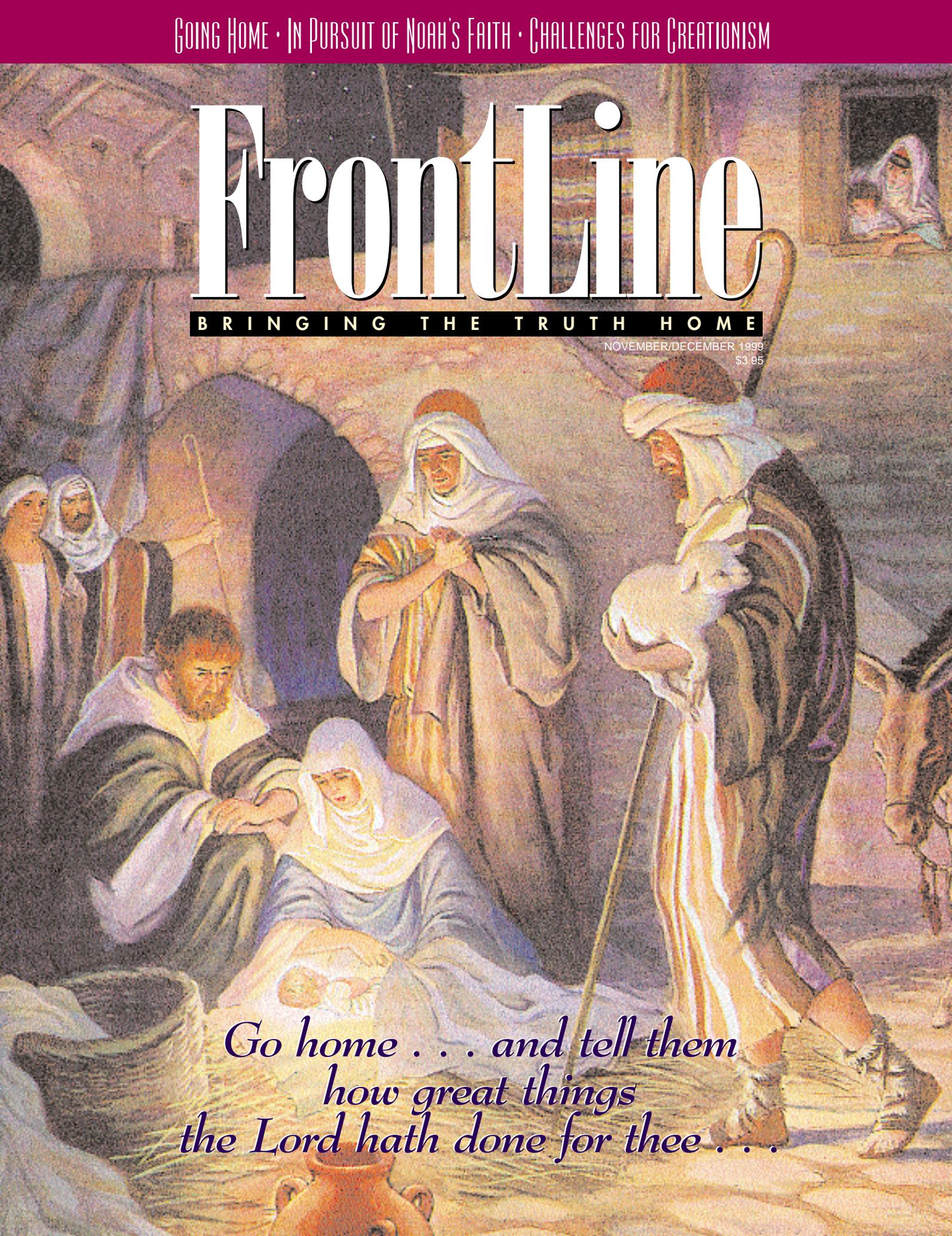


GOING HOME · IN PURSUIT OF NOAH'S FAITH · CHALLENGES FOR CREATIONISM

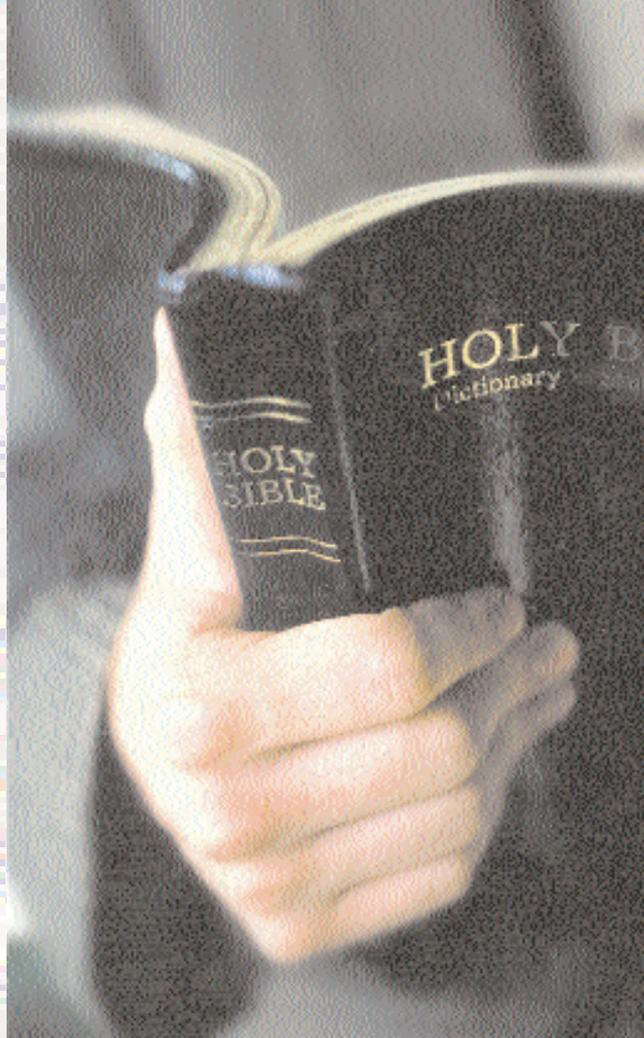
# FrontLine

BRINGING THE TRUTH HOME

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1999  
\$3.95



*Go home . . . and tell them  
how great things  
the Lord hath done for thee . . .*



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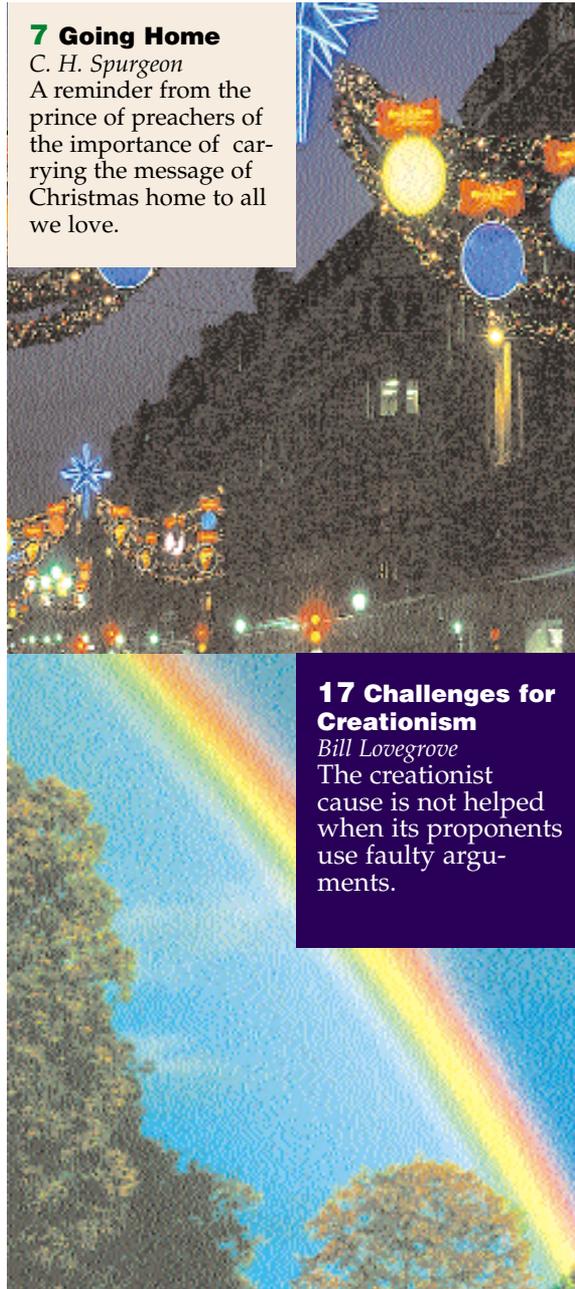
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# Mail Bag

I want to commend you for your excellent article some time back on the Clearwaters and Cedarholm saga [May/June 1999]. . . . I appreciated your tone and purpose. Both men had a great influence for good in their ministries, even though there was a time period when the conflict that consumed fundamental Baptists in the Upper Midwest was difficult and unfortunate. I was caught in the middle of it. . . . It is a blessing to know that these problems can be overcome in time.

Gerald B. Carlson  
Rocky Mount, NC

Your *Frontline* magazine has been a great blessing to my personal Christian life and my ministry as well. I presumed that the Southern Baptist Convention is a good denomination, but by reading *Frontline* I came to know that they are a very dangerous denomination. All articles are helpful.

Rev. Timothy  
Sui Lain Mang  
Biblical Theological  
Seminary, MYANMAR

Thank you for your magazine. What interesting and needed articles, from Puritans to Y2K, from physically and mentally handicapped to those spiritually handicapped.

Ric & Jan Samuels  
Piedmont, SC

I have thoroughly enjoyed the magazine

## We want to hear from you!

Let us know what you like or don't like about *Frontline*. Address your comments to **Managing Editor, *Frontline***, 500 West Lee Road, Taylors, SC 29687. You may also fax your comments to (864) 322-0838 or send them by e-mail to FBFLINE@aol.com.



You may request that your letter not be published or that your name be withheld, but anonymous letters will not be accepted.

since its inception. . . . The articles have always been pertinent to the issues at hand facing Fundamentalists today. I appreciate the uncompromising stand that the FBF has taken through the years.

Pastor Brian Ernsberger  
Lake Stevens, WA

Thank you for all your hard work on *Frontline*! I have a suggestion make that might make it easier for us preachers to remember when a given "Sound Words" insert was published if we remove it from the magazine. Would it be possible to put the year and date at the bottom of the "Sound Words" section next to the words "*Frontline* Pastor's Insert" and the page number? I am writing on mine in pen, for example, "July/August 1999" so I don't forget if I ever want to quote something.

Eric Chapman  
LITHUANIA

Note: Thanks, Eric, for the sensible suggestion. It was incorporated in the last issue.

We appreciate your fine magazine and wish to introduce others to it as the Lord provides.

Rev. Anthony R. Payne  
SOUTH AFRICA

Thanks for including a reasonable Y2K article ["What Should We Do about Y2K?" March/April 1999]. A publication (particularly one from a Christian viewpoint) without an alarming apocalyptic feature on Y2K is a rare find these days.

Vickie Johnson  
Madison, AL

Thank you for the good article ["What's on the Web," May/June 1999] you had on protecting our families from the bad influences on the Internet.

John C. Lewis  
JohnCLewis@  
missionaries.org

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## Why the FBF Is a Fellowship of Individuals

**T**he history of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship's formation is a fascinating one. Fundamentalists met together in 1920 in an attempt to rescue the Northern Baptist Convention from the clutches of modernism. They first called themselves the Fundamentalist Fellowship; then the Conservative Baptist Fellowship; and, finally, the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship (FBF). Dr. David Beale, in his book *The Pursuit of Purity*, holds that the FBF has always been a "loose fellowship of individuals."

The FBF is a *fellowship* and has never been an association of churches. It is a group of pastors, missionaries, college faculty, and other individuals. The Fundamental Baptist Fellowship has been a success because *individuals* have met to fellowship in the gospel—to strengthen, encourage, and inform each other. The purpose of the FBF is *not* to start churches or send out missionaries, but to fellowship around the great, fundamental, cardinal doctrines of the faith and to take a stand on the issues of the day.

For many years, the FBF did not even have a directory of members. I believe the directory was started so that, as people traveled, they could find good local churches of like precious faith with which to fellowship. However, there is an inherent danger that association with such a group can easily degenerate into a "status symbol," in which pride is taken in being "an FBF church." I believe more

than half the participants in FBF meetings would not or *could not* belong to an association of churches. Some churches (such as our church) have constitutional provisions that prohibit membership in any organization wherein membership is granted or revoked by an outside voting body. Many of the FBF men (perhaps as many as 90 percent) come to the Fellowship because it is a fellowship of *individuals* and not an ecclesiastical authority. There is no such thing as "an FBF church." The FBF consists of individual, fundamental, independent Baptists.

*By His grace we have been successful in helping hundreds of preachers, young and old alike, across the country.*

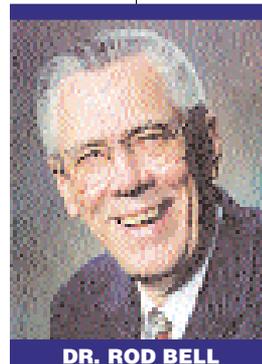
If the FBF were an association of churches, what would happen if a church did not wish to become a part of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship? Would a pastor who is on the board of the FBF be required to relinquish his position on the board if his church did not wish to join? What would be the criteria for one to become a board member? What about men who are presidents of institutions, mission boards, or schools who are not pastors of local churches? They could not serve on the board nor feel welcome. What if a church affiliated with the FBF were to call a new pastor who has no interest in the FBF? Does that place him at odds with his new church? Does the "FBF church" vote to have "messengers" attend FBF meetings and officially vote for them?

I recall that the

American Baptist Convention (before 1950 known as the Northern Baptist Convention), from which I separated 43 years ago, told us that churches were free and autonomous. As such, they could not send delegates to state or national meetings, for autonomous bodies could not delegate authority to anyone. To be an official statement of the Convention, each vote taken would have to go back to the churches to be approved or disapproved. We went as "messengers" and thus did not officially represent the churches that sent us. What we voted was not necessarily binding upon our churches and may not have represented the churches' wishes. Of course, the ABC did not really expect us to be autonomous!

An association of churches eventually wants to do things together so they can offer more benefits to its membership. The association begins approving schools, mission boards, and various other institutions. An association rapidly becomes a political potpourri.

God has blessed the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship. We are not a denomination, but are individuals of like precious faith, earnestly contending for that faith. By His grace we have been successful in helping hundreds of preachers, young and old alike, across the country. I feel we are at one of the most critical points in our history. We are in the process of organizing, and a committee is rewriting our constitution. Organization is needed to grow, but to become an organization of churches is not needed,



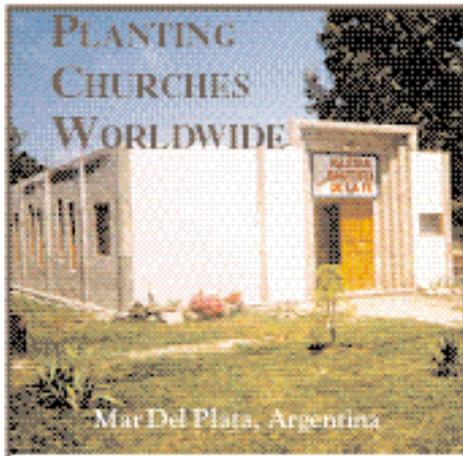
DR. ROD BELL

has never been needed, and is unscriptural. Any attempt to make this Fellowship an association of churches scares me. I believe any attempt to make this Fellowship an association will kill it! Our young men coming up must see these issues and be aware of the dangers.

The FBF should never change to an association of churches. If it did, I would be forced to resign from the FBF. As I stated above, my church's constitution forbids membership in any convention or association of churches. (Hundreds of other men would also face the same dilemma because of similar church constitutional restrictions.) Furthermore, we have learned from history the result of such associations—denominational control.

If you wish to fellowship with us, *come!* If not, *don't!*

I hope you *will* join us as the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship enters the 21st century. I sincerely believe its greatest days lie ahead!



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# Going Home

*Delivered on Sunday morning, December 21, 1856, by the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon*

***“Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.”—Mark 5:19***

**T**he case of the man here referred to is a very extraordinary one. This poor wretch being possessed with a legion of evil spirits had been driven to something worse than madness. He fixed his home among the tombs, where he dwelt by night and day, and was the terror of all those who passed by. The authorities had attempted to curb him. He had been bound with fetters and chains, but in the paroxysms of his madness he had torn the chains in sunder and broken the fetters in pieces. Attempts had been made to reclaim him, but no man could tame him. His fierce nature would not yield. He was a misery to himself, for he would run upon the mountains by night and day, crying and howling fearfully, cutting himself with the sharp flints, and torturing his poor body in the most frightful manner.

Jesus Christ passed by; He said to the devils, “Come out of him.” The man was healed in a moment, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, he became a rational being—an intelligent man, yea, what is more, a convert to the Savior. Out of gratitude to his deliverer, he said, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest; I will be thy constant companion and thy servant; permit me so to be.”

“No,” said Christ, “I esteem your motive; it is one of gratitude to me; but if you would show your gratitude, ‘go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.’”

Now, I will tell you the reason why I selected my text. I thought within myself, there are a large number of young men who always come to hear me preach; they always crowd the aisles of my chapel, and many of them have been converted to God. Now, here is Christmas-day come round again, and they are going home to see their friends. When they get home they will want a Christmas Carol in the evening; I think I will suggest one to them—more especially to such of them as have been lately converted. I will give them a theme for their discourse on Christmas evening; it shall be this: “Go home and tell your friends what the Lord hath done for your souls, and how He hath had compassion on you.”

For my part, I wish there were 20 Christmas days in the year. Though I have no respect to the religious observance of the day, yet I love it as a family institution, as

one of England's brightest days, the great Sabbath of the year, when the plough rests in its furrow, when the din of business is hushed, when the mechanic and the working man go out to refresh themselves upon the green award of the glad earth. We are going home to see our friends, and here is the story some of us have to tell. "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for them, and hath had compassion on thee."

First, then, here is what we are to tell. It is to be a story of personal experience. You are not to repair to your houses and forthwith begin to preach. You are not to begin to take up doctrinal subjects and expatiate on them and endeavor to bring persons to your peculiar views and sentiments. You are not to go home with sundry doctrines you have lately learned and try to teach these, but you are to go home and tell not what you have believed, but what you have really known to be your own; not what great things you have read, but what great things the Lord hath done for you. Tell them how you were once a lost abandoned sinner, how the Lord met with you, how you bowed your knees and poured out your soul before God, and how at last you leaped with joy, for you thought you heard him say within you, "I, even I, am He that bloteth out thy transgressions for my name's sake." Tell your friends a story of your own personal experience.

It is not, "Tell thy friends how great things thou hast

gratitude, remembering how little we deserve these things.

Tell your story, my hearers, as lost sinners. Do not go to your home, and walk into your house with a supercilious air, as much as to say, "Here's a saint come home to the poor sinners, to tell them a story"; but go home like a poor sinner yourself.

In the second place, why should we tell this story? I hear many of my congregation say, "Sir, I could relate that story to any one sooner than I could to my own friends; I could come to your vestry, and tell you something of what I have tasted and handled of the Word of God; but I could not tell my father, nor my mother, nor my brethren, nor my sisters." Come, then; I will try and argue with you, to induce you to do so, that I may send you home this Christmas-day, to be missionaries in the localities to which you belong and to be real preachers, though you are not so by name. Dear friends, do tell this story when you go home.

First, for your Master's sake. It is a strong argument when I say to you, for His dear sake who loved you so much, go home and tell it. What! Do you think we can have so much done for us and yet not tell it? Our children, if anything should be done for them, do not stay many minutes before they are telling all the company, "such an one hath give me such a present, and bestowed on me such-and-such a favor." And should the children of God be backward in declaring how they were saved when their feet made haste

*Go home to them and tell them for their soul's salvation. I hope, when you are telling the story of what God did for you, that they will be led by the Spirit to desire the same mercy themselves.*

done thyself," but "how great things the Lord hath done for thee." He says nothing about his own doings, or willings, or prayings, or seekings, but he ascribes it all to the love and grace of the great God who looks on sinners in love, and makes them His children, heirs of everlasting life. A man who is grateful is always full of the greatness of the mercy which God has shown him; he always thinks that what God has done for him is immensely good and supremely great. May God grant that you may tell a grateful story. No story is more worth hearing than a tale of gratitude.

And lastly, it must be a tale told by a poor sinner who feels himself not to have deserved what he has received. "How he hath had compassion on thee." It was not a mere act of kindness, but an act of compassion towards one who was in misery. I have heard men tell the story of their conversion and of their spiritual life in such a way that my heart hath loathed them and their story too, for they have told of their sins as if they did boast in the greatness of their crime, and they have mentioned the love of God not with a tear of gratitude, not with the simple thanksgiving of the really humble heart, but as if they as much exalted themselves as they exalted God. When we tell the story of our own conversion, I would have it done with deep sorrow, remembering what we used to be, and with great joy and

to hell and how redeeming mercy snatched them as brands from the burning? Will you refuse to tell the tale of His love to you? Shall your lips be dumb when His honor is concerned? Will you not, wherever you go, tell of the God who loved you and died for you? This poor man, we are told, "Departed and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men did marvel." So with you. If Christ has done much for you, you cannot help it—you must tell it.

But are your friends pious? If so, then go home and tell them in order to make their hearts glad. What a happy thing it would be if some here who had gone astray should thus go home! Woman! Hast thou strayed from thy family? Hast thou left them long? "Go home to thy friends," I beseech thee, ere thy father totters to his grave, and ere thy mother's grey hairs sleep on the snow-white pillow of her coffin. Go back, I beseech thee! Tell her thou art penitent; tell her that God hath met with thee. Go back to thy friends. Go home and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.

Once more, dear friends. I hear one of you say, "Sir, would to God I could go home to pious friends! But when I go home I go into the worst of places, for my home is amongst those who never knew God themselves and consequently never prayed for me and never taught me any-

thing concerning heaven." Well, young man, go home to your friends. If they are ever so bad they are still your friends. I sometimes meet with young men wishing to join the church, who say, when I ask them about their father, "Oh, sir, I am parted from my father." Then I say, "Young man, you may just go and see your father before I have anything to do with you; if you are at ill-will with your father and mother I will not receive you into the church; if they are ever so bad they are still your parents."

Go home to them and tell them for their soul's salvation. I hope, when you are telling the story of what God did for you, that they will be led by the Spirit to desire the same mercy themselves. But I will give you a piece of advice. Do not tell this story to your ungodly friends when they are all together, for they will laugh at you. Take them one by one, when you can get them alone, and begin to tell it to them, and they will hear you seriously. Reprove a man alone. A verse may hit him. You may be the means of bringing a man to Christ who has often heard the Word and only laughed at it, but who cannot resist a gentle admonition. Oh! that the everlasting God might make use of some of those now present, that they might be induced to

Tell to others round  
 What a dear Saviour they have found;  
 To point to His redeeming blood,  
 And say, Behold the way to God!

There is a third point, upon which we must be very brief. How is this story to be told? First, tell it truthfully. Do not tell more than you know; do not tell John Bunyan's experience when you ought to tell your own. Tell your experience truthfully; for mayhap one single fly in the pot of ointment will spoil it, and one statement you may make which is not true may ruin it all.

In the next place, tell it very humbly. Do not intrude yourselves upon those who are older, and know more, but tell your story humbly; not as a preacher, but as a friend and as a son.

Next, tell it very earnestly. Let them see you mean it. Do not talk about religion flippantly; do not make puns

on texts; do not quote Scripture by way of joke: if you do, you may talk till you are dumb, but you will do no good if you in the least degree give them occasion to laugh by laughing at holy things yourself.

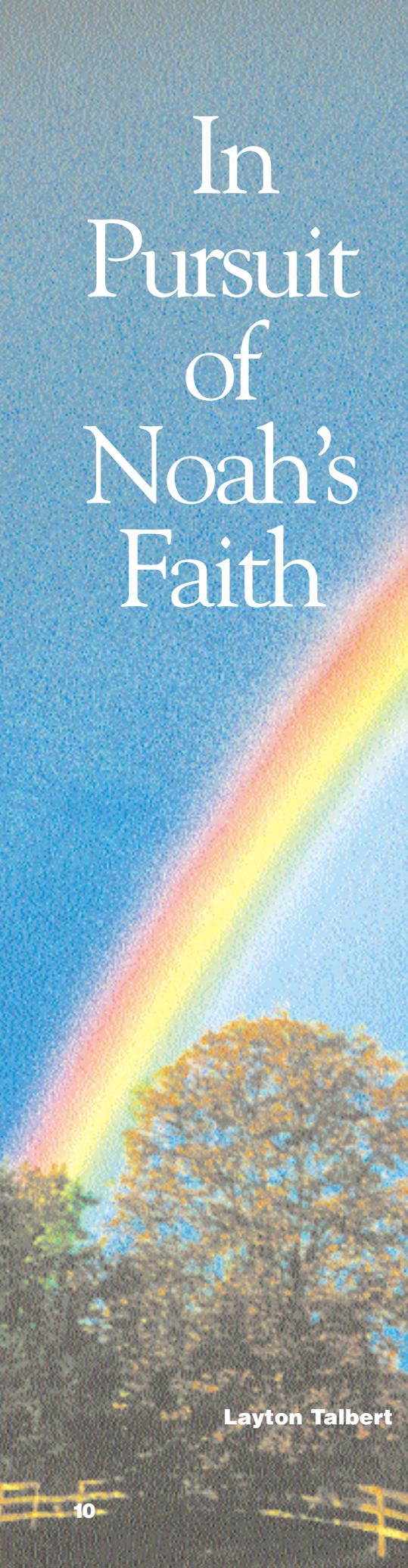
And then, tell it very devoutly. Do not try to tell your tale to man till you have told it first to God. When you are at home on Christmas-day, let no one see your face till God has seen it. Be up in the morning, and if your friends are not converted, wrestle with God for them; and then you will find it easy work to wrestle with them for God. Seek, if you can, to get them one by one, and tell them the story. Do not be afraid; only think of the good you may possibly do. Remember, he that saves a soul from death covereth a multitude of sins, and he shall have stars in his crown for ever and ever. Seek to be the means of leading your own beloved brethren and sisters to seek and to find the Lord Jesus Christ, and then one day, when you shall meet in Paradise, it will be a joy and blessedness to think that you are there and that your friends are there too, whom God will have made you the instrument of saving. Let your reliance in the Holy Spirit be entire and honest. Trust not yourself, but fear not to trust Him. He can give you words. He can apply those words to their heart, and so enable you to "minister grace to the hearers."

I close by a short, and I think, a pleasant turning of the text, to suggest another meaning to it. Soon, dear friends, very soon with some of us, the Master will say, "Go home to thy friends." You know where the home is. It is up above the stars, "Where our best friends, our kindred dwell, Where God our Saviour reigns."

And when we go home to our friends in Paradise, what shall we do? Why, first we will repair to that blest seat where Jesus sits, take off our crown and cast it at His feet, and crown Him Lord of all. And when we have done that, what shall be our next employ? Why, we will tell the blessed ones in heaven what the Lord hath done for us, and how He hath had compassion on us.

Wait awhile; tarry His leisure, and ye shall soon be gathered to the land of the hereafter, to the home of the blessed, where endless felicity shall be thy portion. God grant a blessing for His name's sake!

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# In Pursuit of Noah's Faith

Layton Talbert

The “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews 11 displays the radiance and reality of faith through the stained-glass portrayals of real men and women, exhibiting what faith looks like as it is fleshed out in the choices and actions of those men and women. But how do we cultivate that kind of faith? The answer is simple, but not easy. The same way they did—through hearing and acting upon the explicit statements of God (Rom. 10:17).<sup>\*</sup> We have far more of God’s Word upon which to base our faith than they did, yet they put most of us to shame. But what is to our shame God intends to turn to our encouragement and resolve. Look, for example, at one man of faith—Noah.

The building of the ark was the magnum opus of Noah’s faith—the grandest, most tangible demonstration of his faith in God and in His Word (Heb. 11:7). But a brief glimpse at the background in Genesis 6:8–22 reveals that before Noah had the faith to build an ark, he had been laying a foundation in his life on which great faith could be built. “No Christian character can be built on a foundation of neglected duty,” B. B. Warfield once observed. Likewise, no Biblical faith can be built on a foundation of neglected revelation.

## The Acquisition of Faith

Genesis 6:8 holds the key without which one can neither obtain nor cultivate faith: “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” That does not mean that Noah attracted God’s attention or merited God’s favor because he was so good. Rather, he was “good” because he sought grace from God and found it. It was the grace of God operating in him that made him the man of faith that he became. Faith is not a feeling we work up; we cannot psyche ourselves into an attitude of faith. Faith is ultimately not humanly produced at all. It is not attained by human effort but obtained by grace from God (2 Pet. 1:1–2). Recognizing our dire dependence on God and on His grace working in us is the first and crucial step not only to salvation, but to daily Christian living (Gal. 2:20–21; Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 2:12–13; Col. 2:6–7).

## The Cultivation of Faith

Genesis 6:9 portrays the growth of Noah’s faith through three descriptive

terms. First, Noah was “a just man”—that is, he was careful to meet his obligations to God and to fulfill his responsibilities to others. Second, Noah was “perfect in his generations”—not flawless or sinless, but blameless and outstanding among his contemporaries for his integrity. Third, Noah “walked with God” in the tradition of his great-grandfather Enoch (see Gen. 5:22, 24). In fact, the text records emphatically that, in contrast to those around him, “it was with God that Noah walked.” What did this mean for Noah? He had no Bible to read. Walking with God does not come naturally and does not happen haphazardly. The Puritans called it “practicing the presence of God,” cultivating a consciousness of the Lord amid the deeds and decisions of daily life. “Personal communion with God,” writes H. C. Leupold, “was the taproot of this outstandingly good life.” Griffeth-Thomas adds:

The idea [of walking with God] is that of friendship and fellowship with God, and it is noteworthy that such a position was possible amidst the very difficult, practical, everyday life that Noah had to lead. It meant courage and independence, for no one else was walking that way. When a man walks with God it necessarily means that he cannot walk with any of his contemporaries who are going the opposite direction.

These noble qualities are highlighted by the dark description of Noah’s contemporaries as thoroughly “corrupt” (repeated three times) and his surrounding environment as “filled with violence” (repeated twice; Gen. 6:11–13). But Noah does not stand out merely because of the bleak backdrop of the society in which he lived. “In a corrupt world,” Derek Kidner remarks, “Noah emerges not merely as the best of a bad generation, but as a remarkably complete man of God.” Given our access to the full revelation of God and the abundant resources at our disposal to read and hear and study His Word, what excuse do we have to be any less in our generation?

Responsibility, integrity, and walking with God in the midst of a corrupt world are choices that both require and

reflect faith. It is only out of this reservoir of faith, carefully dug and gradually deepened over years of practice, that Noah's faith could rise to embrace an impossible assignment in the face of an improbable judgment and despite incredible odds and opposition. Great faith is not a sudden burst of unshakable confidence. Great faith is the gradual culmination of small faith that is consistently grown, carefully nourished, and regularly strengthened through exercise and use. Every small action or decision taken on the basis of faith in what God has said, rather than on the basis of what sight and sense would seem to dictate, honors God, strengthens our faith, and emboldens our confidence in the trustworthiness of God.

### **The Manifestation of Faith**

When the time came, "by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark . . . by the which he condemned the world" (Heb. 11:7).

Despite the fact that he was virtually alone in his beliefs and practices, despite the laborious work involved in such a monumental task and long-term goal, despite the raucous ridicule of others, despite the fact that his life and work was a visible, potentially offensive condemnation of the beliefs and lifestyles of those around him, and despite the almost absurd improbability and lengthy delay of what God said would happen ("Just how do you plan to get that thing down to the water, Noah? A flood? What's a flood? Now why would God want to destroy everything He made? You sure you heard God right, Noah? I think you're crazy, Noah, that's what I think!")—despite all odds and opposition and opinion to the contrary, Noah submitted to the explicitly detailed instructions of the divine blueprint for his life.

What is faith? It is stated with startling simplicity in Genesis 6:22—"Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded Him, so did he." Simple obedience itself demands faith because the promised results, punishments, and rewards are often neither immediate nor apparent.

The essence of faith is to order my life according to God's Word, God's values, God's directives, God's promises, and God's warnings regardless of how diffi-

cult, unpopular, or contrary to "common sense" or experience doing so may seem to be. By faith I rear my children as God says they are to be reared, regardless of how our generation says they ought to be reared. By faith in God's warnings I resist the urgings of world, flesh, and Devil to strong drink, to adultery, to dishonesty, to evil company, to compromise any Biblical principle, however fun or alluring or profitable sin might seem to be. By faith I carry out God's ministry according to the message and methods delineated in God's Biblical blueprint, however "successful" alternative methods may appear to be which compromise God's message or distort God's character. By faith I cling to the future and to the unseen as promised by God, however fanciful it may seem to others. Faith is my "Yes" to the words of God.

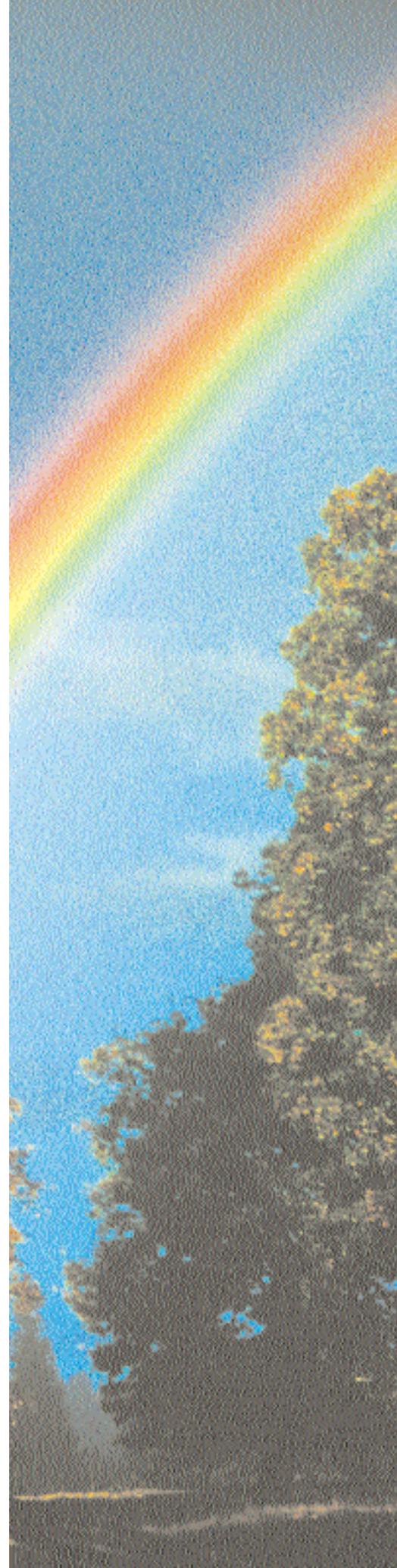
### **Conclusion**

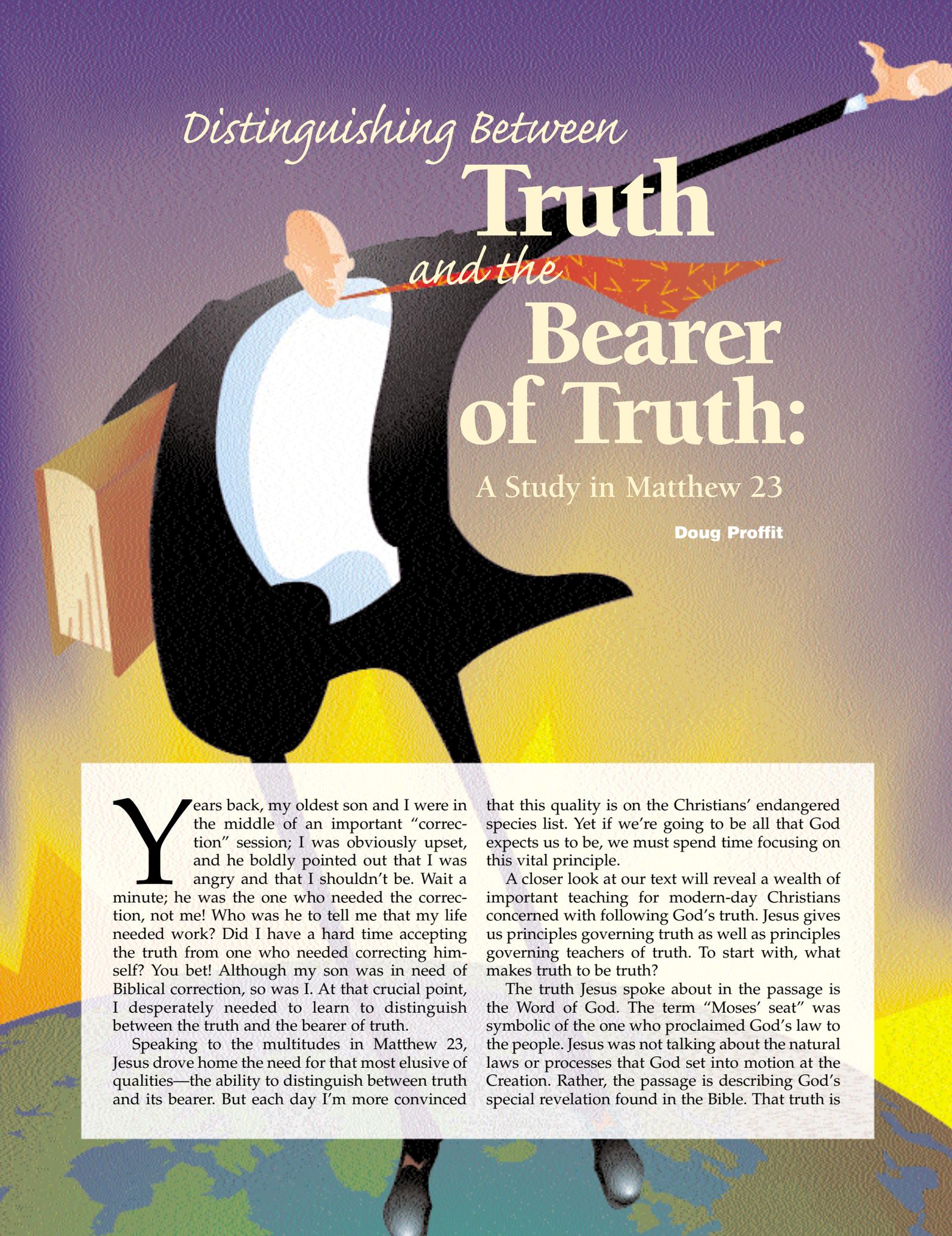
The word "faith" appears only twice in the Old Testament. Once we learn to recognize what it looks like when we see it, however, we discover that the concept of faith abounds where the word may not be found. Biblical faith includes two components: belief and trust. Intellectual assent and certainty (belief) is only half the formula; personal reliance and commitment (trust) complete the circuit of Biblical faith. Faith is my positive response to God's Word—accepting God's person as trustworthy; assenting to God's revelation as true; appropriating God's Word as personally applicable; and yielding to its demand to govern my life, direct my choices, influence my attitudes, and affect my actions. The name Noah means "rest." Faith is coming to rest, like Noah, in the words of God.

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### **Endnote**

\*Two primary Greek words are translated "word" with reference to God's Word. *Logos* is the "larger" concept, referring to the message or content of God's communication to man. *Rhema* denotes the explicit, individual statements themselves which make up the general message or content. The word in Romans 10:17 is the latter. In other words, faith is not produced merely by hearing the overall message of God's Word, but by hearing and believing the explicit statements of God on every subject.





*Distinguishing Between*

# Truth

*and the*

# Bearer of Truth:

A Study in Matthew 23

Doug Proffit

**Y**ears back, my oldest son and I were in the middle of an important “correction” session; I was obviously upset, and he boldly pointed out that I was angry and that I shouldn’t be. Wait a minute; he was the one who needed the correction, not me! Who was he to tell me that my life needed work? Did I have a hard time accepting the truth from one who needed correcting himself? You bet! Although my son was in need of Biblical correction, so was I. At that crucial point, I desperately needed to learn to distinguish between the truth and the bearer of truth.

Speaking to the multitudes in Matthew 23, Jesus drove home the need for that most elusive of qualities—the ability to distinguish between truth and its bearer. But each day I’m more convinced

that this quality is on the Christians’ endangered species list. Yet if we’re going to be all that God expects us to be, we must spend time focusing on this vital principle.

A closer look at our text will reveal a wealth of important teaching for modern-day Christians concerned with following God’s truth. Jesus gives us principles governing truth as well as principles governing teachers of truth. To start with, what makes truth to be truth?

The truth Jesus spoke about in the passage is the Word of God. The term “Moses’ seat” was symbolic of the one who proclaimed God’s law to the people. Jesus was not talking about the natural laws or processes that God set into motion at the Creation. Rather, the passage is describing God’s special revelation found in the Bible. That truth is

truth because God gave it, because God declared it to be so.

When is truth to be obeyed? Always, even when it comes from the worst of examples. Notice that the truth Jesus urged the multitudes to obey came from hypocrites, the scribes and Pharisees (v. 2). We are obligated to obey God's truth regardless of its source. Jesus said "whatsoever they bid you . . . observe and do" (v. 3). There are no excuses for not obeying truth. Although we find it hard to accept, a hypocrite or even an enemy may actually share truth with us—and we are still obligated to obey that truth. The character flaws of the human bearer, the abuses by religious leadership, the poor testimony of preacher or layman—none of these release us from our obligation to obey truth. We often think that since another's life has obvious flaws, inconsistencies, and sins, he certainly can't speak truth to us—at least not truth that we need to obey. But we're wrong. We are to follow truth, not people. We are to follow truth, not positions. Truth is not conditioned or mitigated by its bearer, by its package, or by its setting.

Does truth still reign supreme when it comes from your friend, even when your friend lets you down or sins? Do you stop listening to the truth your friend shares with you when your friend offends you by his style, wording, or approach? Are we not sometimes guilty of conditioning our obedience by the wrong set of standards? We must learn to evaluate a man's message properly. It should be an evaluation based on the content of the message more than the packaging of that content, on its closeness to God's Word more than the expertise or charisma of the messenger.

Jesus instructed the people to obey the truth given to them by the scribes and Pharisees. In the rest of Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced "woe" on these two groups no less than eight times! And yet it was these very individuals who could speak the truth to the people; the people had to listen and to continually (present-tense command in the Greek) observe that truth.

Of course, no Christian's poor testimony is to be condoned, and certainly not that of a preacher. But God will not allow us to use another's sin as an excuse to disregard His Word. Some don't attend church because of a problem with the preacher or another brother. Some disregard the preacher's counsel because of a problem with his style; others are disillusioned about Christianity because of a bad experience with a particular church or with a particular Christian.

What are we doing? We're acting as though truth is made truth solely by the bearer of that truth, as though truth is only binding upon our lives when we "respect" or "enjoy" the bearer of the truth. Remember Paul's encounter with a hypocritical religious leader in Acts 23:1–5? When that leader accurately quoted God's Word, Paul immediately obeyed—even though the Word came through the one persecuting him. What a convicting lesson for today's Christians! Why was Paul able to do this? He was committed to obeying God's truth, and he was able to recognize the small nugget of truth that came in the midst of great hypocrisy. We should be committed to obeying God's truth in whatever garb it appears.

Lest a reader think the preacher, teacher, or leader has a license to live any way he wants, notice that Jesus goes on in the text to emphatically indicate otherwise. He gives us essential principles regarding those who teach truth. Modern Christians must learn to listen carefully and critically to anyone claiming to be sharing Scripture. Today, many Christians think just because the speaker is well known, he or she must be speaking truth. Such Christians are failing to listen carefully and to examine thoroughly the speaker's words for truth.

We must submit to truth for truth's sake, even though we must learn to avoid teachers whose testimony contradicts their teaching or who do not have a balanced ministry. Jesus points out that these teachers left out important truth in their messages, that they majored on the minors to the exclusion of the "weightier matters" (v. 23). It would be best to avoid teachers who pick and choose what truth they will teach and obey, and whose motives—when evident—are unscriptural. For example, Jesus points out that these leaders' motives for ministry were selfish and self-serving (v. 5), that their desire for social

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*We are to follow truth, not people.*

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*We are to follow truth, not positions. Truth is not conditioned or mitigated by its bearer, by its package, or by its setting.*

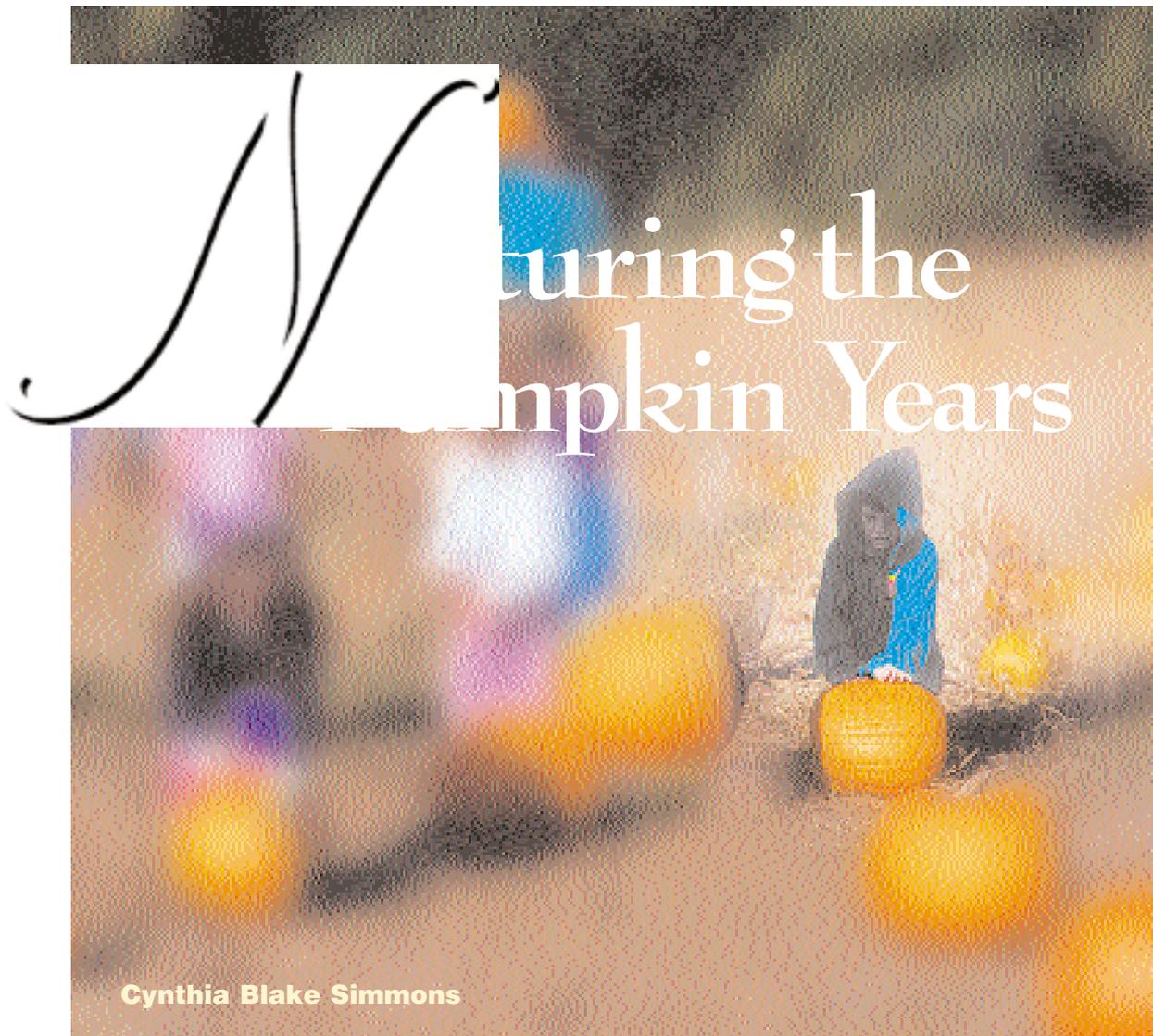
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status had taken precedence over godliness (v. 6), and that their desire for men's approval and praise had overshadowed God's favor and approval (v. 7). Our Lord further shows that these leaders used crafty semantics coupled with Bible statements to cover their greedy, sinful practices (v. 14). Their concerns were merely physical and external rather than spiritual and internal (vv. 25–28). God is not pleased when one teaching God's truth has a life that does not support that truth. He repeatedly pronounces "woe" on such teachers.

Christian, what are we to do? Matthew 23 teaches us to focus on God's truth regardless of its bearer. But the text also gives us criteria for evaluating those who proclaim God's truth—not for the purposes of criticizing, of causing them problems, of bringing about strife and division, but for the purpose of avoiding them and placing ourselves under those whose lives are consistent with the truth of God's Word.

Have you learned to distinguish between truth and its bearer?

Dr. Doug Proffitt teaches at Falls Road Christian School in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.



**Cynthia Blake Simmons**

**A**s the changing colors of the leaves signaled autumn's approach, I had wondered if this child, my last, would still request to travel to the pumpkin farm to make his annual choice. The days were unusually warm—the type which warrant sure destruction for a carved pumpkin, so I had not suggested going. As I studied my growing son, I pondered: had the last year been that final magical year of childhood, and would the entry into junior high school herald the forsaking of the traditional rituals and memories? I noticed the darkening growth on his upper lip that he had recently begun to shave and the fact that he was almost as tall as I, and decided that

probably pumpkin days were over. I should have taken pictures last year.

One day, when the air had turned very cool and we were passing “pumpkins-for-sale” displays as we drove, he announced that we needed to be getting our yearly pumpkin. Feeling a bit tired and pressed for time, I ventured a casual proposal to divert from tradition and make this year's choice from the small selection we had passed or perhaps from the nice (and inexpensive) ones I had seen at the grocery store. This suggestion was met with the equally casual insistence that the best pumpkins were at the pumpkin farm.

I knew what this meant. There were hundreds of pumpkins at the farm, and we were never able to make our final selection until we had made an attempt to check out every single one. I glanced at my watch and my “to do” list passed before my eyes. Then I reminded myself that this excursion would be an extra gift—one more time with a little boy who was almost not a little boy any more. So we were off. As we drove, we planned and dreamed. We had to discuss size, carving options, and, of course, selection strategy. I dispelled his worries that it was too early to carve the pumpkin. The weather was cool enough now for it to last a long time outdoors. Since we do not celebrate Halloween, we try to avoid carvings that would suggest promotion of that holiday. Sometimes the pumpkins remain uncarved. This year we decided upon a cat face.

Strolling through the farm, I decided that there must have been a bumper crop that year. If we were going to look at every last pumpkin, we were going to be there a long time! As I shivered in the cool breeze, I thought wistfully back to the preceding week’s unseasonably high temperatures and chided myself for waiting until the weather was cold. My son began reminding me of our usual procedure (as if I had forgotten!), and we found a wagon and began our search. We would go from pumpkin to pumpkin, selecting the very best ones. When the wagon was full, we would have to begin making choices and eliminating ones in the wagon before we added a superior find. Again he stated that we would have to check each one and described a plan for going row by row. I smiled, remembering past years, and knew that we would find a good one and that he would be tired long before we observed the final row of pumpkins . . . but as always, I seriously played along.

And so we went, pumpkin by pumpkin, scrutinizing each one with the intent of a diamond connoisseur—checking color variances, sizes, and of course watching for flaws. As he wandered off to ensure he had not missed any treasures in the back of a pumpkin row, I noticed a mother and grandmother taking pictures of a small child as he teetered on wobbly legs exploring the wonders of endless pumpkins. Did they realize that as they were picking out their child’s first pumpkin that others were perhaps selecting their last? I wanted to tell them how fast the pumpkin years go and admonish them to treasure each one. I regretted that I had not brought my camera, and I vowed to get a picture of the final product.

Eventually we had our choice narrowed down to several beautiful specimens of autumn finery, and the final process began. I secretly commended myself on once again having managed to leave with a satisfied child after only scouring half of the rows. I was going to miss this tradition some day. Each finalist had to be weighed and reevaluated, and after very serious discussion of the merits and shortcomings of each one, we were finished. Two taffy apples and a bag of



Red Delicious for lunch snacks completed our purchase. We carried our trophy to the car.

I tried to offer a little carving assistance, but he insisted upon carving alone. I sighed as I remembered that seasoned pumpkin experts don’t need a mother’s help. My job was to offer praise and amazement at appropriate moments and to provide supper.

I was not always this wise about the pumpkin years. There were earlier days when the cares of life and the demands of the ministry choked my schedule and left little luxury time for exploring a pumpkin patch. Ah, but are such experiences a luxury? No, they are very necessary chapters in the life of a child and mother. Having a dust-free home and stacks of neatly organized laundry may *seem* like urgent accomplishments—but this child will accompany me to heaven if we both have accepted Christ as our Savior. In fact, all of the earthly possessions that I have carefully maintained will be left behind. They are only tools to aid me in my ministry for the Lord. But the children which He has graciously entrusted into my care are an heritage, and their precious souls may be preserved for eternity. Earth offers no greater work than the nurture and admonition of these young souls. And their lives can extend the influence of the Word of God long after I have ceased to speak.

These truths I have always known, but it is now, when the years of child rearing are coming to an end, that I completely understand. As I look back, I am grateful for the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that I feel, but also there is a tugging at the heart that desires to have the years back, to enjoy them once again, and to do even more. These portions of God’s Word come to my mind.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19–21).

“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

After hours of artistic laboring, he called me out into the cold night air to observe the finished masterpiece. The rest of the world was asleep as we stood, not caring about our bare feet, and marveled at the magical brilliance of the cat face illuminated against the backdrop of darkness. We savored the special moment, and I praised him for having stuck with his project and for finishing the job. And I wondered—in years to come, will he remember this time; will it bring pleasant memories? Time may erase his recollections, but this mother will always look back with satisfaction, and perhaps a tear, when thinking about the pumpkin years.

Cynthia Blake Simmons is the wife of Dr. Mark Simmons, pastor of Marquette Manor Baptist Church in Downers Grove, Illinois.

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In recent decades the Biblical accounts of the Creation and the Flood have come under enormous attack. Theological liberals have criticized the literal interpretation of the Bible, while the scientific community has embraced evolution. People who believe the literal Genesis accounts are routinely ridiculed and grouped with astrologers and those who believe in a flat Earth.

In response to these attacks, a number of Bible-believing scientists and laymen have staged a counterattack. In books, journals, seminars, radio programs, and public debates, they refute evolutionary dogma and defend Biblical creationism. A wealth of material now exists for the Christian community concerning creationism.

However, the defense of creationism has not been without its flaws, blunders, and weaknesses. Let's look at some of these weaknesses in order to challenge creationists to present more persuasive arguments.

### **A Matter of Faith**

A broad misunderstanding exists about the nature of science in general and creation science in particular. Creationists routinely point out that evolution cannot be classified as science in the traditional sense of the word. The origin of life on Earth occurred as an event that was not observed (except by God!) and is not repeatable. Since evolution cannot be classified as pure science, creationists describe evolution as faith.

Neither, however, was the Creation observed by man, nor can it be repeated. Therefore both the creationist and the evolutionist can examine the present universe and make inferences about events that have happened in the past. Such studies describe legitimate scientific endeavors. However, neither the creationist nor the evolutionist can construct a scientific proof of origins.

Creationists do not believe in the Creation because of an unbiased examination of nature. Evidences of a recent creation do exist, but a belief in Creation focuses on the revealed Word of God. Creationists accept the Biblical account by faith, because God said "In the beginning." It can be stated, then, that accepting the Creation as an origin shows as much faith as the evolutionist's faith in evolution. Consequently, the term "creation science" must be used with care. Creationists must not pretend that they alone are doing unbiased scientific investigations.

### **A Matter of Spirituality**

Second Peter 3:3-5 confirms that at the heart of the controversy lies a spiritual—not scientific—problem. Evolutionists would unlikely be converted to creationism if they possessed an open-minded scientific outlook. The text identifies these scoffers as having two problems. First, they are walking after their own lusts. Second, they

willingly ignore the revealed Word of God about the history of the Earth. Evolutionists need regeneration of heart, not persuasion of mind.

### **A Matter of Evidence**

A further problem has been the quality of scientific evidence that has been offered in support of creationism. This evidence shows deficiencies in four important ways.

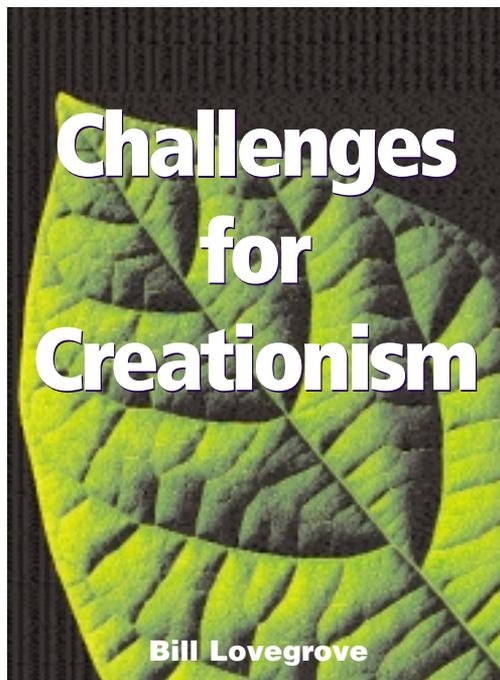
First, much of the scientific work has been performed by people outside of their fields of expertise. In defense of these people, it must be explained that there are few fundamental Christians with expertise in areas such as cosmology, geology, and paleontology to perform research for creationism in these specialized areas. Laymen and

scientists from other fields have accomplished a remarkable job of evaluating the evidence and presenting a creationist point of view. However, such efforts often result in incomplete or inaccurate data or conclusions—and often lack credibility. The solution for these problems is for Christian young people with an interest in science to bypass the more popular and profitable fields, such as engineering, physics, and medicine, to pursue those specialties directly related to the creation and evolution controversy.

Second, some of the scientific work has shown a carelessness that damages its credibility. The widely repeated bombardier beetle story provides an example of this carelessness. This remarkable beetle sprays a noxious, boiling-hot mixture of gases at a predator. An evolutionary sequence that could produce such a complex defense mechanism stretches the imagination.

Unfortunately, the early creationist accounts of this beetle contained a serious scientific error. The accounts described how the beetle contained in its body two chemicals, hydrogen peroxide and hydroquinone, which reacted explosively when mixed. However, in the midst of a public confrontation with an evolutionist, a creationist mixed these two chemicals to demonstrate the explosion. Embarrassingly, the result showed that the chemicals did not react explosively at all when mixed. Further research on the beetle revealed that the chemicals and their mixing process occur in a more complex manner, involving an inhibitor and a catalyst.

This argument stands against evolution because this beetle employs a defense mechanism more complex than originally thought. To conclude that such a process could evolve by random chance is unthinkable. However, the failure to thoroughly investigate the subject greatly damaged the testimony and credibility of those creationists. Most recent descriptions in creationist writings describe the beetle correctly.



Third, by exaggerating and embellishing stories, some legitimate arguments become flawed. The common moon dust argument supporting a recent creation provides such a problem:

Dust constantly falls on the moon. If the moon were billions of years old, a considerable thickness of dust should have accumulated. For this reason, NASA scientists envisioned that astronauts visiting the moon might sink into a layer of dust many feet thick. NASA engineers designed the lunar lander with large feet and long legs to minimize the risk of sinking into the dust. After the astronauts landed on the moon's surface, the astronauts found less lunar dust than expected. Thus, the moon cannot be billions of years old.

While the moon dust story appears convincing, it actually details a mixture of fact, exaggeration, and error. First, dust falls on the moon. The rate and quantity of falling dust remains difficult to determine. Creationist literature sometimes quotes decades-old measurements that are likely to be unreliable. Second, small amounts of loose surface dust exist on the moon. Although additional dust might have been compacted under the surface, scientists debated its possibility. Third, prior to the Apollo program, some but not nearly all scientists thought that there might be several feet of dust on the moon. Fourth, before the astronauts landed, several unmanned spacecraft visited the moon, took pictures, and even landed on the surface. Scientists studied the surface in many different ways from the Earth. By the time the astronauts visited the moon, scientists were convinced that there would not be a deep layer of dust; they were not surprised by the lack of dust.

The creationist position is not helped when people repeat the embellished version. Although the small amount of dust strongly suggests a young moon, this fact alone does not provide a compelling argu-

ment. Creationists must balance the moon dust theory with other moon observations, such as lava flows and numerous large meteorite impacts, which are not seen happening today. Evolutionists cite these facts as evidence of an old moon and challenge creationists to explain these evidences otherwise. Arguments that "God made it that way" are not particularly persuasive.

Finally, some creationists focus on quantity rather than quality of evidence. Lists of 50 (or 100 or 200) proofs of a young Earth often fall into this category. In an effort to detail a body of evidence that might impress by its sheer length, creationists include arguments of questionable quality. The Loch Ness monster argument provides an excellent example. Creationists generally believe that dinosaurs lived at least past the Flood and possibly much longer. They believe that the "behemoth" and the "leviathan" (Job 40:15 and 41:1) might be dinosaurs. They suspect that dinosaurs gave rise to the many dragon legends. While the thought that the Loch Ness monster might be a living dinosaur is intriguing, the actual discovery of a living dinosaur would certainly cause most evolutionists to stop and think! However, little scientific evidence shows that the Loch Ness monster exists at all, much less as a dinosaur. Recent evidence suggests that the most famous Loch Ness photograph is a fraud. The Loch Ness monster receives more coverage in the tabloids than it does in the scientific literature. To raise the Loch Ness monster as a scientific proof for Creation damages one's credibility.

First Peter 2:20 teaches, "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." The challenge for creationists is to uphold the highest standards in their research and writing. To suffer for our beliefs is Scriptural. To suffer needlessly because of shoddy research must be avoided.

Dr. Bill Lovegrove is a faculty member in the Department of Physics and Engineering at Bob Jones University.

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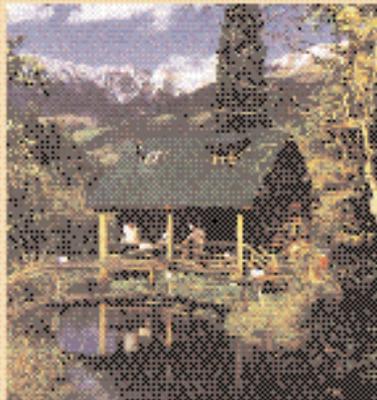
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# SOUND WORDS

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

## First Partaker

### You Get Out and Stand in the Rain

Our homiletics professor caught everyone off-guard with his question: "What would you do if you had been invited to speak at a country church and upon arriving early found that no one was there yet except one young woman who was standing outside the locked building in the rain?" Then he sharpened the dilemma, "Would you invite her to sit in the car with you?"

Not one of us fledgling pastors-in-the-making knew how to respond. Leaving a lady out in the rain rankled our sense of chivalry, but young ministerial imaginations recoiled from the thought of some suspicious saint arriving to find us alone in the night outside a dark building with an attractive woman who wasn't our wife. "Put her in the trunk!" one enterprising theologian finally offered. The chortle of nervous laughter testified to our appreciation that someone was relieving the uncertain tension in the room. "And don't close the lid!" someone else followed through. More laughter. But seriously, by this time we were baffled. What was the right thing to do?

I've never forgotten the day we were confronted with the pinching alternatives of that hypothetical situation. I've never forgotten because what was then purely hypothetical has emerged as the distressingly actual scores of times in the last 25 years. I'm sure that you too have faced these same kinds of uncomfortable predicaments.

I'm driving across town on a hot day when suddenly my attention is drawn to a figure on the sidewalk

about a block and a half ahead on the right. Sure enough, it's one of the teenage girls from the church. *Should I stop to pick her up?* I immediately wonder. Boy, *she's not dressed very modestly*, I notice.

*That's not going to look very good to have her in the car, especially dressed like that.* I'm within a block now. *But if she sees me drive by without offering a ride, what kind of testimony will that be?* my mind worries. *And what will her parents think of their pastor's apparent lack of common courtesy?* I'm within 100 or so feet now, and hearing the sound of the car behind her, the girl turns. . . .

Or here's another dilemma. *Should I make a call on this woman alone in her home?* I ask myself, as I listen to her voice on the other end of the phone requesting a visit to "help clear up some questions about what it means to be saved." My mind scrambles for an alternative. *Maybe I could suggest that we meet for lunch in the mall. At least the mall is a public place,* my mind gropes. *No one could accuse us of being alone together.* I try to visualize the scene through someone else's eyes. Somehow a corner table in the mall looks too cozy in my imaginary eye. But with my wife at home with the flu and no one else on staff at the church, I'm not sure what else to offer. Sensing my uncertainty about the appointment her voice grows more urgent. "Pastor, I just feel that I'm finally ready to do business with the Lord. Can't you please give me at least an hour of your time today?"

Or how do I respond when I'm staying in someone's home during special meetings, and the man comments as I start up the stairs on the way to bed that he won't be seeing me in the mornings? He has to leave the house at 5:00 A.M. to drive to work in the next county, he explains, but his wife will fix breakfast for me whenever I get up. *I better get up and leave at the same time,* is my first frantic

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

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thought. *But is that ever early*, another side of my brain shoots back. *And where will you go?* this more practical side of my brain asks. *And besides, you can't do that anyway. You'll offend these people. It'll look to them as if you're suspicious of her. Or at the very least, this other side of my brain continues, they're going to be embarrassed to discover that they made you uneasy about the arrangements while you're here this week.* The good man, all unsuspecting of my anxiety, is turning away from the stairs now. "Have a good night's sleep, preacher," he calls as he stretches out a hand to turn off the light.

### **Establishing Some "Nevers"**

These are exceedingly uncomfortable situations and, unfortunately, the resolutions to them sometimes feel even more uncomfortable. But over the years I've developed a short list of "nevers" to guide me through the thicket of such questions. They have seldom been easy to implement; but for the most part I have found that once people understand my sincere interest in preserving not only myself but also them from any appearance of evil, they are generally more than sympathetic to suggestions as to how to ensure that we both remain beyond question about our relationship.

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***To begin with a general, philosophical consideration, never risk your moral testimony. To observe this rule, I've sometimes had to risk other things—including money, inconvenience, misunderstanding, and even relationships.***

To begin with a general, philosophical consideration, never risk your moral testimony. To observe this rule, I've sometimes had to risk other things—including money, inconvenience, misunderstanding, and even relationships. Perhaps you may disagree, but my personal belief is that a minister ought to forfeit nearly anything in order to avoid having his moral integrity questioned. Once a man is suspect in this area, he seldom emerges from under its shadow.

A fundamental precept for preachers is the Scripture's demand that a "bishop must be blameless" (Titus 1:7). The root of the word "blameless" is the term "called." Prefixed to it is the preposition "in," and preceding this compound term ("called in") is the negative particle, "not." The combination, translated "blameless," refers to being a man who is "not called in." What does that mean? It

means that a preacher's life is to be so free from suspicion that he is "not called in" question about his actions. I tell the men on our church board, "The issue is not whether you could defend yourself if you were questioned about what you were doing or why you were in a certain place. The issue is whether your doing it or being there would call you into question in the first place. Your testimony ought not be defensible. It ought be unquestionable."

Admittedly, it is impossible to preclude every accusation. But having certain non-negotiable standards which your people come to know are inviolable will go a long way toward averting suspicion. What you want is to have such a conspicuous reputation for scrupulous care about your moral testimony that if one of your people heard someone raise a question about your actions your church member could confidently reply, "Our pastor would never do that. He never. . . ." You can see the benefit of being known for certain "nevers," starting with "never risk your moral testimony." More specifically, here is what that philosophical consideration translates into on the practical side.

***(1) Never permit a circumstance where you will be in an automobile, a church building, a home, an office, or any other enclosed space with a woman alone other than one who is a member of your own family or one who is quite elderly—and I mean quite elderly.*** There will be dozens of reasonable-sounding excuses for breaking this rule; but there will seldom, if ever, be one that is compelling enough to do so. And there is nearly always a way to avoid making an exception to it. I often return to the answer our homiletics professor finally gave to the class. It was so obvious once he stated it. "You never sit alone in a car with another woman. Insist that she get in the car—and *you* get out and stand in the rain," he admonished.

Keeping a standard like this requires that when one of our youth leaders takes young people home in the church van, he (or she) never concludes the run with only himself and one young person of the opposite gender. It requires that when one of our staff meets with a woman in his office he always leaves the door ajar. It requires that we never enter a home to deal with a lady, even on door-to-door evangelism, unless there is another adult or older child present. One of the most difficult situations I've faced in attempting to keep this policy occurred when our church took on its first full-time secretary. How does the pastor of a smaller church have a secretary without working alone together in the same building day after day? The answer was again obvious but very inconvenient. One of us would have to work in another place. Given the accessibility that a church secretary needs, the equipment that she uses, and the nature of her work, the only option was for me to move my study

to our home. In our case, this actually required the finding of a different house—one that had a room large enough and separated enough from the household to accommodate a large library and to be conducive to study.

Today our church has four full-time pastors and several ladies who do secretarial work. We still, however, face regular logistical problems that require our showing a lot of patience and flexibility to avoid ever having only one pastor and one secretary alone in the office building at the same time. But I believe that every one of our staff would testify that the non-negotiable standard is worth its trouble to maintain. And I believe our people are appreciative of the fact that they can say to any one who raises a question, “Our staff are never. . . .”

**(2) Never meet with a woman, even in a public place, by herself.** The situation may be entirely innocent and your own motive may be entirely pure, but only you and God know these things. Men look on the outward appearance, and what men will see is two people—a pastor and a woman who is not his wife—in a car, or in a home, or in an office, or having lunch at the mall. Beyond that, are you sure that your heart will remain entirely right? Even if yours does, can you guarantee that hers will, or that her motives are even pure to begin with? Unfortunately, women like Potiphar’s wife are with us to this day.

I arrange for all meetings with ladies to take place either at the church office when other staff members are in the building, or at our home when my wife is present in the house. Personally, I am uncomfortable with meeting a woman for counseling at her home, even when her children are present, unless her husband is also in the house. In the case of a widowed or divorced woman with children, I take with me my wife, one of my own older children, or one of the staff. The guiding principle here is that the appointment have about it the appearance of something professional rather than personal. Hospital calls are an exception to the above guidelines in that the context or the emergency nature of the situation is inherently professional. I will, therefore, make brief calls on church ladies who are in the hospital. I do, however, leave the room’s door ajar. If the call requires a longer stay I take someone with me.

**(3) Never physically touch, other than by brief handshake, a woman other than one in your own family.** This is a rule that is frequently transgressed by preachers in a society accustomed to seeing celebrities, athletes, old friends, and political personalities embracing almost as casually as they extend handshakes to one another. But I personally think that it is a mistake for a man of God to follow

suit. To begin with, there is no compelling necessity for this more intimate contact. In addition, such embracing tends to break down the inherent reserve that men and women normally have toward

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***Scripture demands that a “bishop must be blameless” (Titus 1:7). That means that a preacher’s life is to be so free from suspicion that he is “not called in” question about his actions. Your testimony ought not be defensible. It ought to be unquestionable.***

one another physically. If a relationship to another woman is so close as to compel the feeling that she must be embraced upon seeing her, then I would suggest that this good and healthy reserve may have already been eroded.

Implementing this policy on a practical level means that our staff do not put their arms in a friendly fashion around the teenage girls in our assembly. Nor do we physically pat them on the back when they have won a race at the summer picnic or burst through to a major spiritual victory at camp. (Although our youth pastor sometimes humorously tells them, “I’m patting you on the back on the inside!”). Nor do we put an arm around the shoulder of a woman who has responded to the invitation at the conclusion of a service.

Sometimes, in the emotion of an invitation, a lady will instinctively reach out to embrace a pastor or to lean against him. These awkward situations can almost always be precluded by extending your arm full length to take one of her hands in a handshake—with your elbow rigidly locked in place. If you think that this sounds extreme, view the sight of her throwing herself sobbing into your arms at the front of the church—through her husband’s eyes, or through the eyes of any other man sitting in that service who has trouble keeping his hands off of other women. I have, two or three times in 20 years, had a woman emotionally, spontaneously cling to me upon receiving news of a death or some other tragedy. In every case other people have been present and the pathos of the whole circumstance was such that no one would think ill of either of us. But apart from those very isolated instances, none of which have been at my own initiation or in my own control, I have never found it necessary to practice any physical greeting or sympathy with ladies other than a brief, firm handshake. Let your wife be the one who extends the warmth of those

physical sympathies to the ladies of your church.

**(4) Never compliment a woman on her appearance.** You do not want to be known for noticing the appearance of women other than your wife. Save your compliments for her. In addition, godly women will not be comfortable with your having noticed how they look. In fact, this is one area where women, if anything, are more vulnerable to temptation than men. A woman's comment on his tie or the colors in his suit does not generally unduly influence a man, but a man's noticing her clothing or attractiveness can linger with a woman and engender an inappropriate appreciation for his attention. This is especially the case when her own

users are pornographic. In spite of the temptations of being online, I've heard men defend their unguarded access by paralleling the Internet with shopping in a secular bookstore. Barnes & Noble, for example, stocks seedy books. In fact, it has whole sections of gay and lesbian titles and pornographic magazines. But as a Christian shopping there, they argue, you just don't pick up and glance through those books. In the same way, you just don't go to inappropriate sites when you're surfing the Internet.

I'd like to challenge that analogy. Connecting to the Internet is not like visiting a Barnes & Noble. It's like having one. But even worse—it's like having one that stocks every conceivable form of seduction and perversion on the shelves of a room built into the privacy of your own home. You're the only one who has a key to the door, and when you enter and shut the door behind you, you're all alone in there—with millions of pages of tempting trouble. Not good. Not safe.

Beyond that, since the surveys reveal that many of our neighbors also have their own private Barnes & Nobles and that the #1 category of sites they access are pornographic, our testimonies can be "called into question" just by having the same unguarded access to these sites that they do—whether we ever open them or not.

For several months a committee of laymen in our church has been hammering out a tight Internet policy to which we're going to ask all of our church leadership to adhere voluntarily. It includes minimum demands about passwords, filters, locations of personal computers within our homes, and times when our leadership may or may not access the Internet. Beyond the demands will be further suggestions that we will strongly urge upon anyone who wants to be qualified for leadership in our assembly.

It will not always be convenient to follow our policies consistently. But neither would it be convenient to amputate a right hand or gouge out an eye. The Lord counseled both of these alternatives to "looking on a woman to lust after her" (Matt. 5:28–30). What would He say about putting some inconvenient Internet policies in place in order to limit temptation and safeguard our testimonies?

Jill Morgan, the daughter-in-law and biographer of the godly G. Campbell Morgan, commented in her splendid account of his ministry that "no breath of scandal ever brushed his life." I like that "ever." We would all like such an "ever" to be said of us when we reach the end of our ministry. I'm convinced that if it is, it will be the result of a life-long discipline to keep certain "nevers" as inviolably and graciously as we can. 

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## ***Connecting to the Internet is not like visiting a Barnes & Noble. It's like having one. But even worse—it's like having one that stocks every conceivable form of seduction and perversion on the shelves of a room built into the privacy of your own home.***

husband is inattentive and uncomplimentary of her appearance. Thank the women of your church for their faithful service to Christ, express your appreciation for their good testimony as wives and mothers, but never compliment them on clothing, jewelry, color of eyes or hair, complexion, and so on. There is no reason for you to do so. There are many very important reasons for you not to.

I want to reiterate that keeping these policies is often extremely inconvenient and sometimes personally embarrassing. There are times when you, as a man of God, will find yourself having to figuratively "get out and stand in the rain." But to this day I do not regret every effort I ever made to avoid breaking the rules with which I began the ministry.

### **What About the Internet?**

Speaking of rules—have you put some in place to guard your testimony and avoid temptation if you're connected to the Internet? Surveys assert that the sites most frequently accessed by Internet



Dr. Mark Minnick is the 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

## Books on Bible Lands

What is on your coffee table? Often we clutter it with outdated magazines or adorn it with books of interest about our hobbies or the geography or culture of lands local or distant. Well, may I make a suggestion?

In 1981 the British Bible scholar F. F. Bruce published a book titled *Places They Knew: Jesus and Paul*. Kregel Publications has recently reprinted this single volume in two parts: *In the Steps of Our Lord* and *In the Steps of the Apostle Paul*. These volumes are beautiful works of art. Lavishly illustrated with text provided by Bruce, they make an admirable conversation piece on any table. Perhaps God would use such a work as an entree into the gospel for someone who does not know Christ as Savior.

Each book is adorned with a lovely dust jacket and consists of 64 oversized pages. Describing the volume on Jesus, the publisher writes, "With many references to Scripture, we visit Bethlehem and Nazareth, Capernaum and the lakeside towns, Sychar, Jericho and Bethany. Our armchair journey culminates in the holy city of Jerusalem, with a close look at the Temple." You will find in the opening pages a handsome color map of Israel in the time of Christ and more detailed maps throughout. The book takes you chronologically through the life of our Lord, and the text is conservative with frequent Scripture quotations or references.

The work on the apostle Paul has a superb photograph of the theater in Ephesus with the Arcadian Way—the main city street that leads down to the ancient harbor in view. Four color maps lay out all the stops and the routes of Paul's three missionary journeys and his journey to Rome. The chronology of Paul's life, prominently set out in a table in the introduction, is very close to what we might draft ourselves.

This book begins with a brief look at Jerusalem, including a beautiful portrait of the Damascus Gate on the north side of the city (about a quarter mile from Calvary). Though it is not explained in the caption, the Damascus Gate that Jesus passed through on His way to Golgatha is the smaller lower gate about 30 feet below present-day street level.

I enjoyed the section on Tarsus. I have never visited this Bible site, so the text and the pictures captivated my imagination. The Cilician Gates, the primary pass through the Taurus Mountains, must certainly have welcomed the apostle Paul on several occasions.

For years I have wondered how Paul might prove his Roman citizenship. The claim and benefits of Roman citizenship were not taken lightly, and there must have been a ready means to prove it in order to prevent fraudulent claims. A photograph of a diptych (a two-leaved hinged tablet folding together to pro-

tect writing on its waxed surfaces) is captioned with the helpful explanation that a device "such as this could have contained a certificate of Paul's birth registration, establishing his claim to Roman citizenship."

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

Many of the sites on Paul's journeys are highlighted in this volume. I especially enjoy the photography and text of Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. The shot of the Parthenon from Mars Hill lets you stand where Paul stood when he preached to the citizens of Athens, "I perceive that in all things, you are too superstitious." Though much of Corinth and Ephesus lies in ruins today, it does not take a lot of imagination to walk down the streets and think of yourself as Paul's companion seeking opportunities to share the gospel wherever you go. I don't think I fully appreciated Ephesus's splendor until I saw the assortment of photographs containing so many shots of the ruins and visually reflected on what it once must have been.

I enjoy the picture of the inscription on a stone referring to Pontius Pilate. My pastor, friend, and ministerial predecessor, Dr. Wayne Van Gelderen Sr., was in Caesarea the day they unearthed the stone and often enjoyed telling the story of the tablet's discovery with all the excitement and electricity in the air. The archaeological significance of the monument cannot be overestimated. Liberals had long denied that Pilate ever existed. This archaeological verification of his historicity sent the liberals scurrying to some other field of unbelief.

Between the two volumes I counted at least 194 pictures—16 of them full-page photographs—and 24 maps. These works will bring vividly to life the places, people, and events of the Bible; pique your interest in the Bible lands; and perhaps whet your appetite for a trip there to see it for yourself.

Be on the lookout for another set of books. Bruce also published a work entitled *Places They Knew: Abraham and David*. Hopefully we may one day see this volume reprinted in two parts by Kregel. If you find them, be sure to snatch them up.

For those who can make a trip to Israel and the Bible lands, go! For those who cannot, Bruce's works are excellent reminders, teaching aids, and points of conversation to lead you into the gospel. They will more than repay your investment. 

Dr. Mark Simmons is the pastor of Marquette Manor Baptist Church in Downers Grove, Illinois. He has ministered as a church planter and senior pastor since earning his Ph.D. from Bob Jones University in 1981.



Ecclesiastes 7:16 has often been misunderstood, misused, and abused. “Be not righteous over much.” Can this clause really be saying what it seems to be saying? Does God actually want us to tone down our righteousness?

In order to correctly determine the meaning of this clause, it must first be viewed in its immediate context. The context of verse 16 is found in the paragraph of Ecclesiastes 7:15–18, which reads:

All things I have seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just *man* that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that longeth *his life* in his wickedness.

Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

There are a number of different interpretations of the expression “be not righteous over much” in verse 16. We will examine three of these.

The first interpretation can be called the “golden mean” view. When verse 16 is taken in connection with the command to avoid being excessively wicked in verse 17 (“be not over much wicked”), a number of commentators have concluded that this is a call to moderation, a golden mean between virtue and vice. Solomon, it is said, is encouraging his audience to avoid living an excessively righteous or sinful life. The problem with this understanding is that it misses the point of Solomon’s argument in the immediate context. It should be noted in verse 15 that Solomon was having difficulty understanding how God works out divine retribution. Solomon had seen a righteous man die while living a righteous life and an ungodly man live a long and prosperous life. This was an apparent inconsistency to what an Israelite living under the Mosaic Covenant expected. The advice to live a life of moderation does not fit the discussion of verse 15, nor any other portion of the Bible.

A second view is the “self-righteous” interpretation. Some commentators understand the term *righteousness* here as a reference to self-righteousness. Therefore, when the writer says “be not righteous over much,” he means “don’t be self-righteous.” A

problem for this view arises, however, when we compare the Hebrew adjective *saddiq* in verse 16 (translated as “righteous”) with its use in verse 15 (translated as “just”), as well as the corresponding noun *sedeq* in verse 15 (translated as “righteousness”). Let’s translate verse 15 with the idea of self-righteousness. “All things I have seen in the days of my vanity: there is a self-righteous *man* that perisheth in his self-righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that longeth *his life* in his wickedness.” The problem is that whatever righteousness is, it is intended as the antithesis of wickedness. Therefore, the only type of righteousness that verse 15 can be describing is a genuine righteousness. The self-righteous view does not fit the context.

A third and preferred interpretation is the “genuine righteousness” view. This view understands the term righteousness to be a genuine righteousness, consistent with the use of this Hebrew term throughout the Old Testament. The righteousness described in verse 16 is the same kind of righteousness found in verse 15. The righteousness in verse 16 is excessive (“righteous over much”) only in the sense that an Old Testament believer might simplistically expect God to honor his righteousness with immediate blessing.

In verse 15 Solomon describes a situation where a genuinely righteous person receives what the wicked should get, and the wicked person receives what the righteous person should get. The point of verse 16 could be explained like this: “Do not be simplistically righteous with the expectation of immediate reward, neither be naively wise; why cause yourself to be astonished that God did not honor your righteous living with immediate blessing?”

How does this fit with the context of verses 17–18? When one sees the wicked prospering, he may lose heart and turn with disillusioned abandonment to an excessively sinful lifestyle. Solomon counsels against this reaction with the reminder that God may immediately judge this sinner (v. 17). According to verse 18, the believer should avoid both extremes—sinning on the faulty assumption that God will not judge immediately and being righteous with the anticipation that God will necessarily bless immediately. In light of other portions of this book (3:17; 8:12–13; 11:9; 12:14), Solomon would argue that we should instead live righteously because a day of reckoning, though delayed, is certain; the day of judgment is coming. This is when the Lord will certainly reward His people. 

“Rightly  
dividing  
the Word  
of Truth”  
(2 Tim. 2:15)

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*“Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil. . . .” (Isaiah 5:20)*

Only by living the life of a hermit can one escape the fact that Americans have abandoned truth as a standard of life and as a spiritual and philosophical ideal. Whether it is called disingenuousness, prevarication, or spin, the lie dominates public life. Advertisers make any statement about a product that they believe will sell. Politicians alter and misrepresent facts. They construct any tale that they think the public will accept. Religious leaders not only rise to the defense of purveyors of falsehood, but are often guilty of the same offense.

How different this is from the ideals of those who founded this nation. Some of the “founding fathers” were genuine believers. Samuel Adams was a devout Christian: “First of all, I . . . rely upon the merits of Jesus Christ for a pardon of all my sins” (*Federalist Digest*). The Last Will and Testament of Patrick Henry read: “This is all the inheritance I give to my dear family. The religion of Christ will give them one which will make them rich indeed.”

Even those who did not share this personal faith held Bible-based principles of moral conduct.

It is a great importance to set a resolution, not to be shaken, never to tell an untruth. There is no vice so mean, so pitiful, so contemptible and he who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual, he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world’s believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions (Thomas Jefferson, *Federalist Digest*).

Truth as a moral absolute is found only in the Word of God. This absolute is possible only by the working of “the God of truth” in the spirit of the man.

No term is more familiar and none more difficult of definition. . . . Truth in man is in response to truth in God, and is to be acquired on the basis of a gift from God. This gift comes by way of teaching and also by way of the working of the Divine Spirit in the life of man. . . . As related to God in origin and obligation, man is bound morally to see and respond to all the demands of his relations to God and to the order in which he lives under God. . . . Truth is not merely in utterance, nor is it only response to a specific command or word, but lies in the response of the will and life to the essential obligations of one’s being (William Owen Carver, *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic. BibleSoft, 1996).

### Truth Renounced

If the world of Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton seems to us somehow both more liberal and more strict than our own, and our own world seems strangely disordered and violent compared to theirs, I think it is because we have slowly allowed moral relativism to dominate every aspect of our thought and speech (Representative Dick Armey).

In the summer of 1967, I took a course at the University of Georgia called Techniques of Educational Research. In the opening session the professor began by asking the question, “What is research?” A number of students gave definitions, none of which met the criteria of this professor, who was the author of the textbook used in this class and in many similar classes in other educational institutions. Having had similar courses in seminary and at another secular university, I forgot the adage, “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” I tried to formulate an acceptable definition. It went something like this: Research is an examination of the theories and evidence related to a particular problem with the goal of determining the facts and arriving at the truth of a matter. The professor abruptly turned to the chalkboard and in large letters wrote the word “truth.” For the next two hours he led the class in a discussion ridiculing the idea that there can be any objective truth.

Such was the attitude of college educators 30 years ago and I am convinced has been for much of this century. The idea that there is no objective truth was instilled in elementary and secondary teachers who passed it along to the population at large.

The denial of objective truth is a dangerous thing. The abandonment of truth prompted a leading New Evangelical to write,

Who would have expected that some of the most secularized cities, such as Los Angeles and Amsterdam, would have become hosts to a growing array of bizarre cults, many of which reek of primitive superstition? Who would have thought that after two awful world wars and subsequent conflicts, Western thought would still be indulging in the myth of inevitable progress with a devotion that makes most believers look like pikers? *When we believe in nothing, we open the doors to believing anything* (David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1993, p. 9, emphasis added).

*“To every preacher of righteousness as well as to Noah, wisdom gives the command, ‘A window shalt thou make in the ark.’”*

*Charles Spurgeon*

## Truth Replaced

There can be no moral or spiritual vacuum. Truth abandoned will be replaced by “untruth.” The epistle to the Romans (1:20 ff.) reminds us that there are severe consequences to abandonment of God’s revelation. Men change “the truth of God into a lie.” The result in society is “vile affections” and that which is “against nature.”

One can find no greater evidence that truth has been replaced than metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia. Drive its streets. Peruse the church section of the Yellow Pages. The invasion of false religion and paganism is readily apparent: three Hindu temples (one of which rivals the splendor of some in Asia); a Krishna Consciousness Society; three Buddhist centers and at least one temple occupying a former Baptist church; a Baha’i Faith center in a former Baptist church; three Metropolitan Community (homosexual) Churches; an Eckankar Center; numerous cults; Islamic centers and mosques too numerous to catalog; and a Unification (“Moonie”) Church. Television outlets air primarily “prosperity gospel” churches with at least three claiming more than 20,000 members and worshipping in buildings seating more than 5000. Wicca covens meet in several sections of the city. On any weekend, at several intersections traffic will be interrupted by solicitors with buckets begging funds for their anonymous “mission organization” (cult).

Atlanta is a religious city, but its religion is no longer Biblical religion. The devastating effect can be seen in its crime statistics. It leads the nation in crimes of violence. Rarely can one turn on the news broadcast without learning of another shooting. In the spring and summer of 1999, national attention focused on school shootings and random killings. Its “gay rights” parade and its concessions to the homosexual movement rival San Francisco’s.

Atlanta is not an isolated example. Similar evidence of the paganization of America exists all across the country. The United States Army has now officially recognized witchcraft as a religion and has appointed “chaplains” to oversee the pagan ceremonies at five bases. A Pentagon spokesman said that at least 100 witches form a Wicca coven at Fort Hood in Texas. Roger Scruton unequivocally states, “That which the Pilgrim fathers found most horrendous—witchcraft—is the latest, and one of the most successful, among the pagan cults now colonizing America” (“Bibles and Broomsticks: The Rise of Neo-paganism,” *National Review*, September 27, 1999).

“The descent to hell is easy,” observed C. S. Lewis, “and those who begin by worshipping power soon worship evil.” The ultimate enemy of truth is Satanic, not flesh-and-blood (Eph. 6:12), so it follows that the ultimate goal of renouncing and replacing truth is more sinister than mere ideological dominance. “[O]ur ene-

mies have made it an object, to eradicate from the minds of the people in general a sense of true religion and virtue, in hopes thereby the more easily to carry their point of enslaving them” (Samuel Adams, *Federalist Digest*).

## Truth Recovered

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove [expose] them” (Eph. 5:11). William Cullen Bryant stated, “Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again.” This is true only when there is a return to the source of truth. The observations of Roger Scruton deserve our attention.

America was founded by Christian Puritans, who had a deep aversion to idolatry, popery, and magic. The hardships and dangers of their predicament made them cling to their religion as the one thing that justified the perilous pilgrimage to the New World. And from time to time they would tremble before the thought that paganism lay not only around them, but within, where it was all the more dangerous because hidden from view. . . .

Constant immigration has diversified the religious inheritance of the United States. Nevertheless the country remained until recently predominantly Christian, with a continuing aversion to pagan cults and superstitions, and a trust in the Bible as the common inheritance of the Judeo-Christian faiths. Indeed the United States has been held together more effectively by its Bible culture than by its Constitution: for the Bible has shaped the language, the morality, and the aspirations of ordinary Americans and provided them with a common frame of reference. . . .

[W]itchcraft has a singular appeal to modern Americans, increasing numbers of whom are brought up without any knowledge of a sacred text and without the language and the concepts of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The idea that religion might be a matter of obedience and example strikes them as weird; the idea that it is a matter of the self and its empowerment connects immediately with the surrounding secular culture. . . .

For the moment the Wiccans speak only of peace and love and finding oneself. But without a doctrine or a text to protect them, they may soon find themselves opening the door to the Devil. Those old Puritans were wrong about many things; but they were not entirely wrong about witchcraft (“Bibles and Broomsticks, The Rise of Neo-paganism,” pp. 44, 45).

America has made a tragic exchange, abandoning truth to follow the lie. As never before conditions in America cry out for the absolute, objective truth found only in the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ, and the written Word of God, the Holy Bible. ☞

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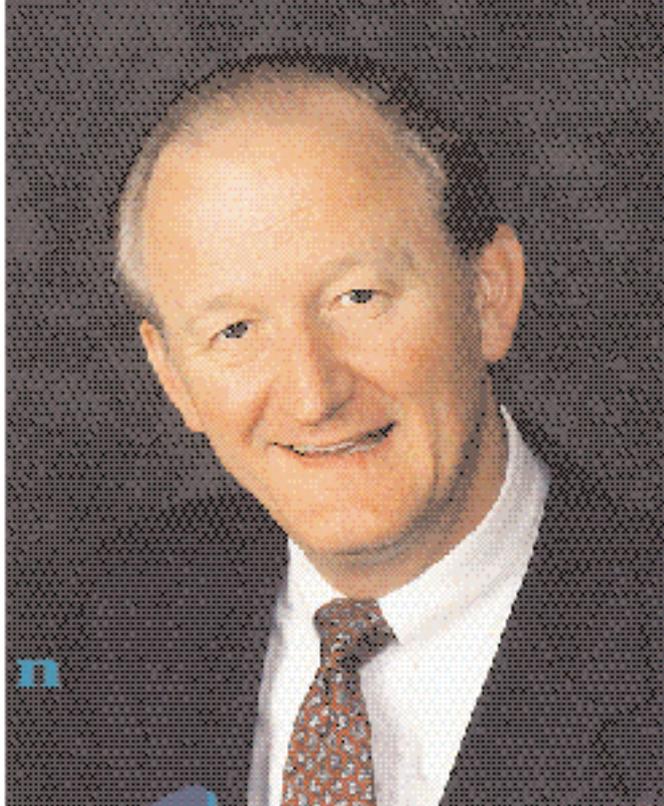
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## Home for Christmas

Lorraine S. Parry

I shall never forget the look on her face as she smiled and waved good-bye. She was leaving us, but she would be home for Christmas.

Christmas was always her favorite time of the year. So it was that in November, some three years before, when the doctor had informed her of her need for surgery because of a "mass," she decided to wait until after Christmas, convinced that it was just a benign growth. Then came the dreaded news. It was cancer.

The chemotherapy, surgeries, treatments, good days and bad days, ups and downs of the next three years blended together, bringing us to this Christmas week. Brothers and sisters-in-law had gathered to seek and to endeavor to bring comfort.

Though she turned her head and looked in our direction when her husband told her that my husband and I had arrived, there was no response to indicate that she had seen or recognized us. The frail, emaciated form there in the bed bore little resemblance to the energetic, enthusiastic loved one that we had known for so long. She appeared almost twice her 46 years, and our hearts wrenched.

Throughout the next few days of our bedside vigil, she sank deeper into the coma. There was no voluntary movement at all, just a stiff, fixed stare up at a corner of the ceiling. The night before Christmas, my husband went into the room, called her name, and told her that it was Christmas Eve. He then read the Christmas story to her and noticed a tear slide down her cheek.

The next morning the hospice nurse came, and, finding weak vital signs, sat down to wait. A short time later, the nurse excused herself, mentioning



that she had other patients to visit. Later, the family gathered in the nearby dining room to eat the Christmas dinner that we had solemnly prepared. With no appetite, we experienced it as more of a ritual than a meal.

Returning to my bedside post, I felt that her hands, which lay across her stomach, were cold and moist. I pulled the blanket up over them carefully so as not to disturb the tissues which she had been clutching in each hand since our arrival.

As evening enveloped us, other family members seemed drawn to the room. We talked quietly, and watching from her side, I noticed that her eyes seemed to brighten. Mentioning it to my husband, who was beside me, he commented that her whole face seemed brighter. Her hands, which had been motionless and seemingly without strength for days, began to move slightly, so I pushed the blanket back off them. As she continued to stare up at the corner of the ceiling, she began to nod her head affirmatively. Then she turned her gaze to her husband, at her right, and said, "I love you." Turning to look at family members gathered in the room, she began to move her hands, tissues floating, as she said, "good-bye, good-bye." With tears in our eyes and choking voices, we all responded our good-byes, and she was gone. Having seen that peaceful, yes, even joyful look of anticipation on her face, we knew that she was happy to go to celebrate Christmas with her Lord.

On a stand near her bed, her devotional book, which she had obviously read ahead, lay open to December 25.

Lorraine S. Parry and her husband, Frank, are missionaries in Panama.

# The Authority of the Scriptures

Paul W. Downey

Many churches today base their ministries on one fad or another. In attempts to attract a larger crowd or larger offerings, many pastors “package” their churches as places where people can be entertained, fulfilled, or taught to cope with the difficulties of life. Our churches ought rather to be places where people can confront the reality of their own helplessly sinful condition and learn of God’s grace. The common ground of our life in Christ is neither temporal nor cultural, but is based on the cross of Christ as revealed in the Bible. The subject of the authority of Scripture is one of the most basic to the Christian faith. That makes it very familiar, but it also makes it very important. Let’s consider three aspects of the authority of the Scriptures: the centrality of the Scriptures to Christian living, the supremacy of the Scriptures in Christian living, and the sufficiency of the Scriptures for Christian living.

## The Centrality of the Scriptures to Christian Living

We need to lift up the Word of God as the center of our Christian life. There are at least three reasons that the Bible deserves a place of centrality in our lives. First, the Bible is the only book inspired by God. The Bible did not come “by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). As a book that is utterly unique as to its *source*, it ought to be central to our lives as Christians.

Secondly, the Bible deserves a place of centrality in the Christian life because it is the only book inerrant in content. The Bible is absolutely accurate and completely reliable in every statement it makes. Because it is a unique book as to its *character*, we ought to make learning and applying everything it teaches the highest priority in our lives.

A third reason the Bible should have a central place in the Christian life is that it is the only book illuminated by the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 2:14–15 says, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” If we would understand the Scripture, we must have His guidance. Our understanding is darkened, our minds can be deceived, we are capable of convincing ourselves that we understand a passage or principle that we really do not understand. We are taught by diligent study and prayer, but we can still be mistaken through the deceitfulness of sin.

To understand Scripture, we must have intellectual honesty. We must be prepared to take God at His Word. We must believe what it teaches and be prepared to change our prejudices. If I find in the study of God’s Word that it teaches something contrary to what I believe or have been taught, or contrary to how I have lived, I must be prepared to change what I believe or how I live. If I find in my study of God’s Word that it does *not* teach what I thought it did,

or what I have been taught, I must be prepared to admit my mistake. “Truth” is not “truth” simply because it is what I have been taught. “What you have been taught in accordance with the Word of God is truth, and what you have been taught that is not in accordance with the Word is not truth” (J. Edwin Hartill, *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics*, 68). The Bible must be central to our Christian lives because it is the only book inspired by God, inerrant in content, and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

## The Supremacy of the Scriptures in Christian Living

A second aspect of the authority of the Scriptures is the supremacy of Scripture for Christian living. In John 14:15, Jesus told His disciples, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are taught that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” The Bible is the only book with supreme priority. In 1 Thessalonians 5:21 Paul challenges us to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” Everything we believe, everything we do, is to be tested by what is taught in this Book. No other book takes precedence. Other books are helpful only insofar as they teach us to understand and obey the Word of God. Never allow any other book to supersede the Scriptures in your life.

Further, no other teacher takes precedence. It really does not matter how large his radio audience, nor how widely recognized his name, nor how prestigious his reputation. A teacher is only trustworthy and helpful insofar as he agrees with the Bible. Never judge a teacher by the size of his audience. Just because a man calls himself a Christian, or even a fundamental Baptist, does not guarantee that everything he teaches agrees with Scripture. We must evaluate everything taught by every teacher in the light of the Bible.

Also, we need to remember that no “new revelation” takes precedence. I distrust anyone who ever says, “God told me . . .,” or “Jesus said to me . . .,” unless he is talking about something he found in the Bible. Neither books, writings, or teachings that claim to be inspired, nor my subjective feelings or impressions or insights are authoritative. God has already told us everything He ever will in His Word. The Scriptures are our final authority.

For the Scriptures to be supreme in our lives, we must also recognize that the Bible is the only book with supreme authority. God gave Joshua a formula for success in the work to which He had called him: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8). We must remember that our behavior will be judged by this Book. Our beliefs will be judged by this Book. Our culture will be judged by this Book.

## The Sufficiency of the Scriptures for Christian Living

Most Fundamentalists would not argue with what I have said thus far. Basic to the definition of a Christian Fundamentalist is the acceptance of the centrality and supremacy of the Scriptures. However, there seems to be some dispute among Fundamentalists today over the *sufficiency* of Scripture for Christian living. We are quick to cite 2 Timothy 3:16 to speak of the authority of the Bible, but we sometimes forget that the next verse says the purpose of the Scripture is “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” It does not say “that the man of God may get off to a good start.” It says that the Bible was given that the man of God may have everything he needs to be completely equipped to do all God wants him to do. Since that is the case, we must cultivate a conviction of the sufficiency of God’s Word. I believe that there are at least five facets to doing that.

First, if we would allow the Word of God to fully equip us, we must be attentive to the teaching and preaching of this Book. Hebrews 13:7 and 17 command us, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. . . . Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” In Ephesians 4:11–13 Paul tells us why God gave teachers and preachers to the church: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” God’s primary method of teaching His people is through pastors and evangelists. Until we have all attained “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,” we must give attention to the preaching and teaching of the Word.

Secondly, we must be diligent in our personal study of this Book. Acts 17:11 commends the believers in Berea for personal study of the Scriptures, saying that “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Paul challenged a young pastor to master the Word through personal study in 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Pastors and evangelists can be in error, and so can you and I. Most of us don’t believe anything wrong on purpose, but we are capable of being mistaken. It would be extremely arrogant of any teacher to assume that he perfectly understands all the teachings of Scripture. You will only be able to recognize error in any teacher, preacher, or writer if you compare his teachings with the Scriptures.

Third, we must cultivate dependence upon the Word of God. Psalm 1:1–2 point out the importance of meditation on the Word of God: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the

counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” Also, Paul instructed Pastor Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15 that he must “meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.” We must make application to our lives, asking ourselves, “What does this passage mean that I must do or say or think to be conformed to the image of Christ?”

Fourth, we need to be courageous in the application of this Book. James 1:22 commands: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” God intends for His Word to change the way we live. We must recognize that no matter how old we grow, how long we have been saved, how much we have been taught, how faithfully we may have served, we are not perfect. If we are not perfect, there are flaws that must be found and corrected. The older we become, the longer we have been saved, the more we have been taught, the more faithfully we have served, the harder this becomes. We are more likely to justify ourselves or rationalize it away, rather than deal with our need to change. It will take real courage for us to apply the Word of God in our lives and allow it to change us.

Finally, we must be bold in the proclamation of this Book. Much is said these days about the filling of the Holy Ghost. Most of what is said or believed misunderstands what is taught in the Bible. According to Acts 4:31, the evidence for the filling of the Spirit of God is not some ecstatic experience, but a bold witness—“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

One night at sea, a ship’s captain saw what looked like the lights of another ship heading toward him. He had his signalman blink to the other ship: “Change your course ten degrees south.”

The reply came back: “Change your course ten degrees north.”

The ship’s captain answered: “I am a captain. Change your course south.”

The reply came: “I am a seaman first class. Change your course north.”

This infuriated the captain, so he signaled back: “I say change your course south. I am on a battleship,” to which the reply came back: “I say change your course north. I am in a lighthouse.”

We are in the lighthouse, not because we are superior to others, but because we are anchored to the Solid Rock of Jesus Christ and His Word. We need not be intimidated by captains on battleships. We must stand unashamedly and with absolute confidence on the Word of God as the only sure foundation and the supreme authority for life. The Bible is *central* for the Christian life, *supreme* in the Christian life, and *sufficient* for the Christian life. We say we believe the Word of God to be inspired, inerrant, and authoritative. Do we live in such a way that others can tell that we truly believe what we claim to believe?

Dr. Paul W. Downey is the pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Athens, Georgia, and is a co-author of *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: A Layman’s Guide to How We Got Our Bible*.

If I am wrong upon other points, I am positive that the sin of this age is impurity of doctrine, and laxity of faith. . . . A new age this, when falsehood and truth can kiss each other!  
—Charles H. Spurgeon

A man has reached middle age when it is his doctor who warns him to slow down—not the police.  
—Unknown

When I hear a man preach, I like to see him act as if he were fighting bees.  
—Abraham Lincoln

People do not lack strength; they lack will.  
—Victor Hugo

My wife says she's just turned thirty—it was a U-turn.  
—Unknown

No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor is the reward of what one gives.  
—Calvin Coolidge

Humility is unconscious self-forgetfulness.  
—W. H. Griffith-Thomas

“One of these days” is none of these days.  
—Unknown

God has two thrones, one in the highest heavens, the other in the lowliest heart.  
—D. L. Moody

The sum total of your religion is to be like the one you worship.  
—Pythagoras

The fly sat upon the axle-tree of the chariot-wheel and said, “What a dust do I raise!”  
—Francis Bacon

You are not called to preach if you are not called to study.  
—Unknown

A man's concept of God creates his attitude toward the hour in which he lives.  
—G. Campbell Morgan

By all means get married. If you get a good wife you will be happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher!  
—Socrates

Loneliness is the first thing God's eye named not good.  
—John Milton

Use our new easy credit plan—100% down, no monthly payments.  
—sign in the window of a store

All history is incomprehensible without Christ.  
—Ernest Renan

Character is determined by choice, not by opinion.  
—Aristotle

The man who remembers what he was taught at his mother's knee was probably bent over it at the time.  
—Bill Ireland

A New Testament preacher . . . has to be surgical.  
—Oswald Chambers

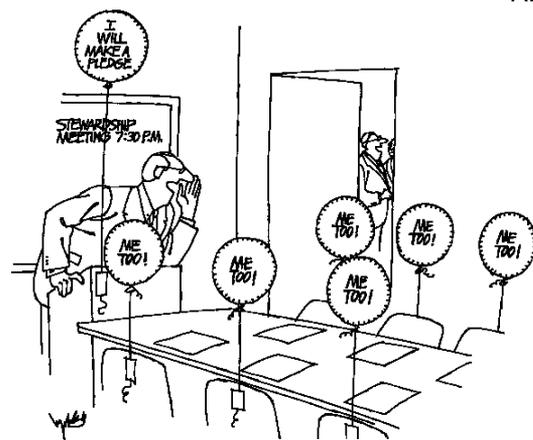
Adam took his trouble like a man—he blamed his wife.  
—Unknown

Every man has a right to his opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts.  
—Bernard M. Baruch

A man of words and not of deeds is like a garden full of weeds.  
—C. H. Spurgeon

The natural mind is ever prone to reason when we ought to believe; to be busy with work when we should be quiet; to go our own way when we ought steadily to walk in God's way, however difficult that may be to the natural man.  
—George Mueller

We who preach the gospel must not think of ourselves as public relations agents sent to establish good will between Christ and the world. We must not imagine ourselves commissioned to make Christ acceptable to big business, the press, or the world of sports, or modern education. We are not diplomats but prophets, and our message is not a compromise but an ultimatum.  
—A. W. Tozer



“Okay, . . . let's get started . . .”

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

# SPIRITUAL AWAKENING CONFERENCE

February 28 - March 2, 2000

Presented by: **Preach the Word Ministries, Inc.**

Hosted by: **Falls Baptist Church, Menomonee Falls, WI**

In the physical realm, the awakening at daybreak breathes out a sense of new life. With the sunrise at dawn comes the light of a new day spanning the horizon. With the sounds of nature comes the song of a new hope seeking for fulfillment. With the freshness of the air comes the invigoration of a new slate waiting to be written on.

Far more impacting is a genuine spiritual awakening. An awakening to the fulness of Christ breathes out the reality of new life in Christ. Sadly, many Christians live in the emptiness of the flesh and miss out on the blessings of the fulness of our great Savior. The Spirit-filled life of God dependence for Spirit-enabling for victory and service is the only hope for our present day of unbelief, which is, in reality, a night of sin. Our greatest need is God! Join us at the "Spiritual Awakening Conference" as together we look to the authority of the Scripture and the ministry of the Spirit to guide us into the truth of the fulness of Christ. Oh, for a consciousness of our majestic God. May the Son rise in our hearts and keep rising until we see Him in His full glory!



**"Not by might, nor by power,  
but by my spirit, saith the LORD."**

**Zechariah 4:6**



Mr. Scott Brier

Pastor Mark Gillmore

Ev. Morris Gleiser

Dr. Gary Hirth

Dr. Charlie Kittrell

Pastor Jeff Musgrave



Dr. Ed Nelson

Ev. Michael Redick

Ev. Jim Van Gelderen

Ev. John R. Van Gelderen

Dr. Wayne Van Gelderen

## **Singing with Grace** Scott Brier

- Who is the primary audience of the believer's music?
- What is the biblical model for spiritual music?
- Where does the believer's song begin?

## **Empowered to Proclaim—The Promise Continues**

### **Mark Gillmore**

- If the Holy Spirit were taken away from you, how much of your ministry would go on as usual with the same level of results?
- Does the cause for which Christ sent His Spirit dominate your life?
- Have you experienced the radical transformation of life and ministry that comes when one truly believes on the Holy Spirit and His promised power to establish the Savior's reign in the hearts of men?

## **The Unsung Hero of the New Testament** Morris Gleiser

- What is the "bottom-line" demonstration of the Spirit-filled life?
- Is there any victory over the prison of fear, jealousy, discouragement, and/or doubt for those who are seeking to serve the Lord?
- Are "fighting Fundamentalists" capable of living a balanced life of graciousness along with standing for standards of separation?

## **Praying in the Spirit** Gary Hirth

- Is any other type of praying profitable?
- Is your praying real or ritual?
- Does prayerlessness reveal a lack of the Spirit-filled life?

## **Lord, If You'll Do It, I'll Tell It** Charlie Kittrell

- What should be the ultimate motive for praying?
- How can answered prayer glorify God?
- Who is getting the glory in your life?

## **The Fragrance of Christ** Jeff Musgrave

- Why do we have so little impact on the lost around us?
- Does God want us to use the methods of the world to promote His Word?
- What was it about the men of the past that made their ministries so influential?

## **Glorifying God as God** Ed Nelson

- How is the stamp of God on a believer's life?
- How does the Spirit-filled life glorify God?
- Are we, by our lives, glorifying God as God?

## **Strange Fire vs. Spirit Fire: Rejecting the Charismatic Movement Without Rejecting the Holy Spirit**

### **Michael Redick**

- Did we reject the Holy Spirit when we rejected the Charismatic movement?
- Did our fundamentalist forefathers teach and preach the necessity of the Holy Spirit's fire?
- Is the fire of the Holy Spirit a must in our ministry today?

## **The Least Commandments** Jim Van Gelderen

- How did Christ fulfill the law?
- What determines whether someone is great in the cause of Christ?
- Are there any prevalent compromises and rationalizations that are robbing us of greater usefulness in God's work and greater power in our lives?

## **The Promise of the Holy Spirit** John R. Van Gelderen

- Does the Scripture explicitly state what the promise of the Holy Spirit encompasses?
- Is there a difference between the "filling" and the "outpouring" of the Spirit?
- Should "greater works" be seen throughout the New Testament age?

## **Foundations for the Filling** Wayne Van Gelderen Jr.

- If it is true that "sin shall not have dominion over you," how is it that so many believers experience so little victory over sin?
- Why is the desire to do right not enough in the battle against sin?
- How do Christ and the Holy Spirit work together to lead the Christian into a life of genuine righteousness, divine communion, and powerful intercession?

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Mr. Scott Brier

Pastor Mark Gillmore

Evangelist Morris Gleiser

Dr. Gary Hirth

Dr. Charlie Kittrell

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Dr. Ed Nelson

Missionary Ev. Michael A. Redick

Evangelist Jim Van Gelderen

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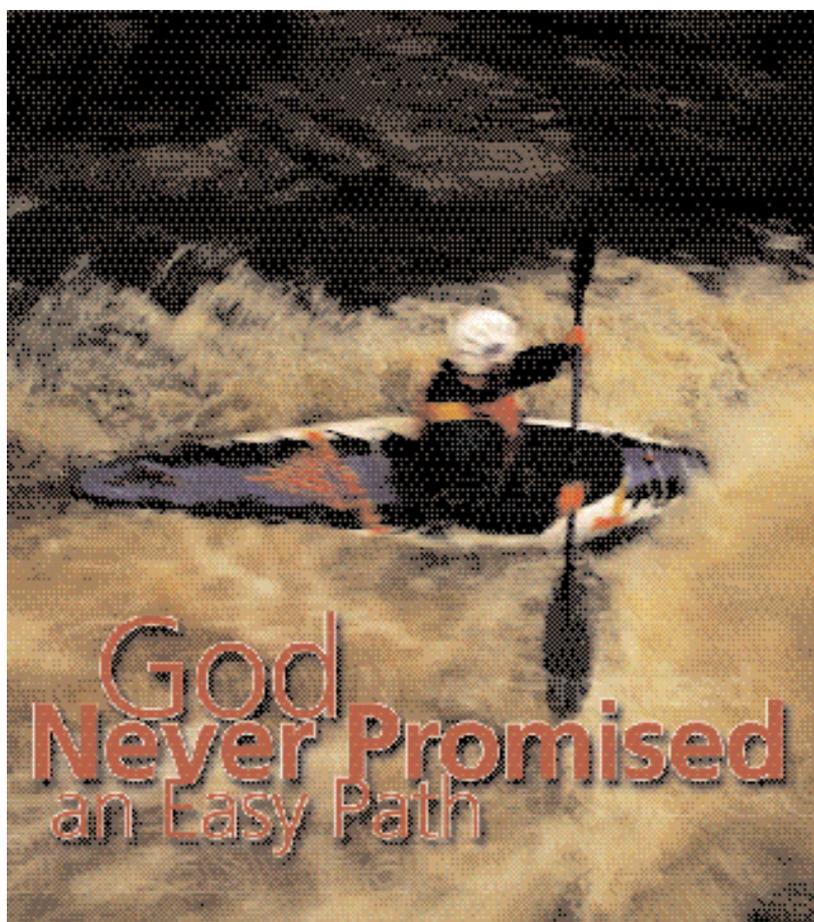
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## Getting Back to God's Business

Phil Shuler

I write this article from my home in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, where we are experiencing one of the worst floods in over 120 years. As I write, I look out my window at my neighbor's home, unscathed by water, while across town most of the homes are still under water. I closed a one-week revival meeting at Fayette Bible Church in Washington Court House, Ohio, on Sunday, September 19, and wasn't allowed home until Wednesday afternoon.

God is sometimes in the business of fouling up our business so that we can get back to His business again. We learned this when we moved from Canoga Park, California, a year and a half ago. The Northridge earthquake had torn up the entire community in which we lived, our home being on the epicenter. We lost 60 percent of the value of our home, but the true tragedy was in the difficulty of finding a church in which to worship. Our church went down in the quake, and we could not find another church with suitable music. Churches we visited had taken on the Hollywood philosophy of entertainment, not content. Pastors whom we had worshipped with previously had set up a music program completely opposite to their previous convictions, just to keep a crowd. When we left California, the church situation was in complete chaos.

This flood in North Carolina has taught me a lesson that had somehow escaped me in the California situation. The South is, in many respects, like the America in which I grew up. The fundamental churches preach the Bible and sing the tried-and-true songs of our faith. Local pastors fellowship whenever they can and make genuine friendships. So when the flood hit this country, it brought Christians together like nothing I have ever seen! My son-in-law, Ross Davis, who pastors the Falls Road Baptist Church here in Rocky Mount, had pastors call him immediately to ask what they could do to help.

Our church was not damaged, nor were any of the homes where Ross and I live, but at least 14 of our church members' homes were flooded. Some lost everything. One couple in our church was rescued in their nightclothes—everything else was destroyed. Several of our members had businesses that were under water. Our druggist piled all of his merchandise high on the shelves and thereby saved some items; but his store, with Christmas displays to go up in the gift shop, was lost to the water. Lowe's Building Supply, which is our only large source of replacements for the flood's losses, was itself flooded. The Tar River had plywood sheets and all

types of lumber floating downstream. A furniture store got about a foot of water. The floor was crammed with beautiful couches and velvet chairs. As I write this article they are on sale for almost nothing!

One of the men in our church tried to pull a woman out of a car that was trapped in the flood. Before he could get her out, she died of a heart attack. A woman from this locality was on a roof with a newborn baby. A chopper flew over, lowered a rescue chair to her, and as they lifted her toward the chopper, she panicked and reached for the rope with the arm that held the baby. The baby fell into the river and has not been found. One of our members, an older man, stayed in his home until the water was up to his chin. He then had to leave. But outside he realized that he did not have his Bible. He went back into the house and saw his Bible on the coffee table, floating five feet above the floor. It was bone dry! That night, as he stayed with a friend, he remembered a commentary by Oliver Green that he had left. He went back to find it floating in the water. He picked it up to find only the slick cover wet, but every page of that book dry!

Now, let me give you the upshot of all this. Our church was closed to the members, because of unpassable roads, for two Wednesdays and one Sunday. It opened this past Wednesday (September 22) and was packed with people who wanted to help. Prayers offered that night were rendered with tears in the voices. Praises were uttered by some who hardly had the nerve to testify. A fund was started for the 14 families of our church who were flooded out and for others in the community. Several other churches heard about this and said they would help. A friend called to say that his church would take an offering toward the fund. When you think of 14 homes that have to be rebuilt from the inside out, you are thinking of large expenses. Floors have to be ripped up, walls replaced, and so on. But friends, in this entire seemingly impossible situation, our church is witnessing revival! Our Christian body is reaching out to the community with materials, food, and the precious testimony that Jesus saves! Every person who enters the gym to receive materials receives the testimony of an all-faithful God who supplies not only physical needs, but spiritual ones! Our people are excited!

We have an Outreach 2000 revival in Rocky Mount this coming year. If the Christian community comes together then as it has now, it will be a great meeting!

Dr. Phil Shuler is an evangelist based in Rocky Mount, North Carolina.

No one recounts the final days of the southern kingdom of Judah with more historical detail or theological perception than the prophet Jeremiah. As the son of a priest named Hilkiah (though apparently not Hilkiah the High Priest under Josiah; 1:1) in the village of Anathoth (only two miles northeast of Jerusalem), Jeremiah was a priest by birth, but a prophet by divine calling from the womb—literally (1:5). He was born apparently very nearly the same time as King Josiah (ca. 648 B.C.) but outlived him by at least 30 years. Jeremiah's is a riveting story that fills in great gaps left by the breathless brevity of the Kings-Chronicles account of Judah's final four kings (which 2 Chronicles covers in a fleeting 14 verses).

### Time Frame of Jeremiah's Prophecy

Jeremiah dates his prophetic call and commencement of ministry specifically to the 13th year of King Josiah, or 627 B.C. (1:2, 25:3), five years before High Priest Hilkiah's discovery of the Book of the Law in the temple (2 Chron. 34:8–18) and the consequent revival under Josiah in 622. So his prophetic ministry began in 627 B.C. But when did it end?

The last chronological event recorded in the Book of Jeremiah is the release of Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon in 562 B.C. (52:31)—a record sometimes used to help date the approximate end of Jeremiah's ministry. However, this event was not recorded by Jeremiah. Jeremiah's words end with chapter 51 (see 51:64). Chapter 52 evidently contains the words of a later compiler, not the words of Jeremiah. (In fact, Jer. 52 duplicates almost *verbatim* the conclusion of 2 Kings 24:18–25:30.) Nevertheless, we do know Jeremiah lived long enough to see the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 (memorialized in his Lamentations); to recount the beginnings of the governorship of Gedaliah, a Jew appointed by Babylon to govern Judah (Jer. 40–41); and to be taken to Egypt against his will by Gedaliah's assassins (Jer. 43), where he probably died. But we do not know exactly when he died—perhaps 580–570, or possibly later.

Jeremiah's experience ranged the entire emotional scale—from the elation of the great revival under Josiah to the devastation of Judah's captivity and Jerusalem's decimation, from his thundering warnings of divine wrath to discouragement so profound he vowed he would stop preaching.

### Jeremiah 1–17: The Early Years (627–622)

Jeremiah 1–17 almost certainly constitutes Jeremiah's ministry for the five years prior to Josiah's revival. Though Hilkiah's discovery of the Book of the Law in the temple and Josiah's own response to the message of that Book served as the catalyst for that revival, the atmosphere was

surely conditioned by five years of Jeremiah's potent prophetic preaching as well. The prevailing themes of rebuke and judgment that dominate the first 17 chapters imply that Israel had, as yet, experienced no widespread revival or repentance. Moreover, Jeremiah's ministry must have had a sobering effect on the youthful and spiritually minded King Josiah, who was 21—probably very close to the prophet's own age—when Jeremiah's ministry began (Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 460).

Chapters 1–17, then, probably cover the years 627–622. The rest of the book is post-Josiah—suggesting that the remainder of Josiah's reign (622–609) was “a period of such relative stability, peace and spiritual renewal that no prophetic word, particularly of judgment, was needed” (*ibid.*). Or it may be that the post-revival period of the remainder of Josiah's reign served as a dozen years of spiritual probation which revealed the apparently short-lived and superficial effects of Josiah's reform among the people. In any case, it did not take long for Josiah's sons “to lead Judah away from whatever measure of godliness she had known under Josiah” (*ibid.*).

### Jeremiah 18–39: The Handwriting on the Wall (609–586)

Many of Jeremiah's oracles in this section are dated specifically, but they are not arranged in chronological order. Josiah's wicked younger son, Jehoahaz, reigned only three months before being deposed by Egypt and replaced by his older but equally evil brother, Jehoiakim. Jeremiah's recorded ministry resumed with the accession of Jehoiakim (26:1), though his words were so offensive (i.e., convicting) that many wanted him executed for treason (26:8–11). God spared Jeremiah, yet permitted the equally bold and faithful prophet Urijah to be slain at the command of King Jehoiakim (26:20–24).

Immediately in the wake of Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation of Jews from Jerusalem in 605, God instructed Jeremiah to record all the judgments He had previously pronounced against Judah and the nations (36:1–3). When the scroll was completed, Baruch (Jeremiah's amanuensis) read it in front of the temple (36:9–10). The princes, hearing of this message, requested Baruch to give them a private reading of the scroll. Trembling at what they heard, they in turn reported these words to King Jehoiakim (36:11–16), who then requested that they bring the scroll and read it before him. But his response was chillingly different. After each 3–4 columns that were read, Jehoiakim slipped off that section of the scroll with a scribe's knife and dropped it into the fire burning on a nearby hearth—over the pleadings of some of his counselors—until the entire scroll was consumed bit by bit. He then ordered the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah, but

# JEREMIAH: A HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS

the Lord hid them (36:20–26). At the command of the Lord, the scroll was rewritten—and even expanded—to certify the certainty of God’s pronouncements (36:27–32).

Jeremiah later delivered an oracle to Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, in 597 (22:24–30). His was a mere three-month token reign before he was carried off to Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar’s second deportation. Jehoiachin was followed on the throne that same year by his uncle, Zedekiah (the third of Josiah’s sons—and the last king—to sit on the throne). In 593, the fourth year of Zedekiah’s reign (27:1; cf. 28:1), Jeremiah warned Judah and her neighbors of God’s judgment (27–28) and prophesied that it was pointless to oppose the certainty of Nebuchadnezzar’s domination. Rather than resist, they should submit to Babylon. To complicate matters, at the same time he was prophesying judgment and sure defeat, others were prophesying just the opposite—that God would intervene and that the Jews who had already been taken captive to Babylon (in 605 and 597) would soon be returned. One such prophet named Hananiah even declared that this restoration would occur within two years (28:3–4). Not so ironically, within a year Hananiah was dead, and the next two years proved that his optimistic prophecy was a lie. The captivity would last 70 years, just as Jeremiah had predicted.

Chapters 29 and 50–51 constitute two letters Jeremiah composed, the former to the Jewish captives already in Babylon, advising them “to settle down in the land of their captors and to await patiently the passing of the seventy years, after which (and only after which) they will return home.” The latter is addressed to Babylon herself, and prophetically “describes in graphic terms the meteoric collapse of that magnificent empire beneath the hammer blows of a northern foe [Medo-Persia]. This [would] make possible the restoration of the exiles, who [would] then see that Babylon, like Assyria, had been merely a pawn in the hands of the Almighty” (*ibid.*, 463).

Jeremiah was locked in the stocks for his annoying and “unpatriotic” preaching (20:1–2). The strain and abuse (verbal and physical) became so severe that Jeremiah even tried to quit his ministry, but God’s inner compulsion constrained him to continue delivering his God-given message, regardless of the price or reception (20:7–13). Nevertheless, the questions continued (20:14–18). Why was Jeremiah’s message of submission to Babylon so different from the other prophets before him?

If indeed the Babylonians were coming, should not Jeremiah rally them to resistance in the power of God rather than undermine them with what appeared to be treasonous cries for capitulation? When Zedekiah sought his counsel, all Jeremiah could advocate was

surrender. The reason was simple, the prophet said: God had determined the destruction of the city and nothing could be done to change that. Human opposition to the decreed purposes of God must inevitably lead to tragic consequences (*ibid.*, 464).

During a brief reprieve in Babylon’s siege of Jerusalem (37:11), Jeremiah left the city on personal business (37:12). He was seized and accused of trying to defect to the Babylonians (37:13). Despite his denial of the false accusation, he was beaten and imprisoned (37:14–15). Zedekiah secretly sent to Jeremiah in prison to ask if there was any word from the Lord; Jeremiah’s message was unchanged (37:16–17). At Jeremiah’s protest, Zedekiah improved Jeremiah’s prison conditions (37:18–21) but later permitted him to be thrown into a watery dungeon-pit (38:1–6) that would have become his grave except for the intervention of an Ethiopian official in Zedekiah’s court (38:7–13).

Once more Jeremiah appealed to Zedekiah to surrender and submit to Babylon in order to spare the city and population total devastation (38:17–23). But Zedekiah’s pride would not permit him to yield; he “stiffened his neck and hardened his heart” against Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar, and God Himself (2 Chron. 36:12–13)—at an enormous price to the people and place of God’s name. The fateful day predicted finally came. Babylon breached Jerusalem’s walls, ransacked the city and burned it to the ground, captured and blinded the fleeing Zedekiah and carried the sightless, shackled king back to Babylon (39:1–10). Jeremiah was offered the choice by the Babylonian commander to go freely to Babylon or to remain in Judah. He chose to stay and later penned his wrenching Lamentations over the smoldering ruins of the fallen city of Jerusalem.

## **Jeremiah 40–44: The Aftermath (586–?)**

Jeremiah recounts the assassination of Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed Jewish governor of Judah (chs. 40–41), and his own involuntary exile to Egypt via Gedaliah’s assassins. The clear chronology of Jeremiah ends here in Egypt (ca. 585), though there are hints he may have lived to about 570. Just 30 years later, on the other side of the empire, an aged Jewish statesman in Babylon named Daniel would read a scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies and conclude that the end of the 70 years of exile prophesied by Jeremiah was imminent (Dan. 9:1–2). The chastisement had run its course. The promised restoration was finally at hand. The Jews would return and prosper under the guidance of Ezra the scribe, who would research and write (under inspiration) the Books of Chronicles for the encouragement and exhortation of this returning remnant of God’s people.



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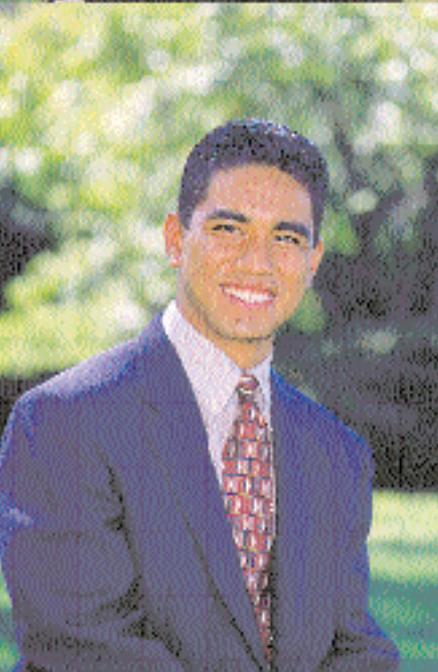
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## City May Include Nativity Scene in Christmas Display

The United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit ruled in August that a Missouri city will be permitted to include a nativity scene in its Christmas display. The City of Florissant had been sued by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for erecting a display at the City Civic Center. (Maranatha News-watch, 8/25/99)

## State Fellowship Withdraws from BBFI

The Washington State Baptist Fellowship voted September 14 to rescind its relationship with the Baptist Bible Fellowship International. The vote by the pastors was 22 for, 1 against, and 4 abstaining at the meeting hosted by the Bible Baptist Church of Selah, Washington. According to Gordon Conner, pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church in Vancouver, British Columbia, "We believe that although the documents of the BBFI (Articles of Faith, Constitution & Bylaws, school policies, mission office materials, etc.) are strong and right doctrinally, there has been a continual slide away from the truths of these documents. . . . We recognize that there has been a failure by many to hold to the truths of these documents and to honestly comply with what they say. This type of hypocrisy

coupled with the blatant inconsistencies in the BBFI that we have documented have brought us to the place that as a regional Fellowship we can no longer be associated with the BBFI. This decision was not based upon a whim, personality conflicts, nor power struggles, but rather upon principles of the Word of God, as we understand them." (Fundamental Baptist Information Service, 9/22/99)

## Amazon.Com Selling Books that Promote Perversion

Internet bookselling giant Amazon.com says that it has sold more than 114,000 copies of *Varieties of Man/Boy Love: Modern Western Contexts*, a book which, according to its own advertisement, celebrates "man/boy eroticism." The publisher of the book is the radical North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), a group which has long called for an end to laws of consent which protect children from sexually predatory adults. Those purchasing the book from Amazon.com are also encouraged to consider other books on the subject of pedophilia. The five selections listed by Amazon.com alone have netted the bookseller almost a half-million sales. (AFA Action Alert, 9/24/99) Amazon.com was also criticized for selling titles promoting incest. When pro-family groups

called for the books' removal, Amazon.com absolved itself of responsibility. "We hope you will understand that our goal of universal access makes it impossible for us to remove items from our catalog, including of course any items which we as individuals dislike," said company spokesman Mark Hazelwood. (AFA Action Alert, 9/27/99)

## Liberty University Gets \$9 Million Gift

A major American foundation recently advised Liberty University that it is making a \$9 million matching gift to the university toward the addition of three floors to the Arthur S. DeMoss Learning Center. The foundation has requested anonymity. The first floor of the DeMoss Learning Center was built and furnished in 1985 at a cost of \$8 million, with the anticipation that three additional floors would be added later. The new DeMoss Learning Center, completed and furnished, will have cost about \$25 million, and will allow Liberty future growth to accommodate 10,000 resident students. (Falwell Fax, 9/23/99)

## "Tentmakers" to Become the Norm for Southern Baptists

If present trends continue, bi-vocational Southern Baptist pastors will outnumber full-time pastors within ten years, according to Carl Barrington, nation-

al missionary for tentmaking ministries for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board. Only since 1948 has full-time ministry been the dominant Southern Baptist model, Barrington said at a "Ministry in the 21st Century" conference held August 8-13. In 1999, 39 percent of Southern Baptist pastors support themselves, and the percentage is increasing, Barrington said. He challenged today's collegians to prepare themselves both for a vocation in the marketplace and for ministry. (Baptist Press)

## Gambling's Destructive Influence

Recent studies—some by the gambling industry itself—reveal that gambling is even more destructive to society and individuals than previously known, according to psychologists and university professors speaking at the annual conference of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling in Jackson, Mississippi, September 24-26.

Robert Goodman, professor at Hampshire College in Massachusetts, said studies show that having a gambling facility within 50 miles roughly doubles problem gambling. Goodman noted that a third of the revenue from casino gambling comes from people with behavioral problems. National figures show that criminal justice costs alone are about \$5,000 a year per

## NOTABLE QUOTES

pathological gambler, he said. University of Illinois professor John Kindt said the crime costs of 1.5 million new pathological gamblers, which governments created from 1994–97, are at least \$15 billion to \$34 billion. “For every \$1 of benefits, gambling costs \$3,” he said, noting that most conservative combined regulatory and crime costs are between \$9,000 and \$11,000 per pathological gambler per year. Kindt said studies show that 25 to 50 percent of gambling revenues come from pathological and problem gamblers, and 5 percent of lottery players are buying 51 percent of the tickets. Another speaker, Earl Grinols, economics professor at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, said his studies suggest that casino gambling costs about \$150 per adult for every \$39 in social benefits. He said his studies reveal that one-third and sometimes as much as one-half of casino revenues come from pathological and problem gamblers. Violent crime rates in casino counties begin to rise dramatically about three years after a casino opens in the county, Grinols said. (Baptist Press, 9/29/99)

### **The Phonics Conspiracy**

A textbook actually being used in a state university in New York, *Reading Process and Practice, From Socio-Psycholinguistics to Whole Language* (1994) by Constance Weaver, includes a chapter warning teachers against a “Far Right” conspiracy of “laypersons” to teach phonics, i.e., sounding out the syllables of the English language. According to this textbook used to teach teachers, the “hidden agenda” of

**W**e [Southern Baptists] have never said that the doctrine of eternal punishment isn’t in the Bible. We have just been so frightened of it and afraid of what society would say to us about such a politically incorrect doctrine in an “I’m OK, you’re OK” generation that we just don’t talk about it anymore.—Paige Patterson, president of the Southern Baptist Convention

**T**here is a deep-seated unbelief among Christians just now, about the eternity of future punishment. It is not outspoken in many cases, but it is whispered; and it frequently assumes the shape of a spirit of benevolent desire that the doctrine may be disproved. I fear that at the bottom of all this there is a rebellion against the dread sovereignty of God. There is a suspicion that sin is not, after all, so bad a thing as we have dreamed. There is an apology, or a lurking wish to apologize for sinners, who are looked upon rather as objects of pity than as objects of indignation, and really deserving the condign punishment which they have willfully brought upon themselves. I am afraid it is the old nature in us putting on the specious garb of charity, which thus leads us to discredit a fact which is as certain as the happiness of believers.—Charles H. Spurgeon

**T**he wall of separation between church and state is a metaphor based upon bad history, a metaphor which has proved useless as a guide to judging. It should be frankly and explicitly abandoned. . . . The greatest injury of the “wall” notion is its mischievous diversion of judges from the actual intent of the drafters of the Bill of Rights.—Supreme Court Chief Justice William Rehnquist, in a 1985 dissenting opinion

**O**ne of the best things we can do for today’s youth is for adults, in positions of authority, to develop a willingness to give the hind parts of misbehaving youth appropriate attention. . . . Regardless of what the “experts” preached, the undeniable fact is the “uncivilized” practice of whipping children produced more civilized young people.—newspaper columnist and college professor Dr. Walter E. Williams

**P**reachers are not sermon makers, but men makers and saint makers, and he only is well-trained for this business who has made himself a man and a saint. It is not great talents or great learning nor great preachers that God needs, but men great in holiness, great in faith, great in love, great in fidelity, great for God—men always preaching by holy sermons in the pulpit, by holy lives out of it.—E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer*

phonics-advocating Far Righters is “to promote a religious agenda.” They supposedly advocate phonics so that children will get all the words “right” and thereby be able to read all the words in the Bible instead of guessing at some of them. According to this textbook, teaching intensive phonics is a Far Right plot to keep children “from reading or thinking for themselves.” (Phyllis Schlafly, 8/19/99)

### **Homosexual Gains in the Workplace**

The number of employers providing health coverage for domestic partners of homosexual workers has grown from fewer than two dozen at the start of the decade to more than 2,800, reported Human Rights Campaign, the country’s largest homosexual political organization. Seventy-one Fortune 500 companies provide such benefits, according to the report, which was released Sept. 7. More than two-thirds of employers with domestic partner benefits provide them not only to homosexuals but to unmarried heterosexual couples as well, according to the report. Companies that provide them to same-sex couples only include American Express, Apple Computer, AT&T, Disney, Gap, IBM, Time Warner and Viacom, which recently purchased CBS. The report found 73 state and local governments provide domestic partner benefits. According to the report, 99 colleges and universities provide domestic partner benefits to their employees. A proposed congressional measure, the Employment Nondiscrimination Act, would add

"sexual orientation" to the classifications now receiving protection in the workplace. President Clinton has endorsed ENDA. (Baptist Press, 9/10/99)

### **Methodist Clergyman Faces Second Trial**

The Rev. Jimmy Creech, a United Methodist clergy member, is facing a second church trial for conducting a same-sex union ceremony for two men. In March 1998, a church jury narrowly acquitted Creech of charges that he broke church rules when he performed a ceremony for two women while pastor at First United Methodist Church in Omaha. (Maranatha Newswatch, 9/26/99)

### **Christian Ex-Gay Ministry Hosts Chicago Conference**

While gay activists picketed outside an auditorium, 1,200 Christians who claim to have once been homosexuals convened last July in Wheaton, Illinois, to host the largest

Exodus International conference since the ex-gay ministry began in 1976. The group is dedicated to persuading homosexuals to embrace healing in Christ, forsake their lifestyle, and if possible marry someone of the opposite sex. (Maranatha Newswatch, 8/1/99)

### **Humanist Manifesto 2000**

The International Academy of Humanism released the *Humanist Manifesto 2000* on September 1, 1999, the fifth document in a series of public humanist manifestos and declarations released this century. According to this new document, "Fundamentalist religions have rekindled, contesting the principles of humanism and secularism and demanding a return to the religiosity of a pre-modern era. . . . We are especially concerned about antiscientific, antimodern trends, including the emergence of shrill fundamentalists voices and the per-

sistence of bigotry and intolerance." The document calls for a "planetary bill of rights and responsibilities" and proposes a new global agenda "if we are to solve our global problems."

### **Roman Catholic Heads Harvard Divinity School**

Bryan Hehir has become the first Roman Catholic to head the Harvard Divinity School. Hehir had been serving as interim head since the previous dean, Ronald F. Thiemann, resigned for "conduct unbecoming" of the divinity school's chief administrator. Thiemann, a Lutheran, resigned after computer technicians found thousands of pornographic sites on his computer at his university residence. (Christian News, 9/13/99)

### **Church of the Nazarene Joins World Methodist Council**

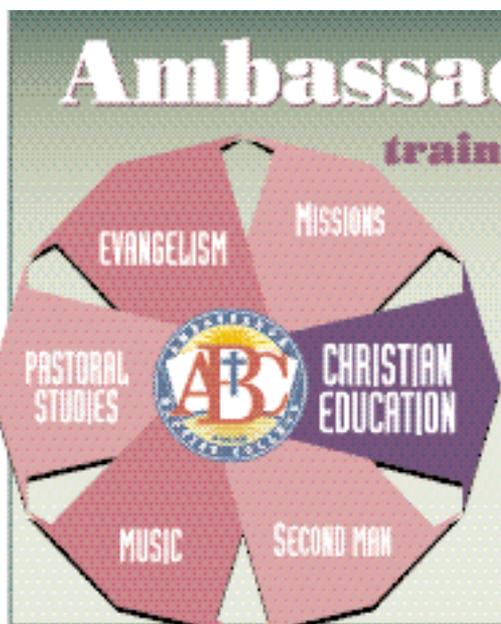
The Church of the Nazarene, a 1.3 million-

member denomination with Wesleyan roots, has joined the World Methodist Council. The WMC's executive committee unanimously approved membership for the Church of the Nazarene on the first day of the committee's Sept. 19-23 meeting. The committee, meeting in the Chinese Methodist Church, stood and applauded after WMC Chairperson Francis Alguire announced the vote. (Maranatha Newswatch, 9/22/99)

### **Boy Scouts in Court Again**

On August 4 New Jersey's Supreme Court found the Boy Scouts of America's ban on homosexuals violated the state's anti-bias laws. Attorneys for the Boy Scouts say they will appeal the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. (Christian News, 9/20/99)

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



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## The Paradox of Separation

**N**o honest Christian would deny that the Bible requires us to be separated from personal sin. Even those who are blind to the truth of ecclesiastical separation will often acknowledge the need to separate from apostasy. In the context of separation there are two errors that are not only possible, but prevalent: on one hand, not standing against sin and disobedience, claiming love prevents it; on the other, ignoring the Bible's command to seek reconciliation, claiming separation forbids it. Separation or reconciliation? This is the paradox of separation.

The paradox has existed in every generation, but has become much more complex in the last half of the 20th century. A recent tactic of some New Evangelicals is to position themselves as "historical Fundamentalists," suggesting that separatists are an aberration—a mean-spirited mutation of true Fundamentalism. They point to the historical fact that Fundamentalism was essentially non-conformist prior to the early 1950s—separation was "something new." True. But the claim ignores that separation was from disobedient brethren who refused to separate from apostasy.

The conflict has left many wondering how to reconcile what appears to be a contradiction in Scripture: maintaining unbroken fellowship with true believers while at the same time actually separating from brethren. There has been further confusion in the concept of "degrees" of separation. First-, second-, third-, and even fourth-degree separation quickly made the whole idea seem absurd. Some true sepa-

ratists took the concept seriously and even used it effectively. But the model is flawed.

We don't separate from obedient brethren just because they are friends with apostates or from those who claim to be Fundamentalists who don't agree with us on matters of opinion and interpretation. We separate from unrepentant sinners who claim to be obedient Christians. The hypocrisy of those who claim to be too spiritual to separate from such other hypocrites is evident in their hasty retreat from true separatists.

The basis for separation is, of course, Biblical and rational. We stay away from that which taints our testimony. Problems come when we use only

rational reasons instead of Biblical ones. New Evangelicals avoid us on rational grounds; we avoid them on Biblical grounds. We separate from them because we love Christ, they separate from us because they want the world to love them. Separation from disobedient brethren is not confined to a narrow interpretation of the standard passages. Second Thessalonians 3:14 has implications beyond laziness, as 2 Corinthians 6:17 is not limited to the uncleanness of idolatry. Such prejudiced views of these and other commands reveal a heart unwilling to trust or obey.

The man who sets sail has sailing as his purpose; that is why he puts his boat in the ocean. But his purpose requires him to keep the ocean out of his boat. What fool would ignore the hole in his hull because he is "called to sail," not to "break fellow-

ship" with the water? It may be noble at times to "go down with the ship," but could he convince us he is doing so to save it? So is the man who pretends Bible motives but who denies Bible methods. Obedience is not a choice between separation and reconciliation; it is both. Church discipline is a helpful example.

The disobedient brother who will not forsake his "trespass" after the procedures of Matthew 18 have been followed is to be unto us "as an heathen man and a publican." He is separated from fellowship until and so that he can be reconciled. Our relationship toward heathen and publicans is to win them, not despise them. The brother in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 with whom we are to have "no company" is not to be treated as an enemy, but admonished as a brother. These passages show the balance that denies the paradox of separation. We separate from the man who will not separate from his sin in order to help separate him from his sin.

When I was a boy, my brother and I would often come home with muddy shoes. Mom would stop us at the door and remind us that the mud must stay outside. If our efforts to clean our shoes were incomplete, she required us to "separate" from them before she would allow us in the house. Had we refused to separate either the mud from our shoes or the shoes from our feet, she would have "separated" us from the fellowship of the home. No

amount of pleading that she should love us, mud and all, would have made a difference. As a result, we learned not only to clean our shoes, but as far as possible to keep them clean. The lesson is simple: reconcile whenever possible, but be willing to separate until it is.

*Obedience is not a choice between separation and reconciliation, it is both.*



DR. JOHN C. VAUGHN

# What's on the Web

Bob Whitmore

Where do you find all of those web sites you review in your *Frontline* column?" a caller recently asked me. I had to stop and think about it, for I almost never search for information with one of the popular Internet search engines such as Yahoo! or Alta Vista, or even America Online's Websearch. I do, however, subscribe to a couple of helpful e-mail newsletters that review web sites.

Tourbus ([www.tourbus.com](http://www.tourbus.com)) is sent out about twice a week. The content consists of web site reviews. Almost none are Christian or even religious, but many are very useful. For instance, through Tourbus I found [www.anywho.com](http://www.anywho.com) and [www.555-1212.com](http://www.555-1212.com), two sites that allow you to look up phone numbers and check addresses. If a subscriber's issue of *Frontline* is sent back to us because he has moved, we can often find the subscriber's new address or phone number at one of these sites. Anywho.com is somewhat easier to use, but 555-1212.com is probably more comprehensive. (If I need to look up a subscriber's ZIP code, instead of thumbing through the thick book from the U.S. Postal Service, I now go to the web site at [www.usps.gov](http://www.usps.gov) and look it up.)

Sometimes I travel to conferences as an exhibitor, and I usually drive because of the amount of materials I need to take—a tabletop display, boxes of magazines, subscription forms, etc. Navigating through strange cities to find a church can be a challenge, but Tourbus once reviewed a web site that I always consult before driving off to strange cities—[www.mapblast.com](http://www.mapblast.com). There you can see maps of any location in the U.S. from various "altitudes" as you zoom in or out. If you don't like looking at maps, you can print out directions from your point of departure all the

way to your destination. A similar site is [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com).

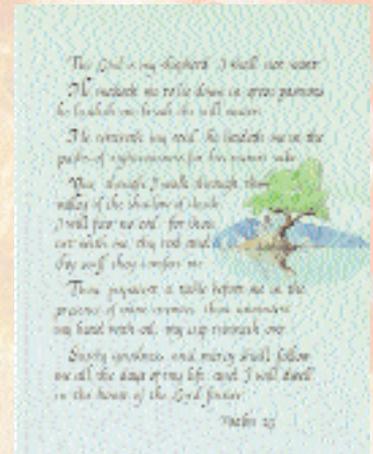
Another e-mail newsletter, *Webwatch*, reviews Christian web sites. I have received it only infrequently and the sites reviewed are generally New Evangelical, but still I have found some useful web sites in it. *Webwatch* is one of several newsletters sent out by *Maranatha Christian Journal* ([www.mcjonline.com](http://www.mcjonline.com)). (*Maranatha Newswatch*, another of their newsletters, is frequently used as a source of news in *Newsworthy*.) *Webwatch* is how I learned about the Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry ([www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org)). Its purpose is "to equip Christians with good biblical information. To do that many subjects are covered: Christian Doctrine, The Bible, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, The New Age Movement, Evolution, Roman Catholicism, and much more."

Yet another way I learn about web sites is from readers. For instance, Bob Meredith sent me an e-mail about [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org), "where there is a place you can retrieve sermon illustrations alphabetically." The site is sponsored by the Biblical Studies Foundation and calls itself "The Home of the New English Translation," a version that Fundamentalists reject. Much practical and useful information can be found here, but a user must exercise discernment. Its many links range from works by cultist Ellen G. White to Spurgeon's *Treasury of David*. The "Prof's Soapbox" page lists messages by Daniel B. Wallace, Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, who tackles some very controversial issues.

Next month we'll take a look at more reader favorites. In the meantime, if you have a favorite web site you'd like to share with others, send it to us at [FBFLINE@aol.com](mailto:FBFLINE@aol.com).

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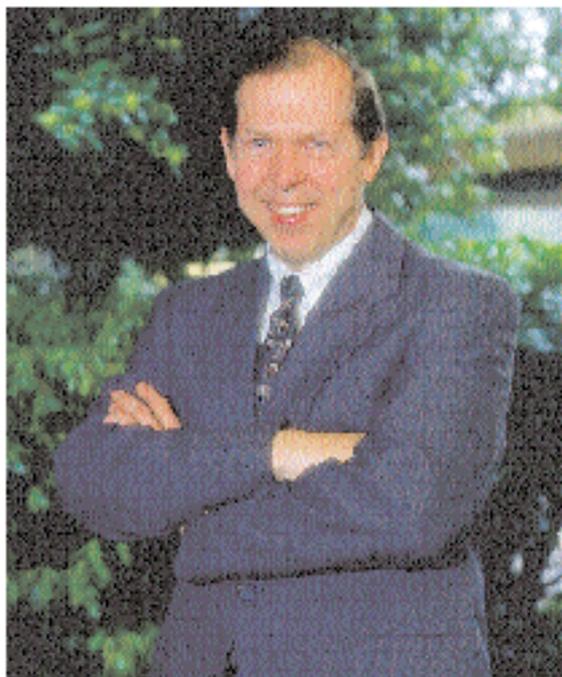
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# Why Be a Nondenominational Baptist?

Bruce Oyen

It is becoming increasingly common for Baptist churches to rid themselves of the name "Baptist" and take a nondenominational name, such as "Community" or "Bible" church. Many of those who want these kinds of churches still want to be known as Baptists. This was made clear recently by a church advertisement that identified the church as "— Bible Church," but under the name it says this church is "an independent, fundamental Baptist church."

But why be a nondenominational Baptist? Is it because that name has been brought into disrepute by some Baptists who have been dishonest, immoral, theologically liberal, or just plain weird? The fact is, bad characters can be found in all churches, including "Bible" churches and "Community" churches.

And if poor reputation is reason enough to go nondenominational, one might not want to be identified as a Christian or a Fundamentalist either. After all, the pope says he is a Christian, and we have heard of Muslim fundamentalists who commit murder in the name of their false god. Some white supremacists call themselves Christians, as do some homosexuals. Therefore, no matter what denominational tag one might use, it can be, or has been, tarnished in some way and might not accurately represent your beliefs or behavior.

Why be a nondenominational Baptist? Is it because that name is objectionable to some for what it represents, and thus is less appealing to those whom you consider prospects for your church? If that is the reason, a name change won't solve the problem because if prospects object to

what the name "Baptist" represents, they will not accept it no matter what it calls itself. In fact, it is very shallow thinking that leads one to assume that individuals will accept Baptist beliefs if they are not called Baptist beliefs.

What does the name "Baptist" represent that so many find objectionable, anyway? Personal conversion to Jesus Christ? Immersion as the Scriptural mode of baptism? Baptism of only those who have put their faith in Christ alone for salvation? A regenerate church membership and church discipline? Separation from the ecumenical movement? Personal responsibility to make the gospel known to others? Holiness and separation from worldly living? The final authority of the Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice? We simply must face the fact that if individuals object to the name "Baptist" because they object to what that name represents, they will object to it no matter what it is called. In other words, if someone objects to Biblical truth, a nondenominational church will not make it acceptable to them. Conversely, if individuals are receptive to Biblical truth, the name "Baptist" will not deter them. Rather, they will learn to appreciate the fact that it represents Biblical truth. They will wear the name as a badge of sacred honor for its centuries-long reputation of fidelity to the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." We ought to stick with the name "Baptist."

Bruce Oyen is pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Miles City, Montana.

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