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SWORD AND TRUMPET GUIDELINES monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for “the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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From Observations

by David L. Miller

We all believe our youth are an important part of the church. The ideals that they hold have important implications for the future. Their idealism and energy can be a tremendous blessing. Because of this awareness we leaders are sometimes fervently admonished to listen to our young people.

It is instructive to notice how this seems to work out when such a concern is not tempered by other pertinent considerations. When this becomes the all-important consideration, it can quickly redirect worship patterns and lifestyles of an entire congregation. It is God's design that the various age groups in the body of Christ blend together, each bringing its valuable contribution.

To listen to our young people becomes valuable as this listening becomes a climate of open communication in which all parties are eager to hear each other. It is important that we consider the youth as an integral part of, rather than a separate entity in, the body. Competition does not belong in the body of Christ. We are ideally

laborers together, allies with compatible goals and ideals. Having said all this, I appeal to fellow leaders that we seek to be the kind of servant whom sincere young people will feel free to bring honest concerns and questions. Sometimes young people appreciate when we initiate opportunities for personal, informal sharing.

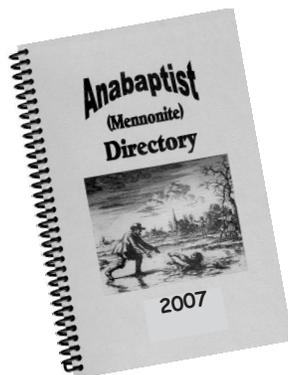
After sharing the above lines with several trusted peers, it seems needful that I make sure that these concerns are clearly communicated. Hence, the following points:

- When there is an emphasis on the need to hear from our youth without a corresponding concern that they are willing to hear the concerns of those with more experience, a situation can quickly become unstable. Furthermore, this philosophy would allow for changes as rapid as any youth group turnover.
- Older people, especially leaders, should cultivate an openness and relationship with youth to promote mutual confidence, trust, and freedom of communication. Informal conversations over a meal can be helpful in strengthening relationships and understanding. ■

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Person of the Month:

John W. Hess

(1884-1958)



The third of ten children, John was born June 13, 1884, near Lincoln, Pennsylvania, to Simon P. and Sara (Wolf) Hess.

While John was still a young child, his family moved to Akron, Pennsylvania, where John's father and two uncles established the Miller-Hess Shoe Company.

As a boy he learned how to be a salesman, working in nearby grocery stores. From there he eventually worked in the shoe business where he honed and developed his salesmanship further, but he had to begin his work there at the bottom just like everyone else.

As a young man he met Lizzie Burkholder, a local schoolteacher. Their friendship grew into love and they began to make wedding plans. Neither one of them was saved at this point but a week before the wedding they both accepted Christ as Saviour at a service held Saturday evening at Ephrata Mennonite Church with A. D. Wenger as the speaker. Then they were married at Preacher Benjamin Weaver's home the following week on April 9, 1905, when Hess was 21 years of age. A month later on May 14, they were both baptized at Metzler Mennonite Church.

In 1906, while at revival meetings in Ephrata, where A. D. Wenger was again the preacher, both John and Lizzie felt the Lord calling them to service in the work of the church. At this time there was also a strong appeal for more missionaries to go to India due to the sudden death of a missionary working in that country. The Hesses felt that this might be where the Lord would have them serve. They counseled with Wenger who forwarded a letter they had written on this matter to the president of the Mennonite Board of Missions in Elkhart, Indiana. They were subsequently interviewed as missionaries, but due to lack of funds, and the fact that by this time they had a child less than a year old, they were approved to serve in the states—not India.

The mission board assigned them to the Kansas City, Kansas, Mission where they served for eleven months but had to leave due to health concerns. From there John accepted an assignment to pastor the 40-member Pea Ridge congregation in Marion County, Missouri. That same year, 1908, Hess was ordained at the age of 24. During the eleven years that the Hesses lived in Missouri, John tended cattle and farmed but he also kept on with his job of working with soles (both kinds!). He also began traveling to different areas doing evangelistic work. The time spent at Pea Ridge was not easy. It also brought heartbreak as they buried an infant son there. In the course of time, God blessed their family with a total of eight children: four boys and four girls.

During his evangelistic trips John had the privilege of holding meetings in the Manson Mennonite Church in Calhoun County, Iowa. After eleven years at Pea Ridge, Brother Hess was called to pastor the 350-member Manson church in 1919, at the age of 35. During the six years in Iowa, John continued to sell shoes for his family's business in Akron, Pennsylvania.

(continued on page 15)

The Saturation of Cynicism

by Jerram Barrs

Where does the deep pessimism that permeates society come from, and how can Christians counteract this spiritually deadly attitude?

Reader's Digest tells us that cynicism is “a scornful or mocking attitude; bitterly mocking; scornful or skeptical of the motives or virtue of others; believing that people are insincere and are motivated by selfishness; expecting the worst of human behavior.” A *Webster's Dictionary* defines cynicism as “morose, sarcastic, sneering; inclination to question the sincerity or motives of others; inclination to question the value of living.”

Cynicism has existed in many human societies and at many points in history. The fundamental reason for a cynical attitude toward others is, of course, that every human person we meet is a person whose motives are sometimes insincere. Every person we meet is someone who sometimes lacks virtue. Every person is sometimes selfish. Therefore, the root reason for a cynical attitude toward life is that life in this world is never free from problems or from events that seem to have no rhyme or reason.

Three thousand years ago, the writer of Ecclesiastes was led to write about this apparent absurdity of life: “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 1:2b NIV) or “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2b ESV). His reflections on the reality of our existence lead him to this cry. He thinks about the pursuit of wisdom, the giving of oneself to a life of pleasure, the striving after wealth, the commitment to live virtuously, the ambition to work hard, and develop one's gifts. He sees that, in this world, the same end comes to the wise and the foolish, the virtuous and the wicked, the hard worker and the lazy person. He concluded his reflection saying, “I hated life, because what is done under the sun was

grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:17 ESV).

This attitude of hating life because of its apparent vanity and absurdity has existed in many times and places, and, of course, it often leads to a questioning of the motives and sincerity of everyone around. If one's heart becomes consumed by a sense of absurdity, by a questioning of the meaning and sense of life itself, it is very difficult to stop that attitude from affecting everything else one thinks and from souring and embittering one's views of other people.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, because the author believes in the one true God, he finds an answer to his problems and is saved from a life of cynicism. We will return later to the answer that he gives; but before we take another glance at Ecclesiastes, I want us to think a little about cynicism in our own culture and time.

The tendency towards cynicism has become a great wave—like a tsunami—sweeping across the cultural landscape of our age. Why is this? Why is cynicism so much stronger in our time—and Western cultures in particular—when these cultures are the most prosperous, the most advanced medically, and the most leisured for more people than any other human culture in history?

How Did We Get Here?

I do not have the space here to give a history of Western thought, so I will summarize briefly. Modernism—or secular humanism, as it is often called—insisted that we do not need God or His revelation to us to understand the world in which we live or human life and human society. Rather,

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secular humanism insisted that human beings alone (with the tools of human reason, human moral consciousness, and human ability) could understand the origin and purpose of life, fathom the mysteries of human existence, decide on a better course for personal and social life, and build an enduring and greater civilization here in this world. Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume wrote: "Reason appears in possession of the throne, prescribing laws and imposing maxims with an absolute sway and authority."

Although Hume acknowledged that this approach involved deep problems, he persisted in following this course. However, despite his own insistence that one must hold skepticism at bay, his doubts about the value of reason and his observation that nihilism was not far away have become commonplace today.

Postmodernism has become much more skeptical about this human enterprise. It insists that human reason is inadequate to lead us to truth. It says there is no objective truth, no absolute truth. There is only personal truth.

We live in a time when human reason is considered inadequate to lead us to the truth. Objective truth about the ultimate nature of reality and about the human condition is thought to be beyond human reach. Instead of objective truth, it is claimed that there is only personal truth—"You have your truth; I have mine." There is nothing transcendent (neither God nor anything else) that understands everything, therefore there is no objective truth available to us. It is pointless to even ask the question whether or not there is an objective world, for we have no way of knowing the answer to such a question. All we have available to us is the language we use to describe what our senses perceive. It does not take much to see how this feeds the cynicism of our present time, for in this view reality cannot be known.

We need to add to this uncertainty about knowing truth the fact of our living in an increasingly pluralistic society. We have

here in the U.S. today the most religiously diverse society the world has ever seen. What does this pluralism of belief have to do with the growth of cynicism? Postmodernism teaches that this pluralism of belief is the way it ought to be. It insists that there is no one truth that describes reality, that our finite grasp on reality is so tenuous that there can be nothing but the belief systems of individuals or cultural groups, and that none of these can claim either the status of "truth" or even superiority over any of the others. Everyone's claims to speak truth are greeted with skepticism—sometimes polite skepticism, but sometimes bitter, mocking, and abusive skepticism.

In addition, postmodernism stresses that simply by knowing, I am not free—ever. I come to every issue with prejudices, with beliefs, and with a background, and these "glasses" determine what I "see." Some postmodernists emphasize the shared knowledge (or prejudices) of various communities, while others stress the isolation of the individual knower. Whichever of these approaches is espoused, the overall result is an increasing skepticism about any kind of truth claim.

So, in this view, reason is a weak tool and can never lead us to true knowledge because it is constrained by our prejudices. Reason and the claim of knowledge are weapons that have been used by the powerful to maintain their power and interests at the expense of the powerless. Knowledge becomes a weapon in the culture wars for various groups to reinforce their already held positions and to use against each other. This recognition that knowledge is sometimes used as a weapon to suppress others and their views, feeds the drift to cynicism and the questioning of people's motives.

The consequence of this loss of confidence in reason and the existence of truth is that Western societies have raised a generation of skeptics and cynics. Think of much of the contemporary music produced for our entertainment! Consider the dwarves in C. S. Lewis's book *The Last Battle* in the Chronicles of Narnia series. Lewis writes

that the dwarves were so reluctant to be taken in that they could no longer be taken out of their skeptical and cynical attitude—hope was then impossible for them. In Western Europe this problem is far more advanced. The cynicism of Lewis's dwarves is almost universal in France, Britain, and most Western European countries.

Young people in particular are deeply pessimistic and cynical about what life holds for them. The deeper "philosophical" skepticism that is at the heart of our culture is made worse by the social and familial settings in which so many young people spend their early years. Many grow up in settings where there is little practical hope of escaping problems of poverty, unemployment, poor education, and social deprivation of every kind. In addition, many have the added burden of being raised in families where there is such betrayal of trust, such failure of commitment and parenting, such wounding of hope and love that deep alienation and a cynical attitude toward all people is not a surprising consequence.

Consequences of Our Intellectual and Social Climate

The cynical view of life produces numerous results that are manifest in loss.

Loss of belief in truth—There is nothing that can make sense of the human condition, so the conclusion is "meaningless, meaningless . . . everything is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 1:2).

Loss of hope, both for this world and for one's own life—There is no story that gives us ground for hope for our solar system, for our planet, for the human race, for my own future, so there is no alternative but cynicism and apathy.

Loss of respect for authority—There is no one and no thing that deserves my trust or obedience, so there is no one to whom I may turn with confidence that I will find answers or meaning.

Loss of respect for everything sacred—Religions, like all other claims to truth, are simply power games; anything or anyone that a group has held to be sacred

or precious should be scorned and held up for ridicule. Consequently there is a delight in shocking the viewer or listener. (I hardly need to give you examples here, for we see them repeatedly in our cultural setting.)

Loss of moral certainty—There are no transcendent moral commandments. There is no "you shall" or "you shall not." There are no commandments that come from above for this generation. No one individual, no group, no authority, no religion, no sacred book, no god has the right to tell anyone how they ought to live. In such a society, there is inevitably cynicism about claims to moral certainty.

You may say, "This does not affect me or many of the other people that I know." I want to challenge that claim. Cynicism is corrosive—it works like a cancer taking over all that is healthy and hopeful, and we are all impacted by it.

Because cynicism is so pervasive in our intellectual and popular culture, it works its corrosive effect on us all. When I was a young person growing up in Britain, not only was much of the popular music I listened to deeply imbued with cynicism about the human condition but so were most of the talk shows and comedies on television and radio. While much of this was and is very funny, such cynical humor can impact us very deeply and shape us into people who automatically doubt the sincerity or motives of people with whom we disagree.

There is much that is similar here in the United States. Our political discourse often encourages cynicism because it urges us to doubt the wisdom, sense, motives, and sincerity of those on the other side of every social, economic, and political debate. Having endured another election last November, I do not think I need to give you examples here. I read the cartoons every day, and political ones (written from both the Right and Left perspectives) are deeply shaped by cynicism and feed a cynical mentality in their readers.

At a personal level, many of us are moved to cynicism by our own family backgrounds, so we are deeply skeptical about the

possibility of happiness in marriage or in family life. Such skepticism actually works to undermine the possibility of marital or familial happiness because trust and vulnerability are fundamental to healthy relationships. These are necessarily undermined wherever there is the presence of cynical attitudes.

This also impacts any depth of relationship with God. Many of us, I am afraid, suspect that God cannot be trusted to care for us or answer our prayers or show us abiding and faithful love. We doubt His motives and the sincerity of His promises to us in Jesus Christ.

For all of us, cynicism will destroy us. For those of us who claim to be Christians, cynicism is forbidden.

Cynicism's Antidote

First, we are indeed called to be realistic about the world in which we live, about all human persons, and about ourselves. A Biblical response to cynicism is not naive optimism, but rather sober realism about the broken and fallen condition of human life in this world. This is where all of Biblical teaching—and Ecclesiastes in particular—is helpful. We are taught that this world is indeed abnormal. We are not to pretend that things are the way they should be; nor are we to suggest that this world is in any way the best of all possible worlds. Rather, because of angelic and human rebellion against God, everything is awry. The Christian should never be surprised by the misery and absurdity of much that happens in this world; for God declares to us that this is indeed the way things are now, and He Himself weeps at our wretched condition. Because all things in our world are abnormal now, we are called to weep with God at the abnormality rather than to pretend things are okay and everything is right with the world.

Second, we are to rejoice that there will one day be a judgment—when all folly, injustice, and wickedness of every kind will be exposed for what it is and will be rejected and punished. This is good news!

Third, we are to be thankful that God

has intervened in the brokenness of this world to set things right, to heal the world, and to overcome the absurdity and misery of human existence. This is what our celebration of Jesus coming into this world is all about—God's intervention in this world to overcome evil, sorrow, misery, death, and absurdity. This work that Christ began and the victory that He won in His death and resurrection will one day fill this whole earth when He comes to make everything new.

Fourth, we are called to be signs of hope in a cynical age. People around us need to be able to enter our homes, observe our marriages, join in our family lives, delight in our friendship, and be encouraged by our integrity and kindness in our places of work. They need to experience the reality of God's healing and hope-renewing power in all we are and all we do. For many people it is only as they enter into the life of another—a life that creates and fosters hope, trust, and love—and see it at close quarters that will put an ax to the root of cynicism that pervades their being.

Fifth, we are to resist the attraction of cynicism and its cancerous hold in our hearts. Cynicism is the very opposite of love. Think of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13. As he describe love, he describes what cynicism undermines and resists. Paul does not call us to be naive—Christ was not naive. Rather, He was utterly realistic about the state of the human heart, and yet He loved in the way that Paul describes love in those wonderful words in Corinthians. Such love is of course costly in this broken world. But this is the way forward to destroy cynicism in our own hearts and in the hearts of those around us. Love is clear-eyed; but love is also full of hope, for it sees the way that Christ's love has already begun to change us. Love is clear-eyed and full of hope even when it means we have to count the cost of disappointment and even betrayal. Only love will arm us against cynicism in all its ugliness and destructive power. ■

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From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

God Builds Fences

by Mark D. Avery

Does God build fences? Satan accused Him of that in Job 1:10: “Hast not thou made an hedge about him . . . ?” Satan actually made a couple of accusations. He accused God of being overly protective and Job of serving God only for the financial and material benefits he received from God.

God must have had a lot of confidence in Job, because He answered Satan’s challenge. The fence was moved, and Satan went about taking away Job’s wealth and family. Job’s response was acknowledgment of God and continued trust in Him.

Again Satan came to God with a challenge. This time the enemy got very personal; he wanted to attack Job’s person. Again God moved the fence, and Satan began his horrible work. Yet skipping to the closing chapters of this book, we learn that Job maintained his integrity and faith-relationship with God.

On the farm, we built fences for two reasons. First, we built fences to keep

animals in. Cattle were kept in the barnyard or pasture by fences which limited their ability to roam. A few strands of barbed wire usually sufficed to control them. While sheep could be kept in the pasture with similar fences, we built tighter fences for them—not so much to keep them in as to keep other animals out. In Job’s story, Satan said that God built fences to keep out Job’s enemy.

The New Testament gives us another insight about God’s fences. Hebrews 6:17 tells us that God confirmed His promise with an oath. To look at this matter reasonably, we must say when God gives His promise, that is enough. The word *confirmed* suggests that God pledged Himself as security to keep His promise. The statement becomes even more emphatic with the use of the word *oath*. This word means an enclosure, a sacred restraint. A fence. The idea is that God has made His promises, and those promises are the fences within which God carries out His will and purpose.

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One line of a chorus that we sing says, "God can do anything but fail." He builds fences, and His fences work. How blessed we are that some of His fences were built for our protection. When He sets up a sacred restraint, Satan himself cannot breach it. Not always does He place the fence where we would be most comfortable, but thank Him anyway. Were it not for His restraining hand, our spiritual enemy would do much damage to our lives and His work.

How blessed we are that some of God's fences were built for our assurance. God's oath of confirmation reminds us that He is reliable and dependable. What He says, He will do. What He promises, He will perform. Living within the reaches of God's self-imposed divine restraints brings confident assurance into our lives. ■

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

AUGUST 5, 2007

Amidst Sorrow, Hope

Lamentations 3:25-33, 55-58

Jeremiah had lived through the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. In spite of his pleadings and warnings the people of Jerusalem did not repent and thus faced the judgment of God, brought about by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Here, in the Book of Lamentations, Jeremiah mourns Jerusalem's destruction (Chapters 1 and 2), expresses hope in God's mercies (Chapter 3), and laments the utter despair of the people during the siege in Chapters 4 and 5. It will help you understand the lesson better if you read the entire book with these themes in mind. (A reading of Jeremiah 52 will

provide background for the Book of Lamentations.)

It is difficult for us to imagine the utter destruction and despair wreaked upon the people of Judah and Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. But here in Lamentations we have the observations and heartache of an eyewitness given in stark detail. Jeremiah's grief runs deep. He was a man of profound passions. But he also had unlimited faith in the justice and mercy of a sovereign God. He pegged his hope on God's faithfulness. (Read verses 22-24 as introduction to our lesson text.)

In verse 25 Jeremiah expresses a timeless principle born of experience and trust: "The Lord is good to them that wait for him, to the soul who seeks him." In verse 26 he expresses the principle of

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patience in waiting upon the fulfillment of God's will and promises. Verse 27 suggests the importance of a disciplined life. Was he perhaps thinking of the young men carried captive to Babylon and urging them to learn from their experience those lessons which would make them capable leaders in Judah's future restoration? Patience and discipline are both formative tools in the molding of character.

Submission is another virtue urged by Jeremiah in verses 29 and 30. Verse 30 certainly has prophetic reference to Jesus' suffering during His trial and pre-crucifixion trauma. (See Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 25:67 and Luke 22:63, 64.)

In verses 31-33 Jeremiah expresses confidence in God's faithfulness: "The [gracious] Lord will not cast off forever." He may take a man, or a nation, through deep and intense struggles and suffering, but He will not abandon His children. He is not a merciless God, visiting capricious or undeserved punishment with sadistic pleasure. He is just, but He is fair. And merciful.

Verses 55 through 58 express Jeremiah's personal experience of crying out to God for mercy when his life was threatened. (See Jeremiah 38:6.) He acknowledged God's awareness of his need, knew that God had heard his prayers, was aware of God's presence, and took comfort in God's response: "Fear not." Jeremiah recognized that the Lord had an interest in him, that He had shown him mercy, that He had redeemed, or saved his life. Jeremiah's personal testimony is expressed in verse 22: "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Great is God's faithfulness. Therefore, in the midst of grief there is hope.

For thought and discussion

1. To better understand Jeremiah's heartache, attempt to imagine the loss of all that one holds dear—family,

friends, personal security. Wasn't Jeremiah's lament justified under the circumstances? Discuss how to handle loss and grief.

2. Do you think God's call to Jeremiah (Chapter 1) had anything to do with his deep passion for God's people? Discuss.
3. Notice the various tools for the molding of character mentioned in this passage. Have these helped mold your life and usefulness?
4. Do we at times doubt God's faithfulness and mercy? How can we strengthen our confidence in His faithfulness?
5. Reflect on the times you called out to God for mercy. Did He hear, and answer? How has that affected your faith?

AUGUST 12, 2007

Accepting Personal Responsibility

Ezekiel 18:4, 20-23, 30-32

Ezekiel was the prophet to the exiles. He was carried to Babylon in 597 BC (see lesson for July 29) and was contemporary with Jeremiah (in Jerusalem) and Daniel (in the court of Babylon). For 22 years he preached to the captives in Babylon, encouraging them to understand God's dealings with them, to accept His judgments, and to amend their ways. (Read the entire chapter for context. See also Ezekiel 33:11.)

The theme of Chapter 18 is that of accepting personal responsibility for one's actions. One dare not blame his actions on another, or claim righteousness from another. Each individual will be held accountable for his own sins. Though the sins of previous generations led to the current captivity, that does not give license for current misdeeds. That principle is stated plainly in the first

verse of our lesson. God judges all souls fairly and holds the individual responsible for his actions.

Verse 21 reiterates that principle and expands the concept of personal responsibility. Neither iniquity nor righteousness passes from generation to generation. Each individual bears responsibility for his own actions. (See Romans 14:12.) In keeping with the principle of personal responsibility, God says that when a sinner repents, turns away from his wickedness and follows His law, He will forgive. That soul shall live because he made a personal choice to change his ways. His sins will be forgiven and remembered against him no more. (See Psalm 103:8-13.) God makes it clear that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (v. 23), because they are then separated from Him eternally. It is the permanent loss of one of His children, and He mourns that loss. His pleasure is that the sinning soul turn from his wicked ways and live.

In the last three verses of the chapter God again confirms His justice and His concerns, and again issues an appeal for His people to make the right choices. God is not capricious. He will be fair in judgment. But He will judge. And the deeds of the individual will determine His dealings with him. God issues this impassioned appeal to His wayward children: "Repent, turn away from your transgressions, develop a new heart and spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

God has no desire to punish His children, but He cannot be held accountable for their waywardness. They must accept personal responsibility for their actions, and either repent, or suffer the consequences of their sinfulness. God the Father reiterates that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, those who are estranged from Him.

God endowed man at creation with the freedom of choice. He also provided restorative measures for man to return

to a favorable relationship with Him from the sinfulness to which man was prone. God offers life for the repentant soul, but death is the end of those who persist in their sins. "Therefore, repent and live."

For thought and discussion

1. Don't we all have a tendency to blame others for our failures, our sins? Why is it so difficult to accept personal responsibility for one's own actions? You may wish to discuss this with your class.
2. While it is true that each individual must answer for his own actions, it is true that the effects of evil or righteousness have bearing on subsequent generations. Think of ways this has proven true.
3. When we repent of sin God forgives and holds those sins against us no longer. But why do we so often have trouble forgetting them? Do we lack faith, or what?
4. Have you ever wondered why with all of God's provisions for life, man still chooses death? Ponder this. Why is this so? What factors are at work?
5. Reaffirm in your thinking that God is not a harsh, judgmental Person, but a kind and loving Father. But remember that He acts only in response to our choices.

AUGUST 19, 2007

A Call to Return to God

Zechariah 1:1-6; 7:8-14

Zechariah was born in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel, where he ministered to the remnant who had returned after the 70 years of captivity. He was a colleague of Haggai (see Ezra 5:1), and along with him encouraged the people to complete the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 6:14;

Haggai 1), which work had been suspended for fourteen years. (See Ezra 4:23, 24.)

Zechariah's message to the people in today's lesson is an encouragement to renew their commitment to God and to be just and fair in their dealings with one another. To set the stage for his appeal he states that "the Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers." They had refused to listen to His appeals to repent and He had driven them into exile. Therefore, to avoid a similar fate, the current generation is encouraged to renew their spiritual commitment and amend their social and civil relationships.

God is not unfair nor unmerciful. When He sees response to His pleas for correction He responds with open arms. He has, as He has stated many times, no pleasure in punishment or observing the death of the wicked (Lamentations 3:33; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11). He is merciful. His appeal here through Zechariah is for His people to not be as their fathers who spurned the message of the prophets. Though both the prophets and their fathers were dead, God's Word stands true and unchanging from generation to generation. It will be their judge.

Zechariah's message in Chapter 7 comes two years after the message in Chapter 1 and was in response to a question regarding a fast the captives had been keeping to mourn the destruction of the temple. (Read verses 1-7.) Zechariah's response shifted to the more important issues of justice, mercy, compassion, helpfulness, and kindness to their fellowmen. The Lord's response through Zechariah stated the uselessness of their fasting while not observing these weightier matters of the law. You cannot buy off God by professed religious practices when your heart is not right with Him. That is the height of religious hypocrisy.

"But they refused to hearken" to

God's appeal and warning and thus suffered the consequences of their evil ways. How sad that God's chosen ones, His children, refused His pleadings and thus incurred the wrath of His punishment. God reminds their children through Zechariah how He faithfully sent prophet-messengers to warn them. But they hardened their hearts, stopped their ears, and turned away from God's pleadings. They were bent on going their own way, living for their own pleasure, and disregarding the words of the Lord. Since they refused to hear God when He called, so He refused their cry for help when overwhelmed by the Babylonians. Therefore, God says, I scattered them with a whirlwind to lands where they were strangers, and their land was left desolate.

God's message is clear. He is merciful to those who return to Him in repentance. But His judgmental wrath will be visited upon those who refuse His call to turn to Him. Zechariah's message is valid for our day as well.

For thought and discussion

1. Be sure to review again the sequence of Judah's history which brings us to the point of today's lesson.
2. Why do we think of God as harsh and judgmental when in reality He is kind and merciful? What gives us this impression? How can we change our viewpoint?
3. This lesson should help us appreciate anew the unchangeable nature of God's Word. What comfort, or instruction, can we take from that fact?
4. Reflect on the absurdity of religious hypocrisy. Why do people attempt to appease God with outward show when the inner man is not in compliance with God's law? Perhaps some class discussion.
5. What lessons does Zechariah's message have for the church today?

AUGUST 26, 2007

God's Unfailing Justice

Malachi 2:17–3:5; 4:1

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, lived and prophesied about 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah. The Jews had been back in their homeland about 100 years by the time of Malachi. They had been cured of idolatry during their captivity, had rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem upon their return, but had grown lax in their worship and compromising in their moral principles. They were offering inferior sacrifices, neglecting the tithe, and intermarrying with their heathen neighbors. Malachi's message, like that of the prophets before him, was to rebuke sin and encourage return to God.

It is clear from our text that the people did not recognize the depth of their departure from God, nor the seriousness of their sinful state. They were accused of "wearying the Lord with their words," yet did not recognize wherein they had done so. Their values and concepts of good and evil were skewed. They were calling evil good and questioning the justice and judgment of God.

In answer to their questions, Malachi breaks forth into a prophetic pronouncement of a coming Judge who will set things aright. God's people would wait yet 400 years for the fulfillment of this prophecy when John the Baptist would appear and announce the coming Messiah. He would be the one ushering in the New Covenant, a new relationship between God and His people.

But, Malachi says, "Who may abide the day of his coming"? He would come as a purifier and a refiner, burning away the dross of sin and cleansing the unclean. Only when God's people turned wholeheartedly to God would their offerings be "pleasant to the Lord, as in former years." By implication Malachi was telling his people that in their present state of spiritual and moral confusion they would not be

acceptable to God.

As we read on (v. 5) we note God's pronouncement of judgment upon those who were disregarding His laws and the moral principles He had established for His people. Years before, God had given Moses the commandments for His people. (See 4:4.) He would not hold them guiltless for violation of those principles and standards of conduct. Verse 1 of Chapter 4 continues the theme of God's judgment upon those who do wickedly. The fire of His wrath will utterly destroy those who have rejected His laws, His counsel, and His mercy.

Here at the end of the Old Testament we find God through Malachi making one final appeal to His wayward people. His challenge to them is as it had been through all the prophets whom He had used as spokesmen, "Repent, forsake your evil, ungodly practices, turn to Me in repentance, learn to do justice, be fair with your fellowmen, and I will receive you and be merciful to you." Did they listen? Israel's subsequent history, even after the coming of Messiah whom Malachi predicted, indicates that their hardness of heart continued. A sad note, indeed.

For thought and discussion

1. Israel seemed almost incurably prone to sin. Why? Was there something in their situation that differed from ours? Explain.
2. What causes people to become so blind to their sins that they fail to recognize the depth of their departure from God's ways? Discuss ways this can happen and ways to avoid it.
3. Sin is serious and God's judgment is sure. Do we have a clear picture of both? And are we committed to avoiding both?
4. Do we at times "weary the Lord" with words to cover up actions which are not in keeping with His will? Think about it.
5. God's refining and purifying fires are not pleasant. What are the intended effects on our lives? How have they affected your life? ■

AUGUST 2007

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Newslines . . .

by Hans Mast

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

Syria Provokes Violence in Lebanon

Fatah al-Islam, a Palestinian terrorist organization, launched attacks on Lebanese army posts in Tripoli. They then returned to their bases in Palestinian refugee camps—which the U.S. State Department describes as being a “safe haven” for the group—where they are using Palestinian refugees as human shields. The Lebanese army has been shelling al-Islam’s positions and BBC shows great clouds of smoke rising over Tripoli as firefights continue to rage. Lebanon says that Syria, in its effort to force the current pro-U.S. Lebanese government to step down, is behind the attacks. Dr. Walid Phares, author of the book *The War of Ideas: Jihadism Against Democracy* and director of the Future Terrorism Project at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, agrees that Syria is behind the attacks. Lebanese citizen sentiment strongly supports such a conclusion as well. Syria, of course, is denying the allegations, but it is intriguing to note that most of the leadership of Fatah al-Islam have been freshly released from Syrian prisons (where they were briefly jailed for being members of al-Qaeda).

Fighting wars by terrorist proxy seems to be a trend that is making a reemergence among Middle East nations hostile to the U.S., the West, and moderate Islamic nations. The next news item reflects this as well.

—Sources: Bloomberg, BBC, and *OneNewsNow.com*

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Iran Plans Summer Offensive to Drive U.S. Out of Iraq

The U.S. has been for some months offering proof that shows Iran is heavily involved in arming and giving orders to Iraqi terrorists attacking U.S. and Iraqi forces. Coalition intelligence has indication that Iran is pre-positioning arms and terrorists for a summer offensive against coalition forces at the end of the six-month “troop surge” in an effort to drive the politically apprehensive U.S. Congress into cutting off funding for U.S. troops in Iraq. —Source: *UK Guardian*

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Gore’s An Inconvenient Truth “Propaganda” Shown in Schools

A young highschooler in Northern Ontario was shown Gore’s global warming documentary—which even scientists who support global warming say is grossly inaccurate scientifically and full of exaggerations—in *four* different classes. First it was shown in his world history class, then economics, then world issues, and finally yet again in his environment class. Many environmental organizations and rich liberals are donating DVDs to schools across the globe. One such coalition did so to every school in British Columbia. Another organization is close to providing a copy to every school, public and private, in the country. England and Spain have integrated the

movie into their curricula while private donors in Australia have provided schools with copies. Canada's *National Post* says of the film's accuracy, "Among other things, since the film's release last year, scientists have rejected Mr. Gore's claims that 2005 was the warmest year on record (temperatures have been receding since 1998), that polar bears are heading for extinction (their numbers are growing), that Antarctica is warming (interior temperature readings show cooling) and that sea levels will 'rise 18 to 20 feet,' swamping coastal cities (the International Panel on Climate Change predicts a few inches)." A Vancouver businessman is fighting back. As soon as the DVD version of the new British documentary *The Great Global Warming Swindle* ships, he will be purchasing a copy for every Canadian high school. However, he faces liberal bias among teachers whom students describe as usually presenting global warming as a one-sided issue.

—Source: Canada's *National Post*

2008: The Year of Flip-Flop Candidates

Flip-floppery is everywhere in America politics these days.

Former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney (R) used to support abortion rights, but now, seeking the votes of conservatives in New Hampshire and South Carolina, he doesn't. Former senator John Edwards (D-N.C.) voted to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada, but now that the state is hosting an early caucus, he opposes such a plan. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said in 2000 that he saw no benefit from ethanol, but now, hoping for a win in corn-crazy Iowa, he sees the alternative fuel as practical, though he's still opposed to subsidizing it.

While flip-flopping—or, more delicately put, a change in position—has

always been a part of political campaigns, President Bush turned it into a deadly political weapon in 2004. Who can forget the footage of Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) insisting that he voted for the \$87 billion in Iraq funding before he voted against it?

—Excerpt from "For 2008, Who Isn't a Flip-Flopper?" by Chris Cillizza and Shailagh Murray in *The Washington Post* on May 20, 2007 (<http://tinyurl.com/2j355w>)

US to Invest \$205m in Missile Defense With Israel

The U.S. House of Representatives authorized a sum of 205 million dollars for financing joint US-Israel missile defense system projects, Israel Radio reported early Saturday morning.

The sum, part of a \$504 billion defense spending bill passed Thursday, will be directed to projects currently being developed in Israeli factories.

According to the report, the defense systems are meant to be able to withstand ballistic missiles developed by Iran.

—Excerpt from "US to invest \$205m in missile defense with Israel" from *The Jerusalem Post* on May 19, 2007 (<http://tinyurl.com/3848ra>)

Eight Reporters Resign Over Kremlin Censorship

Eight correspondents from a Russian broadcast news agency resigned in response to the pro-Kremlin management's decision to require that 50% of items regarding the government had to be positive. This is a further ominous sign of Russia's re-descent into totalitarianism.

—Source: *Christian Broadcasting Network*

Britain Charges, Requests Extradition of Russian in Assassination

The British justice system charged

Russian businessman Andrei Lugovoi for the assassination of ex-KGB agent and outspoken Kremlin critic Alexander Litvinenko. Litvinenko was assassinated via a rare radioactive material, polonium-210, which only nuclear powers, such as Russia, possess. It seems clear that high-level Russian government cooperation and sponsorship was required for the assassination. Litvinenko was an outspoken critic of his former KGB colleague Vladimir Putin, president of Russia, because of the measures he is taking to restore Russia to a police state. Litvinenko was enjoying asylum in Britain when he met with several Russian businessmen, Lugovoi among them, at a British hotel. Hazmat teams confirmed that this meeting was where the polonium was surreptitiously inserted into his food. (The contamination to the hotel posed a public health hazard as well.) Further investigations by Scotland Yard have implicated Lugovoi. While Russia and Britain have a formal extradition treaty, the likely state-sponsorship of this assassination makes the extradition a touchy affair.

—Source: *International Herald Tribune*

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New Wave of Rocket Attacks Hits Israel; Israel Strikes Back

Palestinian militants have launched several new waves of rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, killing many. The Israeli cabinet has authorized air strikes on rocket launch positions and targeted assassinations of terrorist leaders responsible for attacks.

—Source: *Y-net News*

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Country in Profile: Bangladesh

I wrote this column from Bangladesh where I am on a ministry trip organized by a missionary training school.

Bangladesh is the most densely populated nation (sans city-states and island-

nations) in the world. One hundred fifty million people are packed into an area smaller than Iowa. Bangladesh has 985 people/km² (slightly less dense than Atlanta, GA)—32 times the density of the U.S. at 30 people/km².

I have learned in my interactions with missionaries and Muslims (83%) in Bangladesh that while there are many, many Muslims in the world, the vast majority, at least in Bangladesh, are only nominal Muslims. They don't really, literally believe the Koran or take it seriously. I find it intriguing how similar this is to the U.S. where there are many nominal Christians, but few that take their religion seriously.

One unfortunate difference that I see between a country like Bangladesh and the U.S. is law and order. Law and order is what makes a nominal Christian eager to hand in a "Christian" extremist who bombs an abortion clinic. Law and order (a lack thereof) is what makes a nominal Muslim reluctant to hand in an Islamic terrorist because of legitimate fear of reprisal. There seems to be little difference in abhorrence of terrorism among nominal Christians and nominal Muslims, but a far greater difference in willingness to act upon that sentiment.

Bangladesh is a very corrupt country (Transparency International: <http://tinyurl.com/y3macw>) and its citizens do not expect the government to perform justice, though they wish it would. Currently, however, there is an interim government that is working very hard, arguably extra-constitutionally, to root out corruption.

One of the tools they are using in this is the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which was formed by a previous government three years ago from elite portions of the armed forces and police. Members serve only a 3-4 month term to avoid corruption. They are well-armed and operate extra-judicially. Most of the time after they apprehend the culprits, they take them out and shoot them. The

official reports attribute their death to “crossfire.” If officially arrested and put through the court system, a bribe will dismiss the charges. They wear all black and are armed with submachine guns. (This is a significant upgrade from the standard police-issue baton or single-shot bolt action rifle.) They enjoy broad popular support because of the justice they bring and their standing above corruption.

Seeing the incredible poverty (45% below poverty line, \$470 average GNI/capita, 36%/82.8% people live on less than \$1/\$2 per day, 19th/11th poorest country in the world by percentage of people living on less than \$1/\$2 per day) makes my heart ache and provoked much soul-searching as to what my role—and that of the U.S. conservative Mennonite church—should be. Misappropriation of aid funds and testimony from Bangladeshis that a foreign-dependence culture has ruined Bangladeshi

initiative makes for no easy answers.

If you want information about supporting conservative Mennonite missions in Bangladesh, contact Allen Roth: allen-roth@juno.com.

—Sources: Interviews with Bangladeshis on the streets and in homes, interviews with local missionaries, *The Daily Star* (a Bangladesh daily newspaper), *Wikipedia*, *CIA World Fact Book*, UNICEF statistics

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Further recommended online reading (critical reading/thinking skills advised): “Pastor, Wife Stand Strong After Muslim Attack” (<http://tinyurl.com/32vijo>); “Dr. Jerry Falwell: A Cultural Hero” (<http://tinyurl.com/38n8ae>); “Iraqi Christians call for end to persecution” (<http://tinyurl.com/34m45s>)

*Please send any tips, stories, opinions, suggestions, or corrections to: **hansmast@hansmast.com***

— JOHN W. HESS . . . cont’d. —

In 1925, at the age of 41, after 17 years in the west, John Hess moved with his wife and three sons and four daughters back to Akron, PA.

The Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities asked Hess to give pastoral oversight to the Mennonite Mission in Reading, PA, from 1928-1937. In 1944 he joined Lancaster Conference. He also assisted at Elizabethtown from 1945-1950. He served on two conference committees: the first Summer Bible School Committee and the Union Committee. The Bible School Committee prepared the first manuals for the weekday schools.

Brother Hess is most remembered throughout the United States as an evangelist and Bible conference speaker. His messages were filled with illustrations taken from happenings during his years of ministry in various places.

Brother Hess remained active and interested in the service of his Lord. Through his evangelistic and pastoral ministries he was privileged by God to be used in the salvation of hundreds of souls.

During the winter of 1957, while wintering in Arizona, John suffered a mild stroke. Upon returning home to Pennsylvania in April of 1958, he again suffered a stroke, which took his life. He died at his home near Lititz, PA, on April 5 of that year at the age of 73.

The funeral service for Brother John W. Hess was held in the Ephrata Mennonite Church with burial at the Metzler Mennonite Church Cemetery.

—Gail L. Emerson

Sharing the Mission

by Bill Commons

Fifty years ago, as I was training to be a missionary, the cry was “To Every Nation.” The unreached multitudes beckoned, the harvest was ripe, and so few were willing to go as reapers. Few nations had strong churches that were multiplying and effectively evangelizing their populations.

Back then, American missionaries thought it was our job to disciple the nations. One famous Christian leader said, “It’s up to us. If we don’t send the missionaries and reap the harvest, nobody will.” Even then I wondered, “Is it really true that God has put all His eggs in our basket?” Somehow, the biblical passion to reach the world got tangled up with an Anglo-American Messianic complex.

During the colonial era of missions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was often considered “the white man’s burden” to bring civilization and Christianity to the “benighted heathens of the world.” Seeking to bring the gospel from the West to distant lands, Christ’s ambassadors accompanied the ambitious pioneers of European empire expansion. Colonialism’s cultural condescension and racial prejudice tainted the missionaries’ reputation. As a result, many nations formed the tragic misperception that Christianity is a foreign religion.

During the twentieth century, however, Western missionaries learned to embrace the heritage of every people group and sought to follow the incarnational model of Christ by teaching and living out the gospel in each cultural context. Since we sought to identify with the people and not seek foreign privilege, we went and still go as servants, not masters. We discovered we should learn from local citizens before we teach, and listen before we speak.

Now in the twenty-first century, we reject the tired, neocolonial pattern of exporting American religion and transplanting American-style churches. We urge national believers to implement the supracultural truths of Scripture by establishing cultur-

ally authentic churches that are faithful to the Bible.

As the gospel spreads and Christ calls out “a people for His Name” from the *ethne* (all people groups), churches grow and reproduce. Turning from a missionary mindset focused on planting and pastoring one church, we now seek multiplication in order to foster church-planting movements.

It is our greatest calling, after evangelizing, discipling, and “churching” the *ethne*, to pass on the torch of world missions and cheer them on to complete the task. When national leaders see that foreign missionaries do not seek to control, but that we urge *them* to be the leaders, they gain the confidence to believe God can use them in even greater ways than He used us as foreigners among them.

Planting, growing, and multiplying churches in any people group is an overwhelming task. Attacking the “gates of hell” internationally is not for the faint of heart. Exhausted by spiritual warfare, we missionaries tend to stop short of leading our churches to become *sending* forces that launch our own ambassadors for Christ out to the nations.

Looking back on the two churches I helped plant in Hong Kong in the 1970s, I praise God that they picked up the torch of parenting daughter churches and thus reproduced often. But I grieve over my failure to implant a passion to disciple the *ethne* into their spiritual DNA.

We have not completed the church-planting task until new churches have embraced their biblical role and are, in turn, sending and supporting their own gospel ambassadors to the villages, towns, and cities in their nation, and to the nations beyond.

Thus our cry is no longer “From America to the nations,” but “FROM every nation TO every nation”! ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Message*, Spring, 2007



Counseling From the Word

RIGHT THINKING Better Than Drugs

by James Rudy Gray

We take a large amount of drugs in this country. We abuse drugs in a variety of ways and we become dependent on drugs at an alarming rate. While some drugs seem to help some symptoms for a while, no drug is the ultimate answer. What is the answer? Right thinking!

Proverbs 23:7 reminds us that as a person thinks in his heart so he is. Romans 12:2 counsels us, *“Don’t be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* Our emotions are the product of our beliefs and thoughts. John Milton wrote, *“The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make heaven out of hell, a hell out of heaven.”*

William Glasser, MD, has noted that mental illness is basically unhappiness. He says that unhappiness is a time and place in one’s life when it is not the way he would like it to be. Glasser is not an advocate of any drug therapy. He promotes thinking as the way to change our feelings. He states, *“If you are capable of carrying on a conversation, you should seek counseling when you are unhappy.”*

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

Please understand that he equates unhappiness with mental illness and stresses that a person cannot live in an unhappy state for four or five months without showing symptoms. He embraces the metaphor that happiness is mental health and unhappiness can never be mental health.

We cannot be happy all the time. Unhappiness is bound to come into our lives. But how does it get there? In the end, we are unhappy because of how we think. Our interpretation of circumstances, changes, etc., dictates how we respond, not what happens to us. When a person comes to us for counseling,

Accepting reality is one of the keys to good mental health.

what can we do? We need to listen to them so we can understand where they are coming from. We need to get some type of personal history from them and we need to determine what manifestations or symptoms they have. All of this is part of building trust and confidence. Once that foundation is established, the pathway to help is easier to navigate.

Psalm 1 is a description of a happy person. He or she is a person who avoids bad company and embraces a discipline of growing in God’s Word. As a result, that person prospers. Archibald Hart has observed, *“Reality thinking is positive. It stares truth in the eyes, allowing us to find constructive and liberating ways to deal with it. It refuses to deny the actual*

negatives of life.” Accepting reality is one of the keys to good mental health. What a person is repressing, denying, or suppressing is often a major clue in understanding what is behind the client’s manifested symptoms.

One of the greatest deceptions we use on ourselves is to immerse our thinking in unreality or fantasy. Imagination is a good gift from God, but becoming bound up in fantasy is a potential for disaster. How can we help a person change if he or she is living more in a fantasy world than reality? Help him to see that the first step in change is to think healthily. It has been suggested that the human mind easily falls prey to impulsive reactions that invariably lead to difficulty or regret. While some personalities are more prone to spontaneity than others, impulsivity is harmful. A client may swing from one thing to another and never really confront his core problem or face how he is feeding this kind of behav-

ior through faulty thinking. Impulsiveness can often be a refusal to confront reality.

God’s Word is truth. It is faith in His Son, the truth, and obedience to His Word, the truth, that can give a person the freedom to think clearly, realistically, and rightly. From that kind of thinking comes the ability to adjust, adapt, change, grow, and overcome the things that trouble us. Learning to think using God’s truth is not a one-time experience but a lifetime of growth.

As counselors, we cannot change a person’s way of thinking, but we can help him change. God Himself is the author of change in a person’s heart and He uses means to accomplish that. Central to what God uses is His Word. When people learn to think truth, they will in turn learn to live truth. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Pulpit Helps*, January, 2007

My Menno Simons Mouse Pad

by David L. Burkholder

I sat down at my computer one day to perform a routine task, and was immediately struck by a very curious anomaly. There, staring back at me from my mouse pad, was the image of a sixteenth-century monk, Menno Simons. (A mouse pad, for those still in the sixteenth century, is a sponge-like pad with a cloth covering allowing the ball of the mouse to move the cursor on the computer screen.) Here was a man from the pre-industrial-revolution era gracing a very hi-tech symbol of the information age. The irony was not lost on me.

Menno was a man of his times. Trained as a monk in the Catholic

Church, he was converted to evangelical Christianity and a leading figure in the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century in Holland. He could not have imagined in his wildest dreams that years later he would become the hero of the Mennonite Church named, appropriately, for him, nor that entering his name on the worldwide web’s search engine Google nearly 500 years later would result in 242,000 references to his name. It’s staggering what technology has accomplished in the past few years, and especially since Menno’s day.

Would Menno be impressed? I don’t know. He was a man who used candles or

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

lanterns for light and walked or used horse-drawn conveyances for travel. And his interests lay elsewhere than in the technology of his day and its achievements and possibilities. His concern was personal salvation and the reformation of the church from one that was works-oriented to one defined by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, one may say that that became his consuming life interest.

So what does that say to his children of the 21st century who are so preoccupied with the technology of our age? Have we, perhaps, allowed the glamour of technology to override our pursuit of the better and more important things in life, the things Menno gave his life to and for which we should indeed be grateful to him?

The church in Menno's day had become hidebound by tradition and time-worn customs. It had devolved into a highly formal and institutionalized organization devoid of spirituality and concern for man's soul. Menno, and others, broke with tradition and through a spiritual awakening attempted to breathe new life and structure into the lives of the true followers of Jesus. And, amazingly, he accomplished this without anything other than pen and paper and the spoken word. The success of his movement was not due to the technology he could harness for assistance. It was due to a burning spiritual desire and a deep commitment and unreserved dedication to his convictions, all without the technological trappings we feel are so essential to our daily routine and the communication of our ideas and ideals.

It's true that Menno did use the technology of his day to promote the cause he was so passionate about, however limited that technology may seem from our current perspective. But Menno's focus was not on the technology. He employed it only as a vehicle to an end. And therein lies an important lesson for our day and for the propagation of the gospel which

motivated Menno and should spur his followers. Our primary concern should be the pursuit of a holy life and the witness of that life to a largely lost and eternally dying world. Should we employ the technology of our day to further this task? Absolutely. But we should not allow ourselves to become so enamored or involved with the technology and its potential that we overlook or neglect the primary task of reaching out to a desperate world with words of love and hope.

Somehow the church today, made up of individual believers, needs to catch Menno's vision and passion. The sanctifying of believers and multiplication of Christ's followers needs to be our first and foremost aspiration. The use of today's technology can certainly aid that goal and should be consistently employed whenever and wherever feasible. But what we should not lose sight of is that personal contact as well as the spoken, written, or electronically transmitted word, is one of the most successful methods for achieving our goal. We dare not hide behind technology or expect it to do what only warm-bodied believers can do.

The task is vast and large. But it should seem no more hopeless to us in our age of highly advanced technology than it must have seemed to Menno in his day of much more limited communication potential. The key is commitment and motivation. Just imagine what the larger number of today's Christians ought to be able to accomplish with today's technology were they as committed to the task as was Menno and his compatriots.

The Lord's command to "go into all the world and make disciples" still stands. The means are at our fingertips, quite literally. Let's be up and doing, continuing in our day the endeavor set in motion by our namesake—the purifying and furtherance of the kingdom of God by all means at our disposal. And all for His glory. ■

WHY Join a Church?

by Tim Schoap

Is Church Membership Biblical?

The U.S. Congregational Life Survey (www.uscongregations.org), the largest profile of worshipers and their congregations ever done in the United States, found that 10 percent of the people sitting in church pews are not members of any congregation. The survey, conducted in April, 2001, of more than 300,000 worshipers in over 2,200 congregations, also confirmed what many pastors already know, that a growing percentage of active churchgoers are hesitant about something that was once taken for granted: church membership.

One fourth of the people who are actively involved in a church congregation declined to join for at least six years, and almost 20 percent resisted membership for more than 10 years. The reasons given for not joining a church are many.

Some Christians are opposed to church membership on practical grounds. They think that if they come to worship, fellowship, and serve alongside the members of a local church, there is no reason to formally join with that church.

Some Christians are opposed to church membership on what they believe are biblical grounds. They say that since church membership isn't mentioned in the New Testament, it isn't something they need to do.

But joining a church is not simply something you "do," like registering to vote or going out to eat. The church is far more than a spiritual social club. In fact, I believe Scripture provides a solid basis for church membership, and for the conclusion that every Christian should be an active, practicing member

of a local church. Here's why:

The Church, the Body of Christ

Scripture is clear: all who trust Christ as Saviour are already members of the Church: the universal, supernatural Body of Christ that is made up of all believers, in all churches, for all time (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13).

This is the capital "C" Church, described by C. S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters* as "spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners." All who have confessed Christ are part of that Church.

That Church is not visible to us, at least in its entirety. But there is another church that we do see—or perhaps more accurately, an aspect of the universal, triumphant Church that is decidedly fixed in space and time. This one is spelled with a small "c," the local church.

The Local Church

While there is a big difference between the "Church" and the "church," every local expression of the Church is the visible expression of Christ's Body, and is just as much part of that Body as the part that is "terrible as an army with banners."

The establishment of local churches is clearly taught in the New Testament (Acts 14:23, 27), and believers are directed to associate together in local assemblies (Hebrews 10:25).

Most often in the New Testament, the word *church* is the translation of the Greek *ekklesia*, from *ek*, "out of," and *kaleo*, "to call or invite." In secular usage, an *ekklesia* was a gathering of

citizens called out from their homes to a public place. In Scripture, an *ekklesia* is a gathering of Christians “called out” from the general populace to come together for a common purpose. A church, an *ekklesia*, is not a building. If our church buildings fell down around our ears, we’d still be the church, living and functioning as a local expression of the greater Body of Christ. So why join a local church?

The Biblical Evidence for Church Membership

While the New Testament does not use “membership” language, it most definitely presumes that Christians belong to and identify with other Christians with whom they fellowship, and submit to a central authority who has responsibility for that group.

The New Testament church knew who was a part of that group and who was not. Acts 1:15 says the “number” of the church was about 120. That’s fairly specific. Clearly, somebody counted. In Acts 2:41, “. . . about three thousand were added to their number.” In Acts 2:47, “. . . the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Again, in Acts 4:4, a specific number is given. Some form of record was being kept, tracking who was coming to this new work of God.

In 1 Timothy 5:9, Paul directs Timothy to put certain widows on “the list” for financial aid from the church. A list of widows approved for assistance means the New Testament church was not haphazard about who belonged to it.

Scripture consistently underscores commitment to the local church as an important and public statement of commitment to the Lord. The way Scripture speaks of that commitment presumes a formal, public identification with a local church that is analogous to our church “membership.”

Hebrews 10:24, 25 stresses the importance of membership for the sake of bib-

lical fellowship: “*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*” Obedience to that command outside of the local church is impossible.

Hebrews 13:17 highlights the importance of membership for the sake of accountability: “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*” All Christians are to be accountable to their church leaders. Obviously, that assumes membership in a specific body of believers.

Their perception of who these men were and of the God whom they served completely changed.

Finally, the “one anothers” of Scripture underscore the importance of the local church for spiritual maturity. “*Love one another,*” John 13:34; “*Be kind to one another,*” Ephesians 4:32; “*Encourage one another,*” 1 Thessalonians 5:11; and on, and on. Without public, formal commitment in a local church, the “one anothers” don’t make much sense.

It is clear from the New Testament that even in the earliest days of the church, membership mattered. Membership in a local church is God’s design for fellowship, for accountability, and for spiritual maturity.

Church membership is on the decline across America. Even in strongly evangelical, Bible-believing churches, there is a growing number of Christians who view church membership as unnecessary at best, unbiblical at worst.

Previously, we looked at biblical

evidence for church membership. Today we consider four practical reasons to formally join a local church in membership. While practical in nature, these four reasons are also steeped in biblical authority.

1. *Join the church for the sake of other Christians*

Mature Christians need to set an example for weaker Christians, and weaker Christians need the encouragement of stronger Christians. Being a member of a local church provides significant opportunities for that encouragement.

Biblical love is characterized by commitment and sacrifice.

Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., tells of a man in fulltime ministry who didn't want to join the church he regularly attended because he thought it might slow his ministry down. Dever agreed that joining the church could well slow him down. But had he given serious thought to the idea that joining the church may speed others up?

Mature Christians need to realize that not joining a local church sets a poor example for weaker Christians who truly need the accountability of formal church membership.

Further, Christians are called to love one another (Matthew 22:37-40; John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:16). Biblical love is characterized by commitment and sacrifice. That's why Paul compares a husband's love for his wife to the love Christ has for the church (Ephesians 5:25). The weakest Christian needs to be committed to a body of believers to be loved, encouraged, and held accountable through good times and bad. The

strongest Christian needs to be committed to a body of believers for the same reasons, and to make sure the weaker Christians have someone to do all that encouraging.

Join a church to encourage and to be encouraged, and to make your love for Christ known by committing to love others.

2. *Join the church to encourage godliness and obedience to Christ*

Part of identifying with a local church is the accountability that such a relationship provides us. Consider 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, where Paul addresses a man in the Corinthian church who is living in a sexual relationship with his father's wife—a relationship so immoral that Paul says it was even unknown among pagans.

Paul says that this man needed to know that he could not live the life he was living and consider himself a Christian. In directing the church to put him out of the fellowship, he was driving this man to an awareness of his sin and his need to repent of it.

Being willing to submit to such accountability, and caring enough for people to exclude them from the fellowship to clarify what God requires, is an act of love.

God has given the local church the responsibility to encourage one another in the faith and to correct unrepentant sin. Join a church as a means of accountability, to encourage holiness in your life and in others.

3. *Join the church to be under biblical authority*

This reason goes hand in hand with the previous. God has ordained that the church be led by elders and deacons (Acts 14:23). Elders are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the believers in their care. The qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:4-9 make it

clear that elders are to care for the church in the same way they would care for their own families.

If elders are entrusted by God with a leadership role to direct the affairs of the church, they must know who the church is. Most churches have many more “members” than attendees. How can a pastor or an elder watch over a flock he never sees? How can leaders serve the church if they do not know who the church is?

How can the individual members of the body of Christ place themselves under the elders’ authority if they are not part of a local body governed by elders? Join a church to be under biblical authority.

4. Finally, join the church because it is God’s design

In the New Testament, God is not building a collection of individual believers. He is building an *ekklesia*, a gather-

ing of believers called out of the world **together**. In Acts 2, through Peter’s proclamation of the gospel and the faith that resulted, many people were saved. As we saw in Acts 2:47, “. . . *the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*”

“Their number,” the known and identified believers, was the local church of Jerusalem. They were identified with the church in a personal way. When Jesus confronted Paul on the Damascus road in Acts 9:4, he said, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” Who had Paul been persecuting? **The church.** Jesus was saying that when Paul was persecuting the church, he was persecuting Christ.

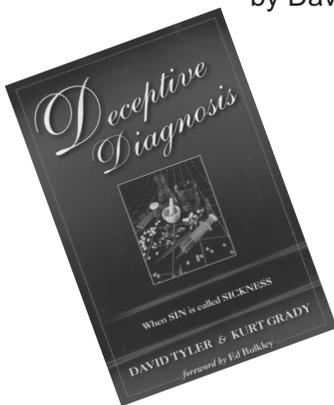
Christ identified with the church completely. Christians should do the same. Join the church because it is God’s design for you as a Christian. ■

—Reprinted with permission from *Pulpit Helps*, June, 2007

Deceptive Diagnosis

When Sin Is Called Sickness

by David Tyler & Kurt Grady



From the Foreword by Ed Bulkley:

“I believe that if you will examine the arguments and evidence that Dave and Kurt provide in this book, your faith in God’s Word and His power to transform lives will be strengthened. Your confidence to help others with their problems of living will be enhanced as you realize that our Lord is more than able to heal confused minds and wounded hearts.”

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Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

The primary purpose of this column is to give congregations fresh music to add to their worship, and/or insights into the origin and meaning of old hymns that have been around for centuries. It will (hopefully) focus primarily on original Mennonite hymns, although other hymns will be incorporated from time to time as well. We request your input for this column, particularly in the form of lyrics to be set to music and used for the column; but also if you know of a hymn that you would like to see published here with an explanation of its background. We specifically ask that if you know of composers who are qualified and willing to compose for this column, let us know about them. Please send your submissions to: Douglas A. Byler, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803.

My Children, Now Attend



by Martin/Martin

Music:

In the case of most of the hymns that have been discussed in this column, the text has been the first component to be composed, and the music added at a later date. In this case, however, the words were penned with the music already in mind. John D. Martin has been working for some time on compiling a hymnbook, and it was for inclusion in the book that this song was written.

Geoffrey Martin was a talented young Mennonite musician from Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. His parents, John and Patricia Martin, are no doubt known to many of the readers. Although he had four years of piano lessons, he never spent much time trying to learn to play notated music, but preferred to arrange and improvise freely by ear, and to create his own compositions at the piano. This song was one that he composed spontaneously at the piano. The story of its composition is told very well by his father.

The music came about in this way. After supper one night, I

played several short meter songs that I wanted to include in my book and asked Geoffrey his opinion of them. He said, "Aw, Dad, those short meter, common meter, and long meter songs all sound the same, and furthermore, anyone could write a song like that anytime." A bit miffed at his cavalier attitude, I challenged him to do so on the spot. He went to the piano and played the music as you see it in one flourish, melody, harmony, and all in the time it takes to play it. I loved it from the start, but he didn't think it had any particular merit and wouldn't bother writing it down for me. He must have been about 15 at the time. About a year ago, I finally had him play it so I could write it down, or it would be lost to history today.

Geoffrey died in a tragic automobile accident on March 17, 2007. He was eighteen years old. Although he had composed and arranged an impressive amount of music, he played it all by ear, and most of it was not written down or

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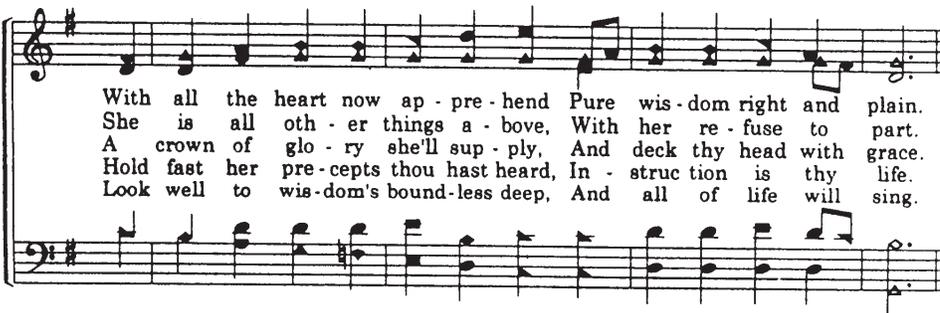
My Children, Now Attend

BASED ON PROVERBS 4
JOHN D. MARTIN, 2006

GEOFFREY E. MARTIN, 2006



1. My chil - dren, now at - tend, And un - der - stand - ing gain;
2. Em - brace her strong with love, And clasp her to thy heart;
3. If thou wilt lift her high, Thy hon - or she will raise;
4. My son, re - ceive my word, For wis - dom no - bly strive;
5. Thy heart guard well and keep, Life's is - sues from it spring;



With all the heart now ap - pre - hend Pure wis - dom right and plain.
She is all oth - er things a - bove, With her re - fuse to part.
A crown of glo - ry she'll sup - ply, And deck thy head with grace.
Hold fast her pre - cepts thou hast heard, In - struc - tion is thy life.
Look well to wis - dom's bound - less deep, And all of life will sing.

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recorded. This hymn and one other that turned up after the funeral are his only surviving compositions.

Lyrics:

As he was compiling songs for his hymnbook, John Martin noticed that there were not many texts that dealt with the subject of wisdom. He also wanted a song that was a joint effort between him and his son. Using one of his favorite passages of Scripture, he worked the thoughts into a hymn to be sung with Geoffrey's music. "My Children, Now Attend" was the result, and it will be published in *Hymns of the Church*, which is still being prepared for publication. ■



More Than FIG LEAVES

by Steve Miller



*A message
on the
Biblical theme
of modesty.*

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Sermon of the Month



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

What the Bible Teaches About the Unseen World

by George R. Brunk II

Summary of last public sermon, January 27, 2002

There are many things which we wish we knew about the unseen world; and many of our questions are left unanswered, but it may surprise us to discover what all the Word of God does have to say about this. The first question we entertain here is:

Who Inhabits the Unseen World?

Our forefather, the primary inhabitant of the unseen world, is God Himself who also is everywhere present. "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:24-26). "Thus saith the LORD, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Isaiah 66:1). According to these passages the primary residence of God is in

heaven.

The redeemed of all ages are inhabitants of the unseen world. We know that they are in the presence of the Lord, but they have not yet received their glorified bodies. There is one thing we have in common with them—all of us are waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when we shall receive our glorified bodies.

The unredeemed ones are also members of the unseen world, but of course, in quite a different category. They, too, are in what might be called something of a holding pattern. They are not waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they are waiting for the summons to the great white throne judgment. Later we shall see where it is that they are waiting.

Satan and his demon agents inhabit the unseen world. It appears that Satan does not now have any certain dwelling place, but the day will come when his everlasting dwelling place will be the lake of fire into which he shall be cast.

Peter makes reference to the angels that sinned, "For if God spared not the

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angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto the judgment" (2 Peter 2:4). We also have these words from Jude, "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). We shall see later that the place where they are is the Abyss.

The Places of the Unseen World Mentioned in the Scriptures

Heaven is the most frequently mentioned place of the unseen world. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are there as well as the innumerable hosts of angels. In a general way we say that our loved ones who knew the Lord have died and gone to heaven. Actually, they are in Paradise which may be thought of as a vestibule of heaven, but not heaven itself. The account of the rich man and Lazarus is most informative about the variety of things that persons in the unseen waiting world are able to do. But while their bodies are, indeed, asleep, they are alive and active. But they have not yet received their glorified bodies.

The unsaved are often said to be in hell, but the fact is that they are not in that final lake of fire. Where then are they?

Hades: As stated above, the righteous dead are in Paradise. The wicked dead are in Hades.

The word *Hades* occurs in the New Testament eleven times and in all instances except one it is unfortunately translated "hell." Here are the passages in which it is so translated: Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. In one passage (1 Corinthians 15:55) it is translated "grave": "O grave, where is thy victory?" It would have been much more helpful if our translators would have simply used the word *Hades* wherever it occurred in the original text. Fail-

ure to do that has resulted in much confusion and misunderstanding.

The Abyss: This Greek word occurs nine times in the New Testament. In the following passages this word is translated "the bottomless pit": Revelation 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 21:1, 3. In Luke 18:31 and Romans 10:7 it is translated "*the deep*." The beast (antichrist) is said to come out of the Abyss in Revelation 11:7 and 8. This seems to be the abode of the demons as an intermediate state between Hades and the final hell.

Tartarus: This word occurs only once in the New Testament and is found in 2 Peter 2:4 in the reference to the fallen angels who were delivered into the chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment. This is not the final hell.

The Final Hell: The Greek word *gehenna* occurs twelve times in the New Testament and is always translated "hell." It is found in the following passages: Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6.

Lake of Fire: This expression occurs six times—all in Revelation. In Revelation 20:10 we are told that the Beast with the false prophet and those who received the mark of the beast were cast into the lake of fire. In Chapter 20:10, we read that the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and false prophet are. In 20:14, we read that death and hell (Hades) were cast into the lake of fire. "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Finally in 21:8, we read that "the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable and murderers and whoremongers and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone which is the second death."

We see therefore that none have yet entered the final hell—the lake of fire.

A question to be thought about: Has anyone yet entered the final heaven? ■

Health Care Ethics

by Nolan Byler

To see what Paul had to say about life and death, let us turn to Philippians 1:20-26: "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . . For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all. . . ."

This passage blesses me. We know that we all have an appointment with death, unless Jesus returns first. We must be realistic; we must look at death—and think and talk about it.

Paul said that death would have been better for him, but he was willing to stay for the sake of others around him. To die in Christ is our gain, but if God has a work for us to do, we need to be willing to remain here. To leave this world and its temptations would be better, but it is important to let God decide when life is over for you and me. He gave us life and He reserves the right to take it again.

We hit our physical peak at about 26 years. After that, our strength starts diminishing.

We are created in God's image. He created us with certain characteristics that He has. We have personality, spirit, an everlasting soul, which is different than all the rest of creation. Life is circumscribed by God. It comes from God; the end also is determined by Him. As we face the issue of death, we must acknowledge that God is sovereign.

First Corinthians 3:16, 17 explains that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, which we must not defile or God

will destroy us. In fact, we don't have a right to life. People would like to say we do, but life is a gift, not a right. Neither do we have a right to die. The whole "rights" movement is very strong, whether it be majority rights, minority rights, right to life, right to die, gay rights, or abortion rights.

The Christian's life is not made up of rights. When we become Christians, we give our rights over to God. We are not our own. Romans 14:7 says: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die we die unto the Lord, whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's." God has divine ownership in matters of life and death. Man has tried to take God's sovereignty away, but he cannot do it.

Here's a question for you: *Under what circumstances, if any, can a person righteously exercise a choice in the timing of and/or mode of his death?* There is no one right answer for all situations, but here are three principles to go by:

1. You need the right standard: God's Word vs. man's reasoning.
2. You need the right goal: to bring glory to God vs. one's own glory.
3. You need the right motive: love for God and others vs. love for self.

Death situations range from suicide to self-sacrifice. There are a number of positions we can take with regard to death. In 1 Chronicles 10:3, 13, Saul was mortally wounded in battle. He asked his armor-bearer to kill him. He refused, so he fell upon his own sword. He went against the word of the Lord. Did Saul have the right goal? No! Did he have the right motive? No! His motive was to avoid humiliation and torture at the hands of the enemy. He was selfish and proud. He was abandoning his nation; he had already abandoned

his God. He failed all three criteria. So also did Judas Iscariot (Matthew 27:3-5). Apparently he was sorry, to some extent, but did not forgive himself.

As to foregoing medical care and thus allowing natural death to come, here is my understanding: It is permissible according to the Bible (Genesis 49:33; Luke 2:25-32).

As to self-sacrifice, we have the example of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, Acts 7. It is noble and is highly commended in Scripture.

Euthanasia means literally “good death.” It is misnamed, because it fails the criteria noted above. It is also called “mercy killing” or “active euthanasia,” as opposed to withholding medical care, which is “passive euthanasia.” It is causing a person to die on purpose with an injection or an overdose so that they die painlessly.

Mercy killing is approved in Oregon. It has been common in Holland for some time. It has come to this that when people get old in Holland, it is commonly understood that they should arrange to be put away. Cultural pressure is upon them to do so. When will it become common in the United States? I don’t know.

Who would have thought that Roe vs. Wade (1973) would have resulted in millions of babies being aborted? It has happened. What is to keep a similar thing from happening if we go down the slippery slope of euthanizing older people? The reasoning is that older people are not productive and are a hindrance to society. Why not just eliminate them? That way we don’t need to feed them and pay for their care anymore. Active euthanasia fails all three of our criteria. It is like a slap in the face of God and rejects His sovereignty.

How should we prepare for our end of life? We have so much medical sophistication that we can keep the lungs breathing when they would shut down. We can keep the heart beating when it wants to quit. The list goes on and on. These decisions make it desirable to have a living will or

assign durable power of attorney for health care.

I don’t promote the living will any more, because the living will may make your decisions as soon as you are very ill, but not necessarily near the end of life. For that reason, I think durable power of attorney for health care is preferable. By this you give someone else the power of decision-making for you when you’re incapacitated. So you brethren could assign to your wife that power. Later in life, you might need to assign this decision-making power to a younger person, perhaps your adult child.

In today’s legal climate, medical personnel will not always listen. For example, if your husband has pneumonia and is unconscious, you can ask that he be given antibiotics. Likely he would recover. A living will would not protect you as well in such an eventuality as would durable power of attorney, which covers a wider range of health care situations.

The person with durable power of attorney should speak with the person they represent, to know what they want when end of life decisions must be made. This person must not be timid but must be able to speak up clearly and confidently.

Dr. Terrill once said, “If we use our own resources or those of others to prolong physical life in any and every situation—no matter what—we handle physical life as our highest value. As such, it is an idol, for only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes possible our final freedom from physical and spiritual death.” We must come to the place of allowing God to be the sovereign judge on this matter. We must not put physical life above spiritual life. The Bible says that the death of saints is precious in the sight of God. Death is God’s prerogative.

What about hospice? I approve of it. Hospice provides that medical care be given to one in his home for six months or less. After all, when the decision is made not to do all one possibly can to pro-

long life, this does not mean to stop giving health care. Such persons still need support and comfort care. Instead of abandonment, we must stick with someone with a terminal illness to the end.

Don't just talk to people—talk to God. Let Him speak to you, perhaps through people. Let us remember that Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." So, if He wants to take us to heaven, let us not dig in our heels. Let us let Him do what is far better for the child of God.

Organ transplantation: Somewhere around 100,000 people are waiting for an organ. About 67% need kidneys; about 15% need livers; about 7% need hearts; about 5% need new lungs; the rest need pancreases and combinations and other lesser things. All of these vital organs are needed for the sustenance of human life. When a vital organ gives out and nothing is done, we die. Modern medical technology has made it possible to transplant from one human being to another and thereby extend life.

The body tends to reject this foreign organ, but medicine holds down the immune system so that it doesn't reject the donated organ. That makes one more susceptible to getting other diseases. Nevertheless, these medicines have made survival rates in transplantation vastly improved over several decades ago.

There are positives, but let us step back and note some negatives in transplantation. With kidneys, we were given two kidneys, but we need only one. So we can share one with someone else. Self-sacrifice is commendable. Probably many of you have given blood at some time. That is similar and is commendable.

In the case of donating a heart, the donor must be brain-dead, but not really dead. John Kerstine, an expert in organ transplantation, said, "We have to take the heart from a physically-living person." We say, *Wait a minute; how could that be?* Well, you see they're brain-dead, but their heart's still beating, their lungs

are still respiring; and they're still warm. "Brain-dead" has been changed to meaning something radically different from really dead. They have a flat EEG, which means that there are no brain waves. Are they dead or alive? I'm conservative; I think they're still alive.

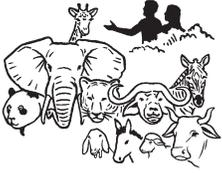
A heart can survive for only about five hours without the profusion of oxygen-rich blood. Thus when surgeons remove a heart from a brain-dead person, they cool it down to about 39 degrees F. so that it slows down the metabolic processes so that they have a little larger window of opportunity to place it into the recipient.

For transplantation, doctors require that the patient's EEG has been flat for two days, then they wheel him into the operating room (dependent on the breathing machine) and open him up, stop the heart with a potassium iodide solution, quickly remove the heart, and rush it over into the recipient patient.

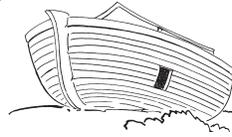
I am not opposed to transplantation, as such. But if you take a living organ from a living person that leaves him dead—that is different. Three systems of the body (nervous, circulatory, and respiratory systems) are required for life. In the case of brain-death, the nervous system has shut down, and the respiratory system is being assisted, but the circulatory system is still working well. There is a vast difference between a person who is dying and a person who is dead. Physicians who honor the sanctity of human life must wait for the completion of dying before they transplant.

In organ transplantation, all that is useful to technical success must take submission to that which is ethically permissible. If a proper respect for life's sanctity precludes the best conditions for some transplants and perhaps forbids others—so be it! God's law is higher than man's law and must always be heeded if we expect God's blessing upon our lives. ■

—Reprinted with permission from the *Calvary Messenger*, March, 2007



Beginning Issues



The Rocks Cry Out

by John Mullett

In Luke 19:40 during His triumphal ride into Jerusalem Jesus tells the Pharisees that if the crowd were to be silent the stones would cry out. I want to testify, today these stones are crying out. From the fossil record to carved-out canyons and mountain ranges to ocean floors I believe the rocks or stones have a message for us. Let's take a closer look at one of these areas and see what they might be telling us.

The Fossil Record

To understand what the fossil record might be telling us we need to understand its formation. So how does a fossil form? In the past many Old-Earth advocates believed fossil formation could take millions of years, and some still do; however after a closer look many have come to realize fossils must be covered quickly by fast-moving, waterborne sediments to prevent decomposition and scavenging. Not only must they be buried quickly under the right conditions, they also do not require millions of years to form. Artifacts such as a hat, a ham, and a bag of flour among other things were found near a volcano on the North Island of New Zealand that had petrified in less than 60 years.¹ Instead of long slow gradual processes, fossil formation requires sudden catastrophic, geologically-altering events.

While the majority of scientists have

bought into an evolutionary worldview and timescale, that is not the case of all scientists. Many scientists believe in the historical accuracy of the Bible, including a young earth and a global flood. One of these scientists is Dr. Arlton C. Murray, often introduced as "Mr. Fossil," because of his knowledge of and passion for working fossils. Dr. Murray is a highly respected scientist who worked for the Smithsonian Institute for 27 years as a field collector and preparator of vertebrate fossils. I have included the following two statements by him on the fossil record taken from an article entitled "The Fossils Shout Creation."²

1. *"The true explanation of the fossil record is very clear. The only reasonable explanation for the fossil record, and the sedimentary formations in which they are found, is the great cataclysm of the Noachic Deluge."*
2. *"I find that the extensive fossil beds contain many remains of plants and animals in a perfect state of preservation, thus showing they were killed and buried suddenly by a great deluge."*

When we look at the geological record we find "billions of dead things buried in rock layers laid down by water all over the earth" as Buddy Davis sings it. Does the Bible speak of any event that could account for a phenomenon such as this? If we believe Genesis as literal history we

have no problem accounting for the fossil record without the millions of years. A flood of global proportions such as the flood of Noah's day explains the evidence very well.

Let us remember Noah's Flood was sent as a judgment of sin. The fossil-bearing rocks/strata cry loudly of a past judgment (Noah's Flood) and they warn us of a just and holy God who will judge

mankind again as He has promised in 2 Peter 3:1-13. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Tarawera's night of terror by Renton MacLachlan; <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v18/i1/tarawera.asp>
2. The Fossils Shout Creation by Robert Doolan; <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v14/i1/fossil.asp>

In Defense of a Lost Ordinance

Feetwashing: A sacrament memorializing "social services."

by Leon Shirk

Believing that the Word of God is the only standard for faith and practice, the followers of Christ study the Holy Scripture to discover the mind of Christ in matters of Christian doctrine. Many of our Lord's teachings go beyond mere belief and include duties which require outward acts (e.g. Lord's Supper). The disciple of Christ comes to the written words of Christ with a humble spirit, as a child, ready to obey the unburdensome orders of the Master Teacher. God has not created the human mind to produce truth, only to discover and accept truth already revealed by the Creator Himself. With these few basic principles in mind, let us consider the ordinance of feetwashing as set forth in John 13:2-17.

In this article the writer will attempt to follow a very simple outline. I will seek first, to offer a sound apology for the practice of feetwashing, which grows naturally from the Scripture; secondly, I will try to answer a few objections posed by those who oppose the practice; and thirdly, I wish to present some cautions in the observance of the ceremony along with

final encouragement.

What, then, is the Speaker who is giving the Upper Room Discourse seeking to convey in this exclusive passage? I believe this discourse supports the thesis that Christ is initiating a perpetual ordinance taught by word and example for His people.

Some Substantiation Arguments

Argument One: Our Lord's act and exposition as it pertains to the bread and wine, taught by the synoptic writers, clearly represents a divine work in the vertical direction. Paul teaches the same in 1 Corinthians 11:24-26, that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic memorial to His work on Calvary. Though the cross is the primary reason for the Father sending the Son, Christ's public ministry to the people of His day took shape in a horizontal manner which is symbolic of His service to those whom He "loved to the end." "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve (feetwashing), and to give his life a ransom (Lord's Supper) for many" (Mark 10:45). Both of these ordinances were initiated at the same

time in redemptive history as the new covenant was being ushered in. It was the same Person, in the same Upper Room, to the same twelve disciples, during the same Passover celebration in which the bread and wine and the towel and basin were symbolically set forth. The towel and basin are symbolic of a life already lived and the bread and wine of a death which was about to take place.

Argument Two: While bread and wine symbolize our Lord's suffering and atoning work, the towel and basin symbolize a practical life of humility (Philippians 2:1-11); service (Matthew 20:28); love (John 13:1-9); purity (John 13:8-10); and equality (John 13:16; James 2:1-9). To rank these in order of importance would necessarily distract from those appearing at the lower end of the scale. However, the broad context to the events of the Passover supper suggests a priority or at least a predominant theme: "... having loved his own who were in the world; he loved them to the end." Christ's love here is set forth to be particular ("his own") and endless ("to the end"). After the traitor (Judas) departs, our Lord returns to the subject of love (vv. 34 and 35). It is here declared to be the preeminent mark of true discipleship.

Just because the larger context hints to a priority of love, we must not fail to give attention to the implied spiritual cleansing in verses 8-10. As water baptism amply symbolizes the big "bath" (identity with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection) so footwashing symbolizes the smaller washings (confession—1 John 1:9) needed daily to maintain our fellowship with God.

Bible students interested in Old Testament typology will find it stimulating to study the correlation between the bronze laver and the Upper Room basin used by our Lord. The bread and wine proclaim the Lord's death upon the brazen altar while footwashing meaningfully reminds us of our need for daily cleansing from the defilement of sin. The ordinance appropriately containing the idea of daily cleansing is footwashing, while baptism is the ordinance

which more sharply depicts the once and for all cleansing which took place at Calvary.

The third theme which vaults uncoerced from the text is the matter of equality—verses 14-16. In the redeemed family there are no superiors or inferiors. The employer is not greater than the employee. Christ is not greater than God; the Father is not greater than the Son. We are all one in Christ. All barriers, prejudices, and discrimination must retreat when the Master washes your feet. Footwashing is but a repeated reminder that these hurts have no place in the body of Christ.

Argument Three: Caution must be taken in "writing off" the towel and basin as sheer Hebrew custom or Jewish hospitality. The following observations will disallow making the assertion that Jesus was merely in line with culture.

a. Note the *time* it was performed. This gesture of Hebrew hospitality (washing of feet), as observed in all biblical records, was performed at the time when the host and guest first met. In John 13 we note that our Lord performed this loving act of cleansing at mid-meal or at its completion (John 13:2, 4, 26-30).

b. If what Jesus did was tradition alone, then verse 7 would be absurd. "Jesus answered and said to him [Peter], What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter." The Jewish disciples would have known immediately what Christ was doing if it would have been mere custom. Verse 7 teaches that in time, some future date, the apostles would know what He just did. What He did in verse 7 was not before known because it transcended culture.

c. This same argument can be posed when looking honestly at verse 12. Is Jesus guilty of belittling the intelligence of His disciples during an hour already filled with grief? If the washing were only traditional, the words, "Do you know what I have done to you?" would have caused insult to the disciples. If the unprecedented washing were cultural you can imagine how impetuous Peter would have

answered such a question.

d. If what was done consisted of only the expression of Palestinian hospitality, it would have been unnecessary for the gospel writer to depict Jesus as giving an example with such minute details. John, writing under the authorship of the Holy Spirit, would have casually mentioned the common order and perhaps went on, excluding the details given in verses 4 and 5: "Rose from supper, laid aside his garments, took a towel, girded himself, poured water into a basin and began washing the disciples' feet, and finally, wiped their feet with a towel." Such careful details are absent from the injunction for water baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Argument Four: Having considered the impossibility of our Lord simply engaging in tradition, let us assume His use of the towel and basin was merely a cultural matter. What or who would disallow Him from borrowing the footwashing mode from culture and sanctifying it as a legitimate rite in the New Covenant? He is God, absolutely sovereign and free to do whatever He wills. Who is His counselor? Who art thou, O man?

Argument Five: We shall now observe how this divine example is a binding duty on all members in the New Covenant.

a. By the use of the word *ought* in verse 14. "You also ought to wash one another's feet." This is a strong Greek word expressing responsibility and duty. The textual use of this word is significant not only by what "ought" means, but also by our Lord's use of the present active imperative. We would be correct to say that Jesus was giving it all the force of perpetual obligation that language could convey. To ignore "ought" in this text suggests freedom to overlook the identical word in other passages. Consider these four examples:

- (1) Acts 17:29, "We *ought* not to think that the Godhead is like gold."
- (2) 1 Corinthians 11:7, "For a man *ought* not to have his head covered."
- (3) Ephesians 5:28, "So husbands *ought* also to love their own wives."

(4) 1 John 4:11, "That we *ought* to love one another."

Are we not obligated to maintain all "oughts" or abandon them all?

b. Verse 15 literally translated says this, "For an example [pattern] I gave to you in order that [purpose clause] just as I did to you also you do." Kenneth Wuest puts it this way, "For I gave to you an example that just as I did to you, *you also should be doing.*" Our Lord's use of the purpose clause and the present active subjunctive verb enhances the argument of perpetual obligation. His use of the Greek word "do" in the continuous tense, according to W. E. Vine, "indicates a practice, the *habit* of doing something."

The teaching and example of the towel and basin contains two strong words, "do" and "ought." We should be challenged not to follow afar off but to draw nigh to the kneeling Christ and emulate Him in *all* that He teaches in the Upper Room. We are without liberty to accept or to reject biblical ordinances on the basis of personal likes or dislikes, or perhaps convenience. We obey because "thus saith the Lord" and "His commandments are not burdensome."

Noting the explicit, precise, and intricate details recorded by John on the ceremony initiated by Jesus, we must be constrained to believe it is more than just a nice story or humble gesture of Christ. If John simply mentioned the fact that his Master washed their feet, void of details, this writer would have no basis from which to defend the principle of perpetual obligation.

Furthermore, John's use of the word "example," "pattern," or "blueprint" (*hypodagma*) in verse 15 cannot be ignored. Blueprints are made to follow. Patterns are duplicated. Examples are given to follow, and "to follow" calls for perpetual action. Certainly patterns are not to be merely read about or to be observed once and then be done away with! Not all that Christ has ever said or done is intended for our emulation, but where commands or injunctions are given, along with explicit demonstrations, these

are matters which may not be ignored and laid aside.

Argument Six: Verse 17 teaches a conditional blessing. The blessing is not rooted in sheer knowledge of what to do, but rather in the actual doing. Knowledge is the basis for doing, and doing activates the blessing. Nowhere are we told what this blessing is, but we can rejoice that the Son of God has spoken, a commandment has been given, with a promised blessing for all who are obedient.

The present active subjunctive form of “do” in verse 17 reinforces the principle of perpetual duty.

Argument Seven: In 1 Timothy 5:10, we have the only epistolary mention of feet-washing. Here Paul uses the ritual and practice as a qualification used in determining a true widow eligible for financial assistance. We are without sufficient evidence from this text to decipher as to whether it is here mentioned as a sacrament or simply a gesture of hospitality. Both opponents and proponents must admit that this verse is unsubstantial to support disposing of the ritual or continuance of the same. John 13, alone, can be used for this purpose.

Objections posed by those who fail to see that Christ was instituting a standing ordinance in the church will now be answered.

Objection One: Opponents says, “Jesus gave this example to twelve Jewish disciples, and they alone were to practice this ritual.” Answer: Jesus also taught the ceremonial use of the Lord’s Supper and water baptism to the same Jewish disciples during the same time period in redemptive history. To abrogate the towel and basin gives sufficient warrant to dispose of the others.

Objection Two: Some theologians argue from the standpoint of silence in early Christian literature and the fact that certain “great” church leaders explained it away. Answer: Silence in non-inspired literature is no argument to dispose of clear teaching found in Inspired Literature. Our

consciences are not to be bound by the words or lack of words propagated by mere men; Scripture alone is to be our only standard for faith and practice. To omit or to append any part of Scripture is to be guilty of antinomianism or legalism. The following is a quote from Matthew Henry which indicates that not all church fathers were antagonistic to the practice. “St. Ambrose of Milan took John 13 literally and practiced this sacrament in his church.” St. Austin said, “Those Christians who did not do it with their hands, yet (he hoped) did it with their hearts in humility; but he saith it is much better to do with the hands also, when there is occasion. What Christ has done Christians should not disdain to do.”

Objection Three: “This passage doubtless is to be understood figuratively; it is an instructive sign, but not sacramental, as the eucharist.” Answer: We are without substantial and sufficient grounds to purport a figurative understanding of this precise text. John 13 contains very intense language which directs us to the principle of perpetual obligation. The details and succinctness of the text will not allow the student of Scripture to make such unwarranted assertions. To make this passage figurative will open the door for further allegorical hermeneutics which may very well lead to greater hermeneutical monstrosities than those held by present-day cultists.

Objection Four: “Those who practice the towel and basin ritual do not live up to what it represents.” Answer: This reasoning overflows with folly and it is dangerous—to state it mildly. To violate a law is no argument for abrogating the same law. How many violations take place with other cardinal doctrines? This writer is sure that many across the centuries have partaken of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. Many baptized persons have apostatized. Even the Apostle Paul indicates that fact. Just look how the doctrine of grace is misused. The abuses of Christian liberty, as taught in Holy Writ should not force

any of God's people into subjection to man-made laws. Thus, the objection lacks soundness and must be ignored.

Objection Five: To the one who cries, "Legalism," let it suffice to say, "Anything which Christ taught cannot be reduced to legalism." Christianity is not formless, dutiless, or without ordinances. His commandments are not burdensome, and obedience to all His commandments is proof of our sonship in Christ (John 15:10; 1 John 2:3). All the New Testament forms are legitimate to authentic Christianity. Consider prayer, singing, water baptism, the use of bread and the fruit of the vine, anointing with oil, men lifting holy hands in prayer, fasting, and preaching. To practice these forms is considered sound biblicism where the whole counsel of God is used to mold creed and conduct.

Objection Six: "It cannot be that important; only one Gospel writer mentions it." Answer: What is the basis for anything which we believe or do in the name of Christianity? We obey and deem matters important for belief on the simple fact that God has spoken—"Thus saith the Lord." The length of a didactic passage or frequency of occurrence in the infallible text do not constitute the essential basis for belief or behavior. Many key passages to orthodox Christianity appear in the Bible only once. We are all tempted at sometime or other to build weighty doctrine on implicit texts while often overlooking doctrine which naturally springs from explicit texts such as John 13.

Further Observations

Leaving the objections, we move now to make further observations to aid us in the proper understanding of this sacrament. Someone may inquire as to how often it should be done. Once in a lifetime? Yearly? Monthly? We do well to observe that Christ gives no guidelines as to frequency with the bread and fruit of the vine, or the towel and basin. It can be clearly noted that He performed each ceremony but once. It would seem logical and reasonable

to assume that the frequency of one dictates the frequency of the other, yet there is room for liberty and personal preference without violating any clear teaching of Scripture. We should exercise care in not binding the conscience of others over the frequency or other unexpressed details.

Some have expressed their "lack of conviction" in practicing this Christian ritual. Again, we must bear in mind that conviction does not necessarily precede obedience. As parents we do not wait for the child to develop convictions before we demand obedience—neither does Christ. If obedience must wait for conviction then much of Christian conduct would be too slow in coming. Obedience breeds conviction as the conscience is shaped by the only infallible and immutable standard. Obedience molds and conditions the conscience. If servitude, love, and equality in the brotherhood of the redeemed are limited to the few times we engage in the feet-washing ritual each year, then we must indeed be most miserable! Then we would have to admit that those who fail to practice the ordinance but yet are busy in living the life it symbolizes, are better than we are. To maintain an empty symbol is to be guilty of hypocrisy. We invalidate the symbol by not living the life it represents. The towel and basin are symbolic of our horizontal Christianity where a sensitivity to the needs of all men is realized, "especially those in the household of faith" with whom we wash feet.

In conclusion, let it be quickly stated that nowhere does Jesus indicate that feet-washing enlarges one's spirituality, or determines or secures his salvation. Yet the practice of it contains an undefined, yet promised blessing. In an age when many evangelical Christians are seeking "greater blessings," might the literal practice of John 13 usher in some of those cherished experiences?

Do you seek greater "blessings" in your Christian life?

"If you know these things, you are *blessed* if you do them." ■

SARCASM— Fun Loving or Unloving?

by Paul L. Miller

Suppose I'm impressed with my senior friend's knowledge on a wide range of subjects, but I'm also slightly annoyed with it. Then suppose that because I know that he has no interest in and no experience with computers, I grin as I invite him to use my computer, and say, "You're such a bright fellow. Just hop to it and use my computer!"

Or suppose I wistfully look at the sky and say, "It will probably rain this weekend. The weather seems to know when I have an outdoor activity planned that means a lot to me."

My negative-toward-others and/or ungrateful-to-God feelings have certainly expressed sarcasm.

Sarcasm is a sharp and often ironic utterance designed to cut or give pain. It is a mode of satirical wit depending for its effect on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual (Webster's definition).

Who enjoys sarcasm? Probably the one having the most fun is the speaker. Sarcasm shows sharp wit, but often someone gets hurt by that sharpness.

Kenneth L. Pike* wrote of the time he got into using such humor: "When I was a freshman in college, I was part of a crew that served tables in the cafeteria, and a couple of the crew were the most accomplished fellows at barbed comments that I've ever met.

"In competition with them I became clever, too, and by the end of that year I couldn't hear a sentence from one of my colleagues without thinking of something

clever or sharp with which to reply.

"When my dad heard me, he would say, 'Why don't people study to say the kind thing instead of the cruel thing?' But I couldn't think of anything encouraging, or sweet, or good. I had become totally corrupt. I could think only of the cruel thing, at which people had to laugh even if they were hurt.

"I saw after a while that I was losing . . . my friends, and I asked God to break me of that habit. It took three years to break it, and in order to do it, I had to [promise] God that I'd be silent rather than say something barbed and cruel. I wasn't used to being silent and it hurt to have nothing to say when I was bursting with a clever remark. But God doesn't want us to look clever at the expense of someone else. We are called to serve, to make others look good."

What's wrong with sarcasm? Consider these ideas:

- It typically laughs at its own jokes.
- It often exaggerates.
- It mocks others' foibles or weaknesses.
- It seeks to increase its influence by clever and degrading remarks.
- It makes light of sacred and/or serious matters.
- It is fueled by competition.
- It "multiplies" once love has been subtracted.

The list is hardly complete, yet it helps define the problem.

A schoolteacher who often used sarcasm was being observed. He believed he had good classroom control. His observer mentioned that his use of sarcasm had a uniting effect on the students. This felt

*Quoted in *Personnel Administration in the Christian School*, J. Lester Brubaker, BMH Books, Winona Lake, IN, 1980, page 129.)

good to him until the observer concluded his observation by saying, "It unites the students against you."

If we wish to say something that is helpful and humorous, let's find something constructive to say. If we are caustic toward God or an act of God, we are irreverent. If we are sarcastic toward other people, we are disrespectful. Walking in the fear of God makes sarcasm seem out of place. Walking in the love of God deals with the carnal desire for the perfect, verbal "put-down."

Sarcasm, like sticking out my foot to trip you, springs from my lack of love for you. It may seem less aggressive than throwing a punch, but it is no more lov-

ing. Let the hateful hurl their insults and their barbed comments. But let those who revel in God's grace enlist God's help in consigning sarcasm to oblivion—"an extinct verbal species."

Note these significant nuggets from the Book of Proverbs as they appear in *The Living Bible*: "Some people like to make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise soothe and heal" (12:18), "Self-control means controlling the tongue! A quick retort can ruin everything" (13:3), and "The Lord . . . delights in kind words" (15:26). ■

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Planning Family Evenings

by Jacob Neuenschwander

The question "What will we do this evening?" echoes around the supper table.

"You promised to take us to see the fawns at neighbor Aaron's," comes the hopeful statement from the fourth grader.

"Did you see how bad my school shoes are? Can we go get new shoes this evening?" The ambitious sixth grader's shoes are showing signs of wear.

"Uncle Marcus wondered whether I could help him load silage tomorrow after school. He would bring me home by bedtime." Desire shows plainly on the fourteen-year-old's face.

Mother is thinking about the mending pile and the menu for meals to provide for the company arriving Friday evening. Father notes the broken milk house win-

dow—jagged testimony of the children's kickball game—the bent sled runners due to pressure from the family van tires, and the declining amount of time left until his next writing assignment is due.

Thank God that there are family evenings to plan. Sometimes parents get caught in wishing for the nostalgic "good old days"—when supposedly everything was simple, children cooperated beautifully, everything and everyone worked together in utmost harmony—in contrast to the "complexities" of modern life. Beware. This impulse may just mark a slothful time when we would rather not expend the energy required by normal family living. Thank God for the family and the abundant opportunities of our times. Then be willing to shoulder the accountability that goes along with having

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SWORD AND TRUMPET

brought a family into the world.

Do not forget to plan the family evenings. Amid the normal busy family routine, it is quite easy to overlook the evening schedule and let fate determine its outcome. Even if today's plan is for all to stay home and read a book together from eight o'clock until bedtime, it is still important that parents consider what to read, the age of the children, and if this indeed is the proper evening for this activity. Lack of planning, whether in directing the daily chores or going shopping for an evening, usually creates more mindless running around and less satisfying family time.

Consider every evening a family evening. It seems less than the best to designate only some evenings as family evenings or to think that parents must plan something special to have a family evening. Even if Father is away at school board meeting, gone for a week of evangelistic meetings, out on an emergency service call, helping late with the harvest, or building that rush item in the shop, there are numerous ways for Father to keep in touch with the family and give direction to the evening family activity.

Sometimes it is appropriate for Mother to bring the family to where Father is laboring. If Father is working throughout the evening, the children often find it meaningful to be working also. Then when everyone is home at bedtime, each can give a satisfying account of his day of labor.

When Father cannot be home for the evening, sometimes telephone service can be used to stay in touch with the family. He should keep a list of suitable evening chores and projects to employ children at these times. Communicating with them on the events of the evening and the progress of their projects helps to develop a sense of responsibility in the children.

What should be included in our plans for family evenings? Attending our congregation's evening services should be an

unquestioned part of family plans. When sickness interferes, Father or Mother take or send family members that are well. Those who attend should be made responsible to bring a report of the service for the rest of the family.

Visiting other church families is a profitable family evening project. This should include the broad spectrum of our congregational households—those younger and older than our family. Supplement this interchange with sufficient parental admonition and oversight for the children.

Grandparents and other elderly family members should be remembered in our family evening plans. We should visit the neighbors when the setting is appropriate. We can take some cookies along for that growing family of boys or share a bouquet with the widow who enjoys flowers. We involve our children in noticing and meeting these lowly needs. If we miss the opportunities to teach our offspring to share in others' ordinary needs, probably we will be unable to teach the grace of sharing with others when needs are catastrophic.

Never plan family evenings with the goal to "get away from it all." This mentality is worldly and irresponsible, usually an excuse to fulfill the lusts of the flesh with fine dining, pointless travel, or carnal pleasures. Yes, Christian families do tire from stress and monotony, but being at home with the family for five consecutive evenings is relaxing, rather than stressful for us.

Christian parents should not always be planning some vacation for the family or be continually plotting an escape from the kitchen to some restaurant across town to taste the delicacies of some strange cook. What better way to spend an evening than with the family at home and all the children gathered around the table, enjoying a hearty meal prepared by Mother and sharing the day's experiences, excitements, losses, and joys in an atmosphere of love and contentment!

One perplexing question that faces fathers with service occupations or those who hold a job away from home is “What shall the growing boys do each afternoon when they come home from school or all day long during the summer?” Children know when they are doing busywork and soon instinctively resent it. Tending ten chickens before going to play may be sufficient evening chores for the eight-year-old, but is not enough for the fourteen-year-old.

Wise fathers employ much foresight and work to provide an environment in which to employ the growing boys. To fail to provide evening employment for our children is akin to denying the faith and being worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8).

Since the traditional ideal of a family farm is unattainable for many, the present generation of fathers and church

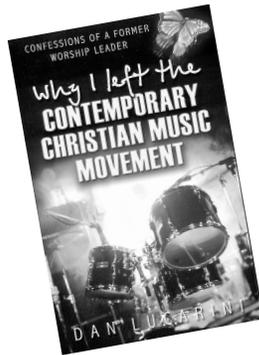
brethren must work together to provide good employment opportunities and a safe work environment for our maturing offspring. An entire way of life is at stake, the outcome of which begins with how effective parents are in planning family evenings.

Parents must understand that with the best efforts, a child will not perform like an adult. It is possible to insist on a level of performance in children’s chores that discourages or eliminates the work that they can do. May we not sin against our offspring in this way but responsibly provide and plan for our family evenings. We want our children to grow up to be well-adjusted, useful, obedient, and God-fearing men and women of faith in a world that is quite hostile to the faith of our fathers. ■

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Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement

by Dan Lucarini



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