with silk bedspreads.

At some time on the evening of February 5, as the seas picked up, a failure with the fuel transfer pump caused the two 1800-hp engines to fail. Dead in the water, waves broke over the vessel, and tons of water sloshed inside, making the vessel dangerously unstable. Shortly before midnight, the captain radioed a mayday. The Coast Guard Air Station in Clearwater, Florida, dispatched a C-130 airplane while a helicopter from a base in the Bahamas began heading for the ship's position. At about 4:30 in the morning of February 6, the decision was made to abandon ship before the rescue helicopter, now low on fuel, had to return to base.

Our culture assumes that "bad things just aren't supposed to happen to beautiful people—or their yachts." The major lesson of the disaster of the *Princess GiGi* is not nautical or mechanical but rather one of attitude. "GiGi reminds us that the unforgiving seas care nothing for our social calendars, grand aesthetics or financial worth."³

The Bible calls a man who trusted in his wealth and ability a fool and warns us against being one who "layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:20, 21).

Not in False Perceptions

At times we tend to trust our impressions without knowing all the details. This is illustrated by a joke that has circulated on the Internet for a number of years. Someone even sent it to "Dear Abby" in November 2003, claiming that a friend had witnessed the occurrence. The fictitious story illustrates the danger of drawing conclusions merely on our perceptions.

A man was flying from Seattle to San Francisco when the plane made an unexpected stop in Sacramento along the way. The flight attendant explained that there would be a delay, and if the passengers wanted to get off the aircraft, the plane would reboard momentarily.

Everybody got off the plane except one blind gentleman traveling with his Seeing Eye dog that lay quietly underneath the seats in front of him.

The pilot approached the blind gentleman, and calling him by name, said, "Bill, we're in Sacramento for almost an hour. Would you like to get off and stretch your legs?"

The blind man replied, "No thanks, but maybe my dog would like to stretch his legs."

The people in the gate area came to a complete standstill when they looked up and saw the pilot, wearing sunglasses, walk off the plane with a Seeing Eye dog!⁴

Remember . . . things aren't always as they appear.

In a Trustworthy Guide

In early summer of 1928 the ocean liner *Tuscania* docked in New York City. On board was a young man named Morris Frank, who was returning from Switzerland where he had gotten a beautiful female German shepherd named Buddy. Buddy was a special

dog. She was the first Seeing Eye dog to come to North America. Morris Frank was blind, and he was on a mission to open a training school for guide dogs.

When Morris and Buddy arrived in New York, reporters were waiting hoping to find a story. A ship's officer directed them to Morris, a blind man with a dog who took him all around the ship. One of the reporters asked Morris if his dog could take him *anywhere*, and Morris assured him she could. "How about across West Street?" the reporter asked.

In 1928, West Street was better known to thousands of New Yorkers as "Death Street." Huge trucks, teams of draft horses pulling wagons, taxicabs, and chauffeured cars all battled for position.

While Morris Frank desired to publicize his Seeing Eye school, to step into West Street under the gaze of reporters could jeopardize his ambition. If he were injured or killed the world would know about it. But he accepted the challenge. Morris Frank tells what happened.

We entered a street so noisy it was almost like entering a wall of sound. She went about four paces and halted. A deafening roar and a rush of hot air told me a tremendous truck was swooshing past so near that Buddy could have lifted her nose and touched it. She moved forward again into the ear-splitting clangor, stopped, backed up, and started again. I lost all sense of direction and surrendered myself entirely to the dog. I shall never forget the next three minutes. Ten-ton trucks rocketing past, cabs blowing their horns in our ears, drivers shouting at us. . . . When we finally got to the other side and I realized what a really magnificent job she had done, I leaned over and gave Buddy a great big hug and told her what a good, good girl she was.

At that moment a photographer beside Morris exclaimed, "She sure is a good girl; I had to come over in a cab, and some of the fellows who tried to cross with you are still back on the other side!" Morris Frank was anything but passive as he crossed Death Street. He was keenly aware of the directions of his guide. Though Morris was blind, his faith in Buddy was not. How trustworthy is the object of your faith?⁵ Morris Frank went on to establish the Seeing Eye guide school in Morristown, New Jersey. The name for the school comes from Proverbs 20:12—"The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them." Look to the Lord.

1 Reported in *Proceedings*, the Naval Institute magazine, retold by Stephen Covey in *The Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 33.

2 Details drawn from the Classic Moody Science video, *Signposts Aloft*, and several websites detailing the story.

3 *Yachting*, September 2006, 90-93.

4 <http://www.snopes.com/humor/jokes/pilotdog.htm#refs>.

5 Morris Frank and Blake Clark, *The First Lady of Seeing Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1957), 39-40, quoted in Christian Overman, *Assumptions That Affect Our Lives* (Chatsworth, CA: Micah 6:8, 1996), 78-79. See also <http://www.seeingeye.org>.

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The Great Evangelical *Mea Culpa*

Layton Talbert

An anatomical anomaly is on the rise these days: many are giving evidence of an essentially Fundamentalist heart trapped in an Evangelical body. True, many well-known Evangelicals have succumbed to the Asa Syndrome—a combination of age and habitual accommodation. Others, however, have for years been sounding self-critical alarms about the direction of Evangelicalism with increasing frequency. Examples include David Wells, Millard Erickson, and R. Kent Hughes, among others. One of the more intriguing and recent examples is Robert Gundry's *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian* (Eerdmans, 2002). But first, a peak at the one who started this trend of self-criticism.

Three months before his death in 1984, Francis Schaeffer published *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Crossway)—a book he described as his “most important statement” regarding “the greatest problem we who are Christians face in our generation” (13). “Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for the truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely accommodation: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. . . . And let us understand that to accommodate to the world spirit about us in our age is nothing less than the most gross form of worldliness in the proper definition of that word. And . . . with exceptions, the evangelical church is worldly and not faithful to the living Christ” (37-38). Schaeffer identified biblical inspiration and authority as the “watershed” issue (44) that would determine whether evangelicals would end up in the ocean of truth or a sea of heresy. But the real watershed, Schaeffer insisted, was not merely a matter of academic doctrine about Scripture but an issue of obedience to it (61, 63). Then Schaeffer cited an intriguing example: “Something is profoundly wrong when a Bible teacher at a prominent evangelical college teaches that one of the Gospel writers made up some of the stories about the birth of Jesus, and that some of the things Jesus said as recorded in the Gospels really were not said by Jesus at all, but were made up by other people later.” Though Schaeffer does not identify the Bible teacher, Robert Gundry published those very teachings two years earlier in a controversial work titled *Matthew: A Commentary on His Theological and Literary Art*. That historical background makes Gundry's recent work all the more fascinating.

In *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian*, Robert Gundry joins Schaeffer's *mea culpa* chorus. Despite a lingering weakness on inerrancy, Gundry's contribution is a unique, enlightening, and genuinely profitable book that deserves a wide and thoughtful reading. Gundry aimed the book at the scholarly Evangelical community

(Subtitle: *A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America*). Some pages contain more footnote than text, and Gundry displays a proclivity for sentences of Pauline proportions. Nevertheless, at only 137 pages the book is not a difficult read. Its Biblical-theological insights into the Gospel of John coupled with its candid analysis of Evangelicalism make it well worth the modest investment of time and money required.

Gundry was not compelled to write “out of disturbance over seeing that North American evangelicalism is on the downgrade, and accelerating.” The book actually “had a biblical genesis.” Gundry was minding his own business, doing a detailed contextual analysis of John's Gospel, when he discovered that John's presentation of Jesus as the Word “dominates the whole of John's Gospel more than has been recognized before,” and that John's Gospel also demonstrates a “strong sectarianism” that emphasizes separateness and distinctiveness from the world. Those two discoveries led him to conclude that “current trends in North American evangelicalism call for a strong dose of John's logocentric sectarianism.” His book divides into just three chapters.

Chapter 1 furnishes fresh lexical data to demonstrate his thesis that John's presentation of Jesus as the Word is not limited to the Prologue but permeates the entire Gospel. That distinctive Johannine emphasis underscores that the Church has, from Christ, an authoritative word for the world that must be heard in all its purity and clarity. In chapter 2, Gundry next turns his attention to a second under-appreciated theme in John—sectarianism. John was no inclusivist, still less a relativist. John's Gospel “is unalterably countercultural and sectarian, for ‘a sect is a religious group that rejects the social environment in which it exists.’” Moving subtly toward his critical analysis of Evangelicalism, Gundry adds that “it is sectarians—those who have separated from the world, who see only in black and white—it is they rather than reformers, accommodationists, and assimilationists who speak with the most controlling authority.” (Does the “accommodation” language sound familiar?) But John's sectarianism does not invite a disengaged withdrawal from the world, for John emphasizes that God's Word (Christ) was sent into the world: “John's sectarianism has sharpened rather than dulled the evangelistic thrust and usefulness—even today—of the Fourth Gospel.”

Finally, in chapter 3, Gundry diagnoses the current state of Evangelicalism by frankly detailing its symptoms.

In the last half century [evangelicals] have enjoyed increasing success in the world of biblical and theological scholarship. They reacted against the separatism of

their fundamentalist forbears, who precisely in their separation from the world knew they had from God a sure word for the world. Penetration replaced separation. Evangelical biblical and theological scholars began holding their meetings in conjunction with . . . societies populated with heretics, non-Christians of other religious persuasions, agnostics, and outright atheists as well as with true Christian believers. And in droves evangelicals (including me) started joining these societies and participating in their activities.

Although a few pages earlier Gundry is quite confident about what John would have thought of someone else's errors, he becomes disingenuously coy about whether John would have approved of believers engaging in such associations and activities:

So I do not condemn penetration by evangelicals any more than I condemn separation by fundamentalists. Separation was necessary to save the gospel against the inroads of modernism, I think; and penetration has been necessary to save the gospel from irrelevance and a seclusion that threatened to keep it from being heard in the world at large.

But even Gundry admits the costs and casualties resulting from the strategy of penetration have been devastating with little to show for it. Rather than persuading their unbelieving counterparts, the price of scholarly success has been a widespread theological and spiritual "gutting" of Evangelicalism and "a growth of worldliness." The notion "that evangelicals would resist accommodation to the world," Gundry confesses, "is turning out to be ill-founded." "Behavioral standards" have plummeted, as has "interest in and knowledge of Christian doctrine. Symptomatically, the most influential evangelical is no longer an evangelist (Billy Graham), but a psychologist (James Dobson)." Gundry's remark is equally symptomatic, however, since it ignores Graham's own devolution into the very postconservative theological errors Erickson describes. In Gundry's view, "the scandal of the evangelical mind pales before the scandal of evangelical acculturation." But as he himself indicates, the two go hand in hand.

Do our present circumstances call for John's Word-Christology, for North American evangelicalism to take a sectarian turn, a *return mutatis mutandis*, to the fundamentalism of *The Fundamentals* and their authors at the very start of the twentieth century? . . . Such a renewed fundamentalism would take direction not only from fundamentalism at the very start of the twentieth century but also, and more importantly, from the paleofundamentalism of John the sectarian, whose Christology of the Word has Jesus come into the world (there is the engagement with it), sanctify himself (there is the separation from it), and exegete God (there is the message to it).

History entitles one to question the impact of Gundry's thoughtful critique on its target audience. Its effect may be less of a "bombshell" and more like a water balloon—a momentary, uncomfortable interruption to an agenda too

entrenched, too intellectually inebriated, too seduced by worldly respectability, to change. The strategy of penetration has evolved into a philosophy of accommodation, so that it is the very fundamentals themselves that have become negotiable.

Fundamentalism has historically championed a militant orthodoxy wedded to personal orthopraxy. Jude 3 has long been its corporate life verse. Faithfully (though not always faultlessly), Fundamentalists have insisted that the wedding between doctrinal purity (orthodoxy) and a biblically distinctive lifestyle (holiness) is a scriptural mandate. Paul, Peter, James, Jude, and John all emphasize that necessary union in their epistles. Fearing marginalization and irrelevance, a "New" Evangelicalism mapped out a different strategy. The Evangelical experiment of the past half-century has resulted in extensive damage—a diminishing of biblical standards, a dilution of clear message, and a loss of distinctive identity. If you think that is just a typical, predictable Fundamentalist diagnosis, you have not been reading their literature. Many Evangelicals are acknowledging the failure of the Evangelical strategy and admitting that in the quest for a relevance deemed necessary to win the world, she has befriended the world but lost her churches.

The important lesson to draw from this is not "See, we were right!" Fundamentalist homes, churches, and institutions increasingly confront reminders that neither we nor our children are immune to the same influences that have seduced many Evangelicals. Young Fundamentalists sidling toward the Evangelical fence, tempted by the sight of seemingly greener grass, need to take a closer look and listen carefully to the lowing of the cattle over there. The ones whose hearts are closest to yours are not happy over there. May Christ grace His Church to reaffirm its commitment not only to the call to contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3) but also to the call for personal and corporate purity (Jude 20-23) in absolute reliance on the only one who can keep us from falling (Jude 24-25).

Layton Talbert is a Contributing Editor for *FrontLine*.

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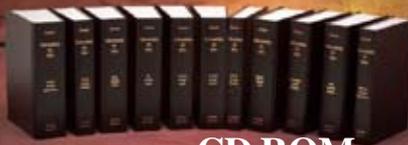
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[To those who suggest that the doctrine of the virgin conception came from pagan ideas I ask] . . . how did a crassly pagan and polytheistic idea ever find a place, not merely in Gentile Christian documents, but in the most strikingly Jewish and Palestinian narratives in the whole New Testament? —J. Gresham Machen

The virgin birth refers to Mary's miraculous conception of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, without any male participation, so that, though the birth process was not unlike that of other humans, Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was born. —John Hartog III

But when God sent His Son into this world, then the angels saw the spirit of self-denial in God, the spirit of self-sacrifice in God. —T. Dewitt Talmage

The poverty surrounding the birth of our Lord is a sufficient answer to a thousand groveling maxims about wealth, which pass current among men. —J. C. Ryle

The Scriptures describe Mary as the one who "brought forth" her Son; they say nothing about a miraculous birthing of Jesus. —John Hartog III

When the angels saw God stoop from His throne and become a Babe, hanging upon a woman's breast, they lifted their notes . . . to the uttermost stretch of angelic music, gained the highest notes of the living scale of praise and sang, "Glory to God in the highest," for higher in goodness they felt God could not go. —Charles H. Spurgeon

If Wise Men from the East would travel hundreds of miles on the single testimony of one verse—Daniel 9:25—how we ought to serve God and live for Him, with the multiplied thousands of promises in our Old and New Testaments! —John R. Rice

Don't put your hopes in the stars this Christmas but turn your eyes toward the heavens and fix them firmly upon Him who said, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." —Kenneth McComas

Our Lord had in His coming but one supreme, stupendous and all-mastering objective: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." —William E. Biederwolf

No better news ever came out of Heaven than the Gospel of Jesus Christ—a Saviour is born unto you. —Dwight L. Moody

Christmas ought to be a time of settlement and establishment in the faith to believers, [for] we celebrate another anniversary of the divine faithfulness manifested in the fulfillment of His Word. —T. T. Shields

When a famous man was asked what site impressed him most during his trip to the Holy Land, he immediately replied, "Nazareth; for such a people could not have produced Jesus except for His deity." —Billy Sunday

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.

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Stranded on Christmas Eve

Barbara Harper

Christmas Eve Day, 1980, found us stranded on Highway 10 near Biloxi, Mississippi. Married just barely over a year, Jim and I were driving from South Carolina to Texas on our first trip back to see my folks. The little car we had at the time was an Opal, a German-made car my brother had nicknamed "Gustav."

I never really liked Gustav. He was yellow, one of my least favorite colors. He was mismatched: his hood was black. He was noisy. And his gear shift was hard for me to handle. But he got us where we needed to go . . . most of the time.

One time before, Gustav had been out of commission about four weeks while we waited on parts that had to be ordered, hard to come by because it was a foreign car.

And now we were stranded on the side of the highway. This was before cell phones, so we had to make our way to a phone booth. I don't recall that we actually talked about our situation much, but I wondered how long it would take to repair Gustav, particularly if parts were needed; I wondered how we would get home (and then get Gustav home) if he took several days—or weeks—to be repaired; and, perhaps most of all, how we would pay for any of this. We had no credit cards and barely enough money to make the trip in the first place: my husband, Jim, was finishing up his college education, so money was tight.

When we found a phone, Jim looked up mechanics in the Yellow Pages and just picked one. When he explained that we had an Opal, the mechanic said his garage had bought out the local Opal dealership!

The tow truck came and transported us and our ailing little car to the garage. The shop was scheduled to close for

Christmas Eve at noon, and we got there shortly before noon. The mechanic agreed to work on the car for us so we could get back on the road. The other employees did go ahead and start their Christmas party, and our mechanic, though not at all unkind to us, was eager to complete his work and get to the party!

We called my mother to let her know that we had been delayed and why. She graciously gave the shop her credit card number to pay for repairs.

Thus what seemed a greatly complicated, time-consuming, frustrating, and costly problem was taken care of and paid for in comparatively short order.

"Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:19). Certainly! Can God provide for the needs of a resourceless young couple stranded on the side of the road with a cantankerous foreign-made car on Christmas Eve? Yes, indeed! Second Chronicles 16:9 says, "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." For more than twenty years He has continued to watch over and provide for us, and we trust He will ever do so.

Barbara Harper is a wife and homemaker living in Spartanburg, South Carolina.

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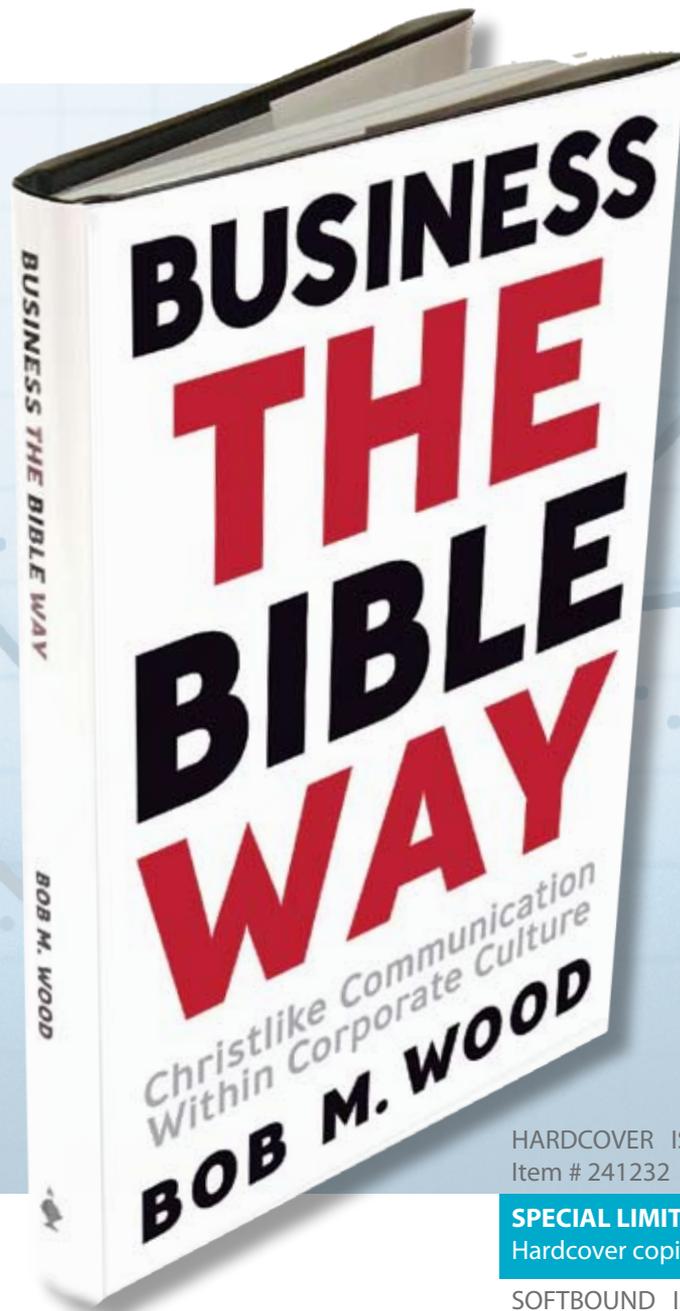


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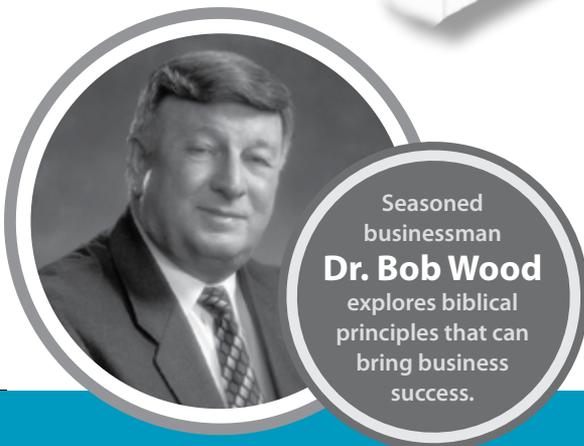


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Bringing Others to the Truth

Jerry Sivnksty

In John 8:32 the Lord Jesus Christ said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 1:17 says, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." The Lord told Thomas in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." What a wonderful and powerful message of hope we have to deliver to people concerning the Lord's divine Truth—His beloved Son!

We are living in an age in which the waters have been muddied concerning right and wrong. My observation is that our judicial system is guilty of confusing our nation in its verdict on crime. It seems they justify the guilty, condemn the innocent, and blend right and wrong into a perplexing shade of gray. Also, the universities of our nation are destroying the very moral fiber of our young people by teaching that there are no absolutes. They undermine their belief in God, in Creation, and in ethics.

Many people have reached the point of exasperation and ask as Pilate did in John 18:38, "What is truth?" I'm grateful that there is an answer to those who are frustrated and are truly searching for the truth. In Galatians 2:5 the apostle Paul expressed his hope that "the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Observe that the truth is the gospel. What is the gospel message? Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." Here is the truth of the gospel: Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose from the grave! We have a glorious message to deliver to those who are searching for the truth.

In my ministry of evangelism, I am always amazed how the Lord leads individuals who are seeking salvation. This past fall we were holding meetings in Michigan. On the very first Sunday morning a lady in her early thirties was driving around town trying to decide which church to attend. She pulled into the parking lot of a church and was ready to go inside when she paused and thought to herself, "I don't think I want to go to this church." She looked across the street and saw another church and decided to go there. She had no idea that I was starting meetings there that morning. She listened to the sermon and was the first to come down the aisle to accept the Lord as her Savior! She came the entire week of meetings. On Friday night she approached me at the end of the service and gave me this testimony: "I want you to know that I was baptized in the Church of Christ. I also was supposed to have received the gift of the Holy Ghost in a Pentecostal church; however, I

never heard preaching from either of these two churches that Jesus died for my sins until I heard you preach last Sunday. For the first time in my life I heard that going to Heaven doesn't depend upon what I do, but what Christ did by giving His life so I can have eternal life!"

Recently we had another young lady in West Virginia who asked her grandmother to drive her around town so she could find a church to attend. Apparently her grandmother was not a Christian but said she would be willing to show her several churches. As they approached the church where I was going to start meetings on Sunday, the grandmother said she thought that that would be a good church to visit; so the next morning, this young college student came to the meeting. When I gave the invitation, she was the first to respond and receive Christ as her Savior. She, too, came every night to the meetings. What a thrill it is to see the Holy Spirit direct individuals who truly want to know God's truth.

An interesting thing happened several years ago in our ministry. A man came to our meetings and hurried down the aisle during the invitation to accept Christ. At the close of the service he wanted to talk with me—he was so excited that he was now saved. But all of a sudden his countenance changed and he said, "You know, I have been searching for years how I could go to heaven. Why didn't someone tell me sooner? Why didn't someone tell me sooner?"

There are many of God's people who need to be stirred in helping others come to the Truth—that is, our Lord Jesus Christ. I am aware that many Christians go out and witness to others, only to have doors slammed in their faces or be cursed and ridiculed. However, there are people who will be open to the gospel message, and we can have the privilege of bringing them to God's glorious truth.

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at P.O. Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at evangjsivn@aol.com.



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Our non-Jewish background tends to color our conception of the Church as an international, interracial institution from its inception. It was not. The Church was a Jewish entity birthed out of the womb of OT Judaism. The Gospels record the Jewish roots of Christianity in the life and the ministry, death and resurrection of a Jew among Jews, who announced, “I will build my church.” The Acts record the building of that Church, its Judeocentric origin and its growth among Jews. In Acts 1–10, Jerusalem is the hub of Christianity. Not until Acts 11 does the expansion of this Church take a turn into Gentile realms, as the attention shifts to a new hub in Antioch. It was two decades after Pentecost before the Church began showing a Gentile complexion. The very early Epistle of James unshutters a window into that early Jewish phase of the Church, and the epistles of Peter appear to apprise us of later developments within that community. The Epistle to the Hebrews opens a door into the most theologically detailed context of the Jewish Christian community.

Author of Hebrews

There is broad consensus on *when* Hebrews was written—the mid to late AD 60s. The question of *who* wrote it is another matter. “The search for the author has been going on for centuries, and is no nearer a solution than when it began. There is no scarcity of candidates, but conclusive evidence for any one candidate is lacking, and problems exist no matter who is suggested” (Kent). Ancient guesses include Paul, Luke, or Barnabas. According to Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria asserted that Paul wrote it in Hebrew and that Luke translated it into Greek (*Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14). Its differences from Paul’s other writings would be expected; distinctive treatises call for distinctive styles and vocabulary. Clement explained Paul’s anonymity as an intentional omission to avoid prejudicing his audience against his arguments on the front end. Later hypotheses include Apollos, Silvanus, Philip, Jude, or Aquila and Priscilla. Some are just as certain that Paul could not possibly have written Hebrews. More than one commentator is fond of concluding with the words of Origen: “who wrote the epistle [to the Hebrews], only God knows.” We can conclude with a considerable degree of certainty that (1) there is enough internal data to link the writer, at least indirectly, to the Pauline apostolic party to a degree that justified its canonicity in the eyes of the early church, and (2) since it is so clearly the will of Providence that we not know, it ultimately does not, cannot, and therefore need not matter whether we identify the author beyond all doubt.

Nature of Hebrews

The writer of Hebrews tells us exactly what kind of letter this is and why he wrote it. In 13:22 he refers to his letter as a “word [*logos*, message] of exhortation.” The technical term (taken from the Greek word translated “exhortation”) is *paraclesis*, an earnest appeal. “Hebrews is a pastorally oriented sermon . . . an expression of passionate and personal concern for the Christians addressed . . . written to arouse, urge, encourage, and exhort those addressed to maintain their Christian confession and to dissuade them from a course of action that the writer believed would be catastrophic” (Lane). What, precisely, that exhortation was will become apparent as we survey the contents.

Center of Hebrews

There is a sense in which every epistle, every NT book, and indeed the Bible itself is Christocentric. Yet there is arguably no NT book that is more Christocentric, or whose theological argument is more sustained, than Hebrews. Every exhortation until the closing few verses *centers* on their view of and relation to Christ Himself. It is *all* about His person, His work, His superiority, His priestly role, His covenant, and the nonnegotiable necessity of allegiance to Him. He is the intended theological focal point of the letter: “Consider . . . Christ Jesus” (3:1). Hebrews contains about 200 references to Christ by name, title, and pronoun. The list of titles and descriptive designations is impressive and exalted.

- Christ—13x
- Jesus—14x
- Son—11x
- Son of God—4x (4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29)
- High Priest—11x
- Lord—4x (clearly referring to Christ)
- Yahweh—1x at least (1:10; 8:8ff.?)
- God—2x (1:8, 9; 3:3, 4 by inference)
- Mediator—3x (8:6; 9:15; 12:24)
- Firstborn—1x (1:6)
- Apostle (of our confession)—1x (3:1)
- Originator—1x (5:9)
- Pioneer—2x (2:10; 12:2)
- Finisher—1x (12:2)
- Forerunner—1x (6:20; a scout)
- Minister—1x (8:2)
- Man—1x (10:12)
- Shepherd of the sheep—1x (13:20)

OF HEBREWS

Argument of Hebrews

Hebrews argues from beginning to end for the supremacy of Christ to everything the Jews had ever known—not only because He is *better* (a key word in Hebrews, occurring 13 times) but because He is the *perfecter* (also a key word in Hebrews) who would fulfill all they had been taught to anticipate and expect.

Superiority to Prophets: Because He Is a Son (1:1–3)

In the past, God spoke in various ways at various times to the ancient Israelites by means of the prophets (1:1). The birth of Christ marked the dawn of a new revelatory era (1:2). “These last days” ushered in a time when God would convey His fullest self-revelation by a *qualitatively* different means. In the past, He spoke through the prophets; *now* He has spoken to us through (literally) “a Son.” Omitting a definite article (“*the* Son”) or a possessive pronoun (“*His* Son”) is a grammatical means of stressing the *distinctive quality* of Christ as the quintessential spokesman and revealer. He is not just another prophet; *this* Prophet is “a Son.” How did this happen? Through what John describes as the *incarnation* of God’s Word (see John 1:1–3, 14–18). This event marks the apex of prophetic expression, for He not only *brings* God’s Word to us, He *is* God’s Word to us. But He is more; He is (literally) the personified *radiance* of God’s glory and the identical *reflection* of God’s Person (1:3). Christ embodies the definitive, declarative, and ultimate self-revelatory voice of God for every succeeding generation—because this Prophet, as the embodied Word of God, *is* God. His identity as “Son” leads into the next comparison.

Superiority to Angels (1:4–2:18)

- *Because He is a Son (1:4–2:5)*—God’s Son has an infinitely more exalted status than God’s angelic servants and messengers.
- *Because He is a Man (2:5–18)*—The writer turns his argument in an intriguing direction by noting that Jesus’ superiority is not in spite of His being human but because of His being human. It is humans to whom God has uniquely granted not only the divine image but the inheritance and dominion of all creation—an inheritance marred by the Fall but regained and restored through Christ. (For a more detailed exploration of this section, see “Straight Cuts,” *FrontLine*, July/August 2006.)

Superiority to Moses: Because He Is a Son (3:1–4:16)

The writer first introduces Christ’s High Priesthood but does not immediately develop it (3:1). Instead, he shows the superlative position of Christ, a Son, over

Moses, a servant (3:2–6). He then traces (3:7–4:11) the fortunes of Israel in the wilderness under Moses (3:16) and Joshua (4:8), emphasizing that the failure of Israel to enter into the blessings and rest God intended for them was linked to their *unbelief* in God’s revelation (3:11, 12, 18, 19; 4:1–3a, 6, 11, 12, 13). This is the very error the writer warns his audience against: “God has spoken to you fully and finally through and in Christ—you turn from this revelation at your peril.” The writer then reintroduces the High Priesthood of Christ (4:14–16), which he proceeds to develop in the next major section.

Superiority to the Old (Mosaic) Covenant (5–10)

Here the writer turns to the sacerdotal supremacy of Christ. The relationship of the Jews, both corporately and individually, was rooted in a priestly and sacrificial system designed and given by God yet intentionally incomplete, a temporary measure. The priests, the sacrifices, even the temple itself—tangible and concrete as they appeared—were only shadows of an ultimate reality awaiting fulfillment, pictorial actions anticipating actual accomplishment. The writer carries his audience through a series of comparisons to show the superiority of Christ to all they had known under what is only now termed the *Old Covenant*.

- *Because He Represents a Better Priesthood (Melchizedek) (5–7)*
- *Because He Mediates a Better Covenant (New) (8)*
- *Because He Ministers in a Better Tabernacle (Heavenly) (9)*
- *Because He Offers a Better Sacrifice (Himself) (9–10)*

Exhortation of Hebrews

The writer describes his correspondence as “a message of exhortation” (cf. 13:22). His exhortation has surfaced regularly throughout the argument of the letter—“therefore give heed” (2:1), “wherefore consider Jesus” (3:1), “take heed, brethren” (3:12), “let us therefore fear” (4:1), “let us labor to enter that rest” (4:11), “let us hold fast our profession” (4:14–16), “let us go on unto perfection” (6:1–3), “be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:9–12).

That exhortation comes to a passionate point and its most heated expression in 10:19–25—“let us draw near . . . let us hold fast . . . let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (10:19–25). Why? Because a Jew who turns back from this full and final revelation from God in Christ has nothing to turn back to; the Old Covenant,

Continued on next page

At a Glance Continued

with its temple and sacrifices, is over and done. There is no other option; it is Christ or judgment (10:26–31). But the writer reminds them that what they had already suffered for their profession of Christ was a testimony to a faith which they should not abandon (10:32–34). Patience amid their present persecutions will prove the genuineness of their profession (10:35–39). In short, the writer exhorts them not to fall away and apostatize from their professed faith in Christ; that is a road from which there is no return.

This “word of exhortation” turns from warning in chapter 10 to warm encouragement in chapter 11. The encouragement is a simple one: *believing God’s Word is your heritage!* The best and godliest of your ancestors have this in common: they all *acted on faith* in a word of God to them in the face of impossible odds and were rewarded for doing so. Follow in the footsteps of those who are now your witnesses (12:1). Yet the greatest example of this is Christ Himself (12:2–4). The suffering of chastening is not a sign that you are *not* God’s children; it is the single greatest sign that you *are*, and that He is dealing with you as His children (12:5–17). You are faced with the ultimate reality and fulfillment of all you have believed (12:18–24); don’t fail to follow through on your profession of faith in Christ, because the consequences, positive and negative, are infinite and eternal (12:25–29).

Conclusion

The writer opens with a thesis: God has spoken finally and decisively to us through a Son (1:2). The writer draws from that thesis an exhortation: See that you refuse not Him that speaks (12:25). Jesus is the Author and Finisher, the Pioneer and Perfecter, of faith; man’s only hope is to hold fast to Him and to the faith He finished (3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23, 35; 13:10–14). The writer has expressed every hope that they will respond rightly to his “message of exhortation” (6:9–12; 10:32–39; 13:18–25).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is an extended exhortation to perseverance: *Remain faithful to the finished faith offered only through the New Covenant—revealed by Christ as God’s final Prophet, fulfilled by Christ as God’s perfect Priest, mediated through Christ as God’s anointed King.*

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Lebanese Christians Persecuted

Although one might assume that the persecution of Lebanese Christians would be from the direction of Islam, the violence that one local congregation faced in July of this year came at the behest of Parish Pastor Bishop Guy Njeim, a local Roman bishop. Pictures and news reports on this incident can be found at www.cbbclbanon.com.

24/7 Sacred Music Now Available Online

Brookside Baptist Church (Brookfield, Wisconsin) has launched AbidingRadio, a 24/7 Internet radio station that features the best of conservative, sacred, and traditional Christian music.

Music from Amy Herbster, Bob Jones University, the Calvary Quartet, John Zimmer, Majesty Music, Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Northland Baptist Bible College, the Outreach Quartet, SoundForth Singers and Orchestra, the Steve Pettit Evangelistic Association, SMS, and more can be heard anytime over the internet at www.abidingradio.org.

Sanctioned Textbooks

In August of 2005 a joint suit was filed by ACSI (Association of Christian Schools International), Calvary Chapel Christian School, and an individual student

against the University of California. The school's Board of Relations and Admissions had formed policy to dismiss the core course curriculums taught in Christian schools if they were not taught from an approved secular perspective. While acknowledging the right of schools and home educators to use "Christian" textbooks, they (U of C) also reserved the right to deny enrollment since the use of such textbooks would not meet enrollment standards.

The first victory was won for the plaintiffs when an October-filed motion to dismiss was denied by District Judge S. James Otero in August of this year. Obviously, this case has large implications for Christians and home educators. For more information please see *World Magazine*, "Strange Standards," November 26, 2005, and "Systematic Flaw," August 19, 2006.

Wicca Receives Government Sanction

Roberta Stewart has been lobbying state and federal governmental agencies to apply the Wiccan symbol (a pentagram) to her husband's VA-provided grave marker. Sgt. Patrick Stewart was killed in Afghanistan last September when a rocket-propelled grenade struck his helicopter. The VA allows for thirty different religious symbols to be applied to markers provided for fallen veterans. The

Wiccan symbol, however, is not among them.

According to AP writer Scott Sonner ("Wiccan sign allowed on soldier's plaque," *Yahoo News*, Thursday September 14): "Wiccans worship the earth and believe they must give to the community. Some consider themselves good witches, pagans or neo-pagans. The Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery Administration allows only approved emblems of religious beliefs on government headstones. Over the years, it has approved more than 30, including symbols for the Tenrikyo Church, United Moravian Church and Sikhs. There is also an emblem for atheists."

While the VA has not rendered its decision on the Wiccan symbol, the state of Nevada, claiming primacy on state-managed cemeteries, has ruled in favor of granting the symbol.

Mainline Perversion

According to the Presbyterian News Service (an official communication branch of the Presbyterian Church USA), Janet Edwards, direct descendant of the famed Jonathan Edwards, will be brought to council for violating church law for providing a marriage ceremony for two lesbians.

Edwards has entrenched herself in her position. As quoted by the News Service, Edwards stated, "I'm disappointed that the

investigative committee did not recognize that marriage between two men or two women is not prohibited by the church. . . . I am going to plead not guilty and see it as an opportunity to show how my actions were in accordance with my vows as a Presbyterian minister and that marriage between two men or two women is within the bounds of Christian understanding of marriage."

No trial dates have been set. (<http://www.pcusa.org/pcnews/2006/06469.htm>; accessed September 16, 2006)

American Religion

Baylor University conducted a religious poll through the Gallup organization during the 2005 calendar year to research the practical impact of one's religious preferences on one's social behavior. Dr. Byron Johnson (co-director of the research group) stated, "We wanted to do something that most surveys don't and that is to probe questions that are typically not asked on surveys. So for example, most surveys might ask how often you pray. We want to know whom do you pray to, what was the last thing you prayed about, and why do you pray."

The study was designed to answer questions such as

- Just how religious is America?
- Do religious Americans favor any political party?

NOTABLE QUOTES

- How do religious Americans feel about the Iraq war?
- How does religious belief affect spending patterns in America?
- How do people's perceptions of God affect their view of government and their religious practices?

While the full results are not available as of this writing, some of the initial conclusions are

- A third of Americans (33.6 percent), roughly 100 million people, are Evangelical Protestants by affiliation.
- The majority (62.9 percent) of Americans not affiliated with a religious tradition believe in God or some higher power.

Those surveyed were asked to characterize God in one of four ways.

- 31.4 percent believe in an **Authoritarian God**, who is very judgmental and engaged.
- 25 percent believe in a **Benevolent God**, who is not judgmental but engaged.
- 23 percent believe in a **Distant God**, who is completely removed.
- 16 percent believe in a **Critical God**, who is judgmental but not engaged.

(<http://www.baylor.edu/pr/news.php?action=story&story=41678>; accessed September 16, 2006.)

The View

Rosie O'Donnell, ABC's co-host of *The View*, pronounced her religious bigotry on the September 12 edition of the program. In discussing the presence of US troops in Iraq, Rosie made this disjointed parallel: "Radical Christianity is just as threatening as

I am what I was—God.
I was not what I am—Man.
I am now called both—God and Man.
—Oswald Sanders

I have often prayed that I might be able to say at the last what George Fox could so truly say: "I am clear, I am clear!" It is my highest ambition to be clear of the blood of all men. I have preached God's truth, so far as I know it, and I have not been ashamed of the peculiarities. That I might not stultify my testimony I have cut myself clear of those who err from the faith, and even from those who associate with them. —C. H. Spurgeon

Two opposite religions are being proclaimed from the pulpits. One is the great redemptive religion known as Christianity, founded upon the supernatural birth of Jesus, His death on the cross as a sin offering, and salvation by repentance and faith in His sacrificial death. The other is anti-Christian, agnostic, naturalistic modernism and is being proclaimed in every denomination.—Billy Sunday

The only way one could be the rightful heir to David's throne and escape this curse was to be virgin-born as Jesus was. —Oswald Smith

How does the wise man of Proverbs [30:7–9] complete the thought, "All I want for Christmas . . ."? He responds, "Lord, all I want is for my life to be characterized by consistency and contentment." —Ben Strohbeh

When we find [Ignatius] attesting the virgin birth not as a novelty but altogether as a matter of course, as one of the accepted facts about Christ, it becomes evident that the belief of the virgin birth must have been prevalent long before the close of the first century. . . . The denials of the virgin birth which appear in that century were based upon philosophical or dogmatic prepossession, much more than upon genuine historical tradition. —J. Gresham Machen

Compiled by Robert Condict, Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International Advisory Board member and pastor of Upper Cross Roads Baptist Church, Baldwin, Maryland.

radical Islam in a country like America where we have a separation of church and state. We're a democracy here." Co-host Joy Behar, vigorously disagreed with O'Donnell, but ABC executives were pleased to maintain her "open mic." (<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/1424194.html>; accessed September 16, 2006)

New Ethics

Peter Singer, professor of ethics at Princeton, has sighted moral ethics as justification for the euthanizing of babies. No longer content to abort pre-born children, Singer advocates taking the life of the disabled if it would be in the best interest of the child and family. Singer stated, "Anyone who ascribes rights to babies or humans with intellectual disabilities must be willing to attribute rights to beings who can't understand the concept. It's the moral agents, the ones who are acting, who need to understand the concept. Those to whom we attribute rights do not need to understand these concepts."

He freely admits that there is no difference between a child yet to be delivered and one already born. The right to life is rooted in their own moral consciousness. "The only moral absolute is that we should do what will have the best consequences for all those affected by our actions." (<http://www.religionandspirituality.com/view.php?StoryID=20060915-082834-6154r>; accessed September 16, 2006)

This news is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International.

Learning How to Serve through Graceful Giving

Pearson Johnson

'Tis the season to be . . . helpful to our missionaries. We know that it is our Biblical responsibility to "serve as senders." But how can we best serve? Part of the answer lies in learning from the missionaries themselves what will truly help them. We have enlisted the help of missionaries from around the world to compose this article, and below are some of their stories and comments. Let's read.

With Christmas quickly approaching, many of us soon will be pondering what kind of gifts to give those whom we care about. Certain folks are wonderful gift-givers, always seeming to know how to give the most perfect gift; however, many of us struggle to discern what might be an appropriate gift. Gift-giving at Christmas should be a joyous moment when we can emulate and show our thankfulness for God's "unspeakable gift." Wrapped together with this "gift" is God's exceeding grace in us. Putting these two concepts of gift and grace together may help us learn to practice what might be called "graceful giving." This is where we by God's grace carefully discern what to give and how to give so as to more closely resemble God's gift of salvation.

Perhaps a story would help us all learn to become more graceful in our giving. Over twenty years ago I was working with the government for an extended time in Costa Rica. That particular year I was not able to go home for Christmas. However, a coworker was going home for Christmas and kindly carried with her the box of items I had by great sacrifice collected for my family members. I had wonderful intentions buying and sending Costa Rican-crafted items for my family to wear or hang on the walls.

A year later I returned only to find most of the things still stowed away in my parents' home. Things I thought were so exotic, such as the authentic machete with a real leather case, were buried under other unused things in the corner of a closet, and the hand-made hammock was never even taken out of its wrappings. As I reflected upon this experience, I began to ask God where I had gone wrong with these gifts. The thoughts that came to me were that **I had given only from my own perspective without much thought for the recipient.** What my family members least needed was one more thing to wear or hang on their walls, Costa Rican-crafted or not!

This was an example of gift giving to those in America, but what might we need to consider when giving gifts to those in other countries? Missionaries all around the world each year have different gifts shipped to them from friends and families back home in the USA. Most of the gifts are greatly needed and appreciated; however, in order to

give gracefully, **first we must discern the particular missionary's needs.** This can be done easily by sending an e-mail or making a phone call. Better yet: when the missionaries are visiting your church, invite them into your home and get to know them. Make a record of what you've learned about them—their preferences, hobbies and interests, their goals and desires. Then surprise them with a gift in keeping with your knowledge of them, whether it's the latest CD or book or a couple of packets of their favorite drink.

Second, we must find out what the missionary can and cannot get in his country. Many countries have strict health regulations regarding allowing certain food items into the country. One missionary received boxes of food staples that a church had kindly gathered together, only to find that the health department's approval and the customs charges were far beyond the missionary's means, so the boxes had to be returned to the USA. Other missionaries have had things like coffee or shredded coconut sent to them when they have coffee plants or coconut trees in their own backyard! Another had phone cards sent to him so he could call back home. This was a very nice gesture, but the state-owned phone company did not allow access to use the cards.

Finally, take into consideration customs regulations and charges. When declaring the value on the green customs forms, it is best to declare "no commercial value" because you are sending the item as a gift and not for resale. Sometimes people put high values on the form, thinking that the value is for insurance purposes; however, that is not the case. The declared value helps the customs agent determine how much he will charge the missionary in order to release the package. Another way to avoid problems in customs and to ensure that the missionary will have something extra at Christmas, is to send monetary gifts to the missionary for Christmas through the mission office. In some countries, unless the gifts are sent in September (or by airmail), the package will arrive after Christmas—some as late as March!

As you can see from the comments of these missionaries from around the world, taking time to get to know them and the situations in which they live helps us discern the most appropriate and useful gifts. Let's do our homework first! That will communicate our love and concern for our missionaries by understanding how to best serve them through graceful giving. 'Tis the season to be . . . helpful to our missionaries.

We appreciate the contribution to this article by Allen Lund and other missionaries. Pearson can be reached at pjohnson@intercity.org and would welcome your input and interaction.

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Chaplain News

Chaplain Dan Hall

From Babylon in Christ

Greetings from Al Asad, Iraq. I came to Al Asad with a vision for a radio ministry; consequently, I brought with me a low-power FM transmitter; an extra computer; the antenna; 30 of cabling; the software to operate the station; and about 85 GB worth of music, preaching, and teaching in audio form.

Upon arrival at Al Asad, I met my senior Chaplain: an O-5 Roman Catholic priest named Simpson. After two days of turnover with the chaplain I was relieving (a Seventh-Day Adventist Chaplain), I approached Chaplain Simpson with my vision of a radio ministry. He was overwhelmingly in favor of it. He reminded me, though, that

1. we were in an Islamic country,
2. no base had ever had a radio station controlled by a Chaplain,
3. the airwaves were controlled by a number of other departments outside our control,
4. the decision was out of his control.

Nevertheless, he encouraged me to approach the Wing Chaplain with my idea and assured me he would support it. True to his word, he introduced me to the Wing Chaplain and said "Dan has a way-out-of-the-box idea for ministry that is, frankly, intriguing." With that introduction, I told the Wing Chaplain my idea and how it would work. The Wing Chaplain, a Lutheran (Missouri Synod), was immediately in favor of the idea and asked if I'd be willing to explain it to the Chief of Staff. His only stipulation: bring all my equipment.

So with all my equipment in tow, I met the Chief of Staff—a Marine Colonel. The Wing Chaplain warned me of his demeanor before the meeting. However, the Colonel was fascinated by the concept and asked if I could pump the broadcast into the base intranet as well! I explained that my software would permit it, but I would have to work with the IT department to make it happen. At his

direction, we started the staff work (paperwork) to get every department to approve the concept of a Chaplain radio before he would present it to the Base Commander.

The next stop was the G-6: our communications chief. He has since left Al Asad, but at that time the G-6 was an amiable Marine LtCol who attended the contemporary services. He was excited about the radio station and gave on-the-spot approval for it to take place. He informed the frequency manager, who worked for him, to assign me an appropriate frequency to operate within. The Wing Chaplain had to break the news that the Chief of Staff wanted to staff it first. So, on the spot, he signed off on the project—which all but pushed it through because it directly impacts his department the most.

I prepared a point paper on the station and attached it to the routing paperwork (which contained the G-6's signature). Visiting each office in person, I explained to the various "G" level department heads what I wanted to do and answered their questions. Within two days, I had everyone's signature.

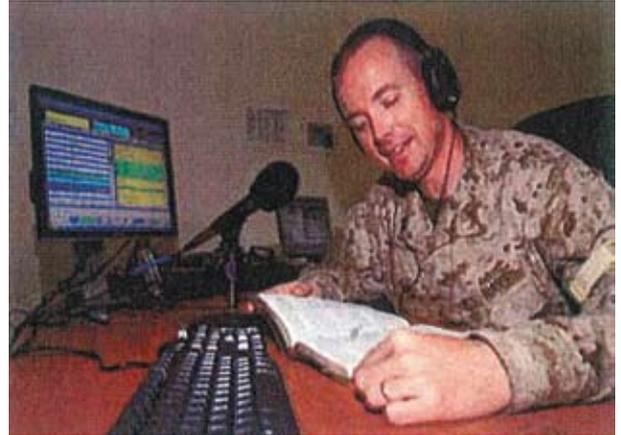
During this process, the Army Corps of Engineers got involved—since they owned the tower the G-6 wanted the antenna placed upon. The Army Colonel liked the idea so much that he authorized the antenna to be placed on the tower before the final signature was obtained and provided a new cable to triple the height of the position from my original estimates. In addition, he authorized the station to broadcast on the base closed-circuit cable television system.

After the final signature was obtained, the Base Commander signed off on the point paper . . . and the station became a reality!

Not a single human involved in

the process attempted to delay it—although the intelligence chief gave me restrictions on what type of announcements could be made on the air.

However, as you can imagine, the Devil certainly wasn't going to just watch this happen without incident. A series of events unfolded that revealed



to me that "the prince of the power of the air" was on the attack.

1. A transmitter with 300x more power than mine on a multiple frequency of my transmitter, whose antenna was just 7 feet from mine, fried my RF transistor when a portion of its power jumped to my antenna and followed my cable directly into my transmitter. This problem took a day to diagnose, \$131 to fix, and ten days to get the part from the States.

2. After the repair, a new RF interference load appeared in the area. This interference prevented the broadcast from reaching the entirety of the base. After studying the situation and discussing it with radio engineers here and in the States, I decided my only course of action was to purchase a more powerful transmitter. Marsha and I discussed it, along with some counsel from others, and we purchased a 50-watt transmitter and had it shipped to the base in California. After a long series of mishaps and miscommunication the transmitter finally reached us.

Continued on next page

3. Working with the radio engineers here, we installed the new transmitter and connected it to a piece of test gear and connected the test gear to the antenna cable. The tests revealed the new transmitter was perfect. The test gear was unplugged from the new transmitter, regrettably, before the new transmitter was turned off. This caused the amplifier to overpower and burn out. I telephoned the manufacturer, explained what happened, and the manufacturer helped me rig a workaround. In the meantime, the company was sending me a replacement transmitter.

Needless to say, we have been transmitting now for almost three months. We call the station, "A Voice in the Wilderness." The signal strength is good, and the new (replacement) transmitter has arrived; I have raised the antenna twenty feet higher on the tower and have a beautifully clear signal on every part of the base; the broadcast is twenty-four hours a day; and at the end of October a second Voice in the Wilderness station began broadcasting on the Airbase at Al Taqqadum, Iraq. I cannot tell you what a positive reaction this has received from the Marines, Sailors, Airmen, and Soldiers on this base.

I broadcast on 88.5 FM, and today I received this poem from Marine Corps SGT L.F. Daniels simply titled "88.5."

Quite engaged in espionage
And they've been long at their task
So imagine their relief
When a line was finally tapped!

As each sentence was translated
Documents were closely kept
So the leaders at Headquarters
Of news, could be kept abreast.

But appreciate the humor
In this tale of irony
For they struck a font of knowledge
Not intent on secrecy!

And in fact, to truly savor
The disaster which they met,
Not only was it not secret,
But *intended* to be spread.

Their last thought, to encounter
Such a resource left exposed,
Was rivaled by one discovery
More amazing to behold.

As the spies heard the transmission
Sent on eighty-eight point five
They were given information
That could *really* save their lives!

Chaplain Richard Wiese awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal.

The citation reads as follows:

This is to certify that the Secretary of the Navy
has awarded the Navy and Marine Corps
Commendation Medal to

Lieutenant Richard H. Wiese, United States Navy,
for

Meritorious achievement while serving as Chaplain for Battalion Landing Team 1/4 and 2D Battalion, 11th Marines from December 2003 to July 2006. During intense combat operations in an NAJAF during August 2004, Chaplain Wiese voluntarily manned the battalion landing team's forward casualty collection point. Despite danger from small arms, rocket and mortar fire, he carried scores of litters, prayed with the wounded and assisted the corpsmen with their duties. After an attack on the an NAJAF police station in September 2004, he assisted the battalion aid station with their mass casualty procedures. His triage assistance helped preserve the life of 17 Iraqi policemen and further enhanced the coalition's relationship with the local populace. While with the 2D Battalion, 11th Marines, Chaplain Wiese exercised a proactive and comprehensive approach to family building. His efforts mitigated countless personnel readiness challenges, allowing the battalion to deploy combat ready batteries in support of operation Iraqi Freedom. Chaplain Wiese's initiative, perseverance and total dedication to duty reflected credit upon him and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

Chaplain Richard Wiese responded, "I felt as if I was receiving this award—not for myself—but on the behalf of all the Marines, Corpsman, and other chaplains who served side by side with me in Iraq. This award is neither given nor accepted lightly."



An Unparalleled Announcement!

Chuck Phelps

Do you know what happened on the 20th of July in 1969? How about the 21st of June in 1982? By any standard these dates are considered to be very important. On July 20, 1969, the world waited breathlessly to hear the crew of *Apollo 11* announce that man had landed on the moon. On the 21st of June in 1982 bells sounded in Great Britain to let the world know that the British had a new heir to the throne, Prince William.

Important announcements are soon forgotten, but on a hillside near the sleeping village of Bethlehem the angelic hosts were dispatched to share an unparalleled announcement. Three words changed time and eternity—"Born a Savior!" The angelic announcement divided our calendar into two great epochs (BC and AD). The Eternal Word had become a speechless babe, and the Infinite God was now an incarnate child.

We live in a media-driven, information-saturated age. Each day is abuzz with news from around the globe. We are connected electronically to every part of our world. Our generation wants its news to be delivered quickly, accurately, and in vivid color. Details and images of events pour into our minds like tsunamis of sight and sound, and they fade as quickly as they come. Yet the echo of the 2000-year-old angelic announce-

ment shared suddenly with a few shepherds while they watched their flocks by night will soon inspire the singing of carols and the ringing of bells throughout the world. God's Word abides forever (Matt. 5:18).

*Three words
changed time and
eternity—"Born a
Savior!"*

The announcement of the Savior's birth is unequalled because of its intent. How wonderful to realize that the angel said, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy"! In the fields where David once pondered God's majesty, the frightened shepherds were awakened by the news of God's mercy. The appearance of the beings once dispatched to guard fallen mankind from entering Eden brought great fear to the men in the fields. The angels that blinded the Sodomites and killed Egypt's firstborn were now singing redemption's song of reconciliation! Good tidings indeed!

The announcement of the Savior's birth is unequalled because of its extent. These were "tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Shepherds and magi, an aged widow and a youthful virgin, a silent carpenter and a suspicious king were all made equals by a message that mystifies the wise. How sad to realize that these blessed tidings intended for all are yet known only by some.

The announcement of the Savior's birth is unequalled because of its content. The angels spoke of Christ the Son of promise (Isa. 7:14; 9:6).

Israel's promised Messiah pillowed His head in a manger. The Lord whose hands had fashioned the earth was now swaddled and tended by the tender hands of a Galilean maiden. Born a Savior!

Soon a glowing crystal ball will fall in Times Square, and a newscaster will declare our entrance into 2007. Trumpets will sound, shouts will be heard, and there will be laughter and celebration. Then as soon as the much-anticipated announcement has come, it will begin to fade away.

With every new day there is the possibility of earth-shaking news. After all, there is coming a day when the earth will melt and the heavens will pass away with a great noise (2 Pet. 3:10). Sooner than we think, time will be no more. The already yellowed headlines will fade into oblivion. Words that caused great men to tremble will all be forgotten.

But one announcement will never be forgotten. One message will never fade. One headline will still cause joy. One carol will forever fill the courts of heaven—"Born a Savior!"

May the Spirit of God inspire us to join with the angels and sing to the nations, "For unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." This is an unequalled announcement, and though this column is called *Behind the Lines*, this is a matter that deserves *FrontLine* attention. Ours is to do angels' work. Ours is to bring the world an announcement ever new—"Unto you is born . . . a Saviour . . . Christ the Lord!"

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