

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXIX May 2011 No. 5

THE SWORD AND TRUMPET 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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THE SWORD AND TRUMPET (USPS 615-540) is published monthly by *The Sword and Trumpet, Inc.*, P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, Va. 22803-0575. Periodicals postage paid at Harrisonburg, Va. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year US \$15.00, 2 years US \$25.00. Bulk rates on the basis of US \$12.00 per year. Add US \$3.00 per year for countries outside USA and Canada. Telephone (540) 867-9419 or 867-9444. FAX (540) 867-9419. E-mail address: swandtrump@verizon.net. Website: www.swordandtrumpet.org.

command to rebuke an unrepentant believer, He reminds His followers, as you move forward in confronting others, remember, "I am there." Such remembrance should foster reverence before God in words spoken by all.

These latest episodes of human failure and sin should serve as a reminder of the sufficiency that is found in Jesus Christ alone. The seemingly most devout ministers who rise to unfathomable popularity are nothing more than sinners in need of God's

grace. While they hold a profound responsibility regarding their conduct and lives, they are mere mortals dependent upon the mercy and love of God. They need accountability and discipline just as much as any other person who professes faith in Christ.

Christians should be urged to put away their icons as found in evangelists and pastors, and fix their eyes upon the only One deserving of adoration and worship, namely Jesus Christ, the spotless Lamb of God! ■

—Reprinted from www.christiancounseling.com.

Book Summary . . .

Guest Writer
by Sheryl Hooley

A Severe Mercy

Author: Sheldon Vanauken
 Publisher: Harper San Francisco, 1987.
 240 pp.

In this touching memoir, Sheldon Vanauken, or "Van," chronicles for the reader his intimate relationship with the love of his life, Jean Davis, or "Davy." We are allowed to look on as they meet and find their common bonds, and then as they articulate what will be the nature of their relationship. "Total sharing, we felt, was the ultimate secret of a love that would last forever" (35). "We raised the Shining Barrier against creeping separateness, which was, in the last analysis, self" (37). So, we witness the "inloveness" that flourishes within this framework—an amazingly Biblical framework—born in the minds of two self-described pagans.

While studying at Oxford University, the happy pair decides in the interest of fairness to investigate the claims of Christianity. They read, among many others, the

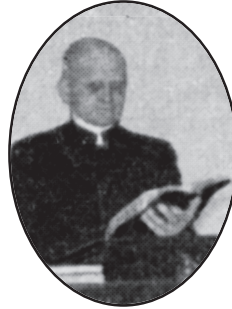
writings of C. S. Lewis, and send their questions to him in letters. Through correspondence with Lewis (included in the book) and stimulating interaction with Christian friends at Oxford, they come to Christ.

Now a new factor affects their relationship. The love between them is no longer the ultimate priority, especially for Davy. As she becomes immersed in devotion and service for Christ, Van harbors a longing for the old days of immersion in each other.

Then comes the final challenge to their love. Davy is found to be terminally ill, and dies about six months later. In correspondence with C. S. Lewis, Van comes to apprehend two insights. First, Davy's and his immersion in each other had ultimately been selfish, according to God's standards. The second insight explains Van's feelings of ambivalence about Davy's devotion. In the words of C. S. Lewis, "You have been treated with a severe mercy. You have been brought to see . . . that you were jealous of God" (210).

Person of the Month:

Joseph P. Bontrager (1872-1949)



Joseph P. Bontrager was born in Colfax, Fairfield County, Ohio, on February 1, 1872, to John J. and Martha (King) Bontrager. Joseph's ancestors had only been in this country for a little over a century, having arrived from Europe in 1749, and subsequently settling in Pennsylvania.

In 1881, when Joseph Bontrager was nine years old, he moved with his family to Logan County, Ohio, near Bellefontaine. It was while he was there, at the age of 12, that Joseph sensed God calling him to Himself in 1884. At 17, in 1889, Joseph Bontrager yielded himself completely to God. He was then baptized and became a charter member at Bethel Church in West Liberty, Ohio. For eleven years Brother Bontrager served as Sunday school superintendent at Bethel.

On September 13, 1896, at the age of 24, Joseph P. Bontrager married Amanda Hilty of Bluffton, Ohio. God blessed their family with the births of a son and six daughters.

In 1900, at the age of 28, Joseph moved his family across the country to Nampa, Idaho. After being at the Antioch Church for only two weeks he was chosen to be the Sunday school superintendent.

Four and a half years later, in 1905, at the age of 33, Bontrager again moved his family. This time it was farther west to Albany, Oregon, where he was ordained to serve the group by helping in the organization of a Sunday school and also in the role of an exhorter. That same year Joseph Bontrager was instrumental in birthing the Pacific Coast Conference where he served in various offices and committees in the following years.

In 1906, the Albany church was officially organized with Bontrager as pastor. That same year, at age 34, Brother Bontrager was appointed Sunday school field worker and district evangelist in the West, but he also ministered this way in the East and Canada. In those days traveling was difficult. Some places were only reached by walking. Joseph was sometimes gone for several months preaching the Gospel. He had a real burden for souls.

At the age of 39, Joseph Bontrager was ordained bishop of the Albany church on October 15, 1911.

Sometime during the Albany years tragedy struck the Bontrager family when Joseph and Amanda's son drowned.

In addition to helping start the congregation in Albany, Oregon, Brother Bontrager also helped start the congregations in Los Angeles and Winton, as well as reorganizing the church in Upland, California. A carpenter by trade, Bontrager also helped build some church buildings. From 1918 to 1919, he built the church in Filer, Idaho.

In 1919, at age 47, Joseph Bontrager was asked by Pacific Coast District Mission Board to move to L.A. to serve as pastor there, arriving November 7 of that year.

During his years in L. A., Bontrager did extensive missionary work in southern California and along the coastal areas until 1930.

(continued on page 5)

Practicing Biblical Nonresistance in Contemporary America

by Timothy Reitz

For many Christians living in twenty-first-century America, especially those of Anabaptist persuasion, the issue of nonresistance is very prevalent and is often debated. Many Christians find that practicing Biblical nonresistance in contemporary America is difficult because of the pressure to conform to the standards of a violence-crazed society. There are two main aspects of practicing Biblical nonresistance: in regard to war and the military, and in regard to personal situations “at home.” There are many views of nonresistance and pacifism within the Church, and most Christians have varying beliefs of how nonresistance is to be carried out in war and in everyday life. Christians are called to be nonresistant. This includes not fighting in war, as well as not harming or killing someone in defense.

In practicing nonresistance, the Christian should follow some basic Biblical principles to guide his decisions and actions in all situations. Using these guidelines, he or she should then develop some sort of plan or standard for action, in case he or she would ever be faced with a potentially violent situation. While no one can say with certainty how he or she would act in a specific situation, each individual should at least develop some personal standards and plans well before a potentially violent situation occurs. Creating guidelines helps to insure that, if such a situation would occur, he or she would be able to act rationally instead of impulsively or as a result of adrenaline or instinct.

The ultimate goal of a believer’s life should be to bring maximum glory to God and as part of this main goal, to follow

the examples of Jesus and to fulfill the Great Commission: “Teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19). When analyzing potentially violent situations and attempting to determine the proper course of action, the believer should ask the following questions and use the Biblical answers as guidelines: What will bring the greatest glory to God in this situation? What would Jesus do? What does the Bible say about this type of situation? How will my actions or inactions in this situation affect other people?

The Bible gives many general guidelines for living a life of nonresistance, or perhaps better put, living a Christlike life of love and peace. In the Book of Luke, Jesus commands His followers to “love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:27-31). In the Book of Matthew, Jesus says, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil” and “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:38, 39, 43-45).

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In the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul writes: "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

Paul also writes, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds)" (2 Cor. 10:3, 4).

The Christian should also look to the personal example of Jesus Christ: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). These Scriptures provide the foundational principles and guidelines that should be the basis when discussing and practicing nonresistance. Some people may argue that these verses don't apply to a Christian's life in modern America, but Jesus declares that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). This means that God's Word remains true and should always be obeyed in everything it teaches.

Beyond the general "nonresistance" passages, the Bible also speaks more directly to specific situations in which the Christian should respond with love and nonresistance. One of these more specific aspects is that of war. Within Christian circles, there are many different viewpoints of how involved a believer should become in a war effort. Most Christians' positions in this matter pivot around several questions: Is war ever right? Should the Christian participate in war? If so, then to what extent? Most believers have some Biblical basis for their beliefs, but many interpret Scripture out of context or fail to apply cer-

tain passages properly.

With proper study of the Scriptures, the believer will find that God permits war, and places responsibility for war in the hands of the government, but not for Christians. In Romans 13, the Bible says of the government, "He beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Romans 13:4), indicating that there are times when the government can and should use "the sword" in the form of military action to vanquish evil. However, the Christian does "not war after the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3).

Many believers who support the idea of Christians participating in the military base their position on Old Testament examples of times when God sanctioned and commanded the Israelites to go to war. These people will say because God commanded the children of Israel to fight and destroy their enemies, the same should apply to Christians today. Thus, if the war is "just," and if it is for the purpose of defeating evil, the child of God is called to fight. However, in making this comparison, they overlook another Biblical comparison, and a consequent overriding command that forbids Christians to go to war.

While God did indeed command most of the Israelites to fight in Israel's wars, there was one group of the children of Israel which He specifically prohibited from fighting and serving in the military. This group was the priests and Levites. In the first chapter of the Book of Numbers, God commanded Moses and Aaron to count the men of Israel to find how many were eligible to serve in the army. However, God specifically commanded Moses, "Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel" (Numbers 1:49). Thus the priests and Levites were not permitted to join the rest of Israel in fighting wars and defending the country. Rather, they were set apart from the rest of the nation of Israel to belong to God, so they could serve Him better.

Likewise, God has set Christians apart

from the rest of the world: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 2:9, 10). Here God calls Christians to be a “royal priesthood,” and to be set apart from the rest of the world. Just as the priests of the Old Testament were set apart, and did not participate in war, a Christian should not go to war or serve in the military.

The intensity of the nonresistance debate heats up quickly when more personal issues are discussed. Situations such as defending one’s possessions, self, or family when they are in danger are much more hotly debated. Once again, to establish personal standards, the Christian needs to use the basic Scriptural guidelines for nonresistance mentioned earlier, and find Scriptures that relate directly to certain situations.

In the event in which a believer’s possessions are threatened, such as a robbery or burglary, Jesus’ specific teachings to the Christian are quite clear: “And him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again” (Luke 6:29, 30). Since the possessions people call their own actually belong to God, no one has the right to try to take control and keep the “things” for themselves. Possessions “belong” to a person for only a short time, and no one can take them along after death, so possessions most definitely cannot be valued above the life of another human being, or above the value of the Christian’s witness. Therefore, in the event of a robbery or burglary, the proper course of action is obviously to not resist and fight back. In fact, the best course of action would probably be to offer to give the thief what he wants, and even more than he asks. By doing this, the believer is

obeying the commands of Christ and showing His love to a person who desperately needs Him.

Another situation in which many people debate nonresistance is self-defense: What is the proper response for a Christian in the event that they are physically threatened or attacked? Often the natural human reaction is to retaliate with force and violence, and some people will argue that violence is the only viable option. However, Scripture commands that the Christian should respond with love, as Christ did, and “turn the other cheek.” The issue of self-defense connects closely with another issue that is inevitably brought into debate when nonresistance is discussed: the issue of defending other people.

How should the Christian respond if his family or someone else is being threatened by a dangerous person? Some Christians will say defending their family is the only time that killing another person is justifiable since they are saving the life or lives of other people. However, God’s Word clearly says that taking human life is wrong, and as the common saying goes, “It is never right to do wrong to do right.” Other Christians will advocate causing some harm to disable the attacker, such as shooting them in the arm or leg. However, this also goes against the Scriptural example of the events that transpired in the Garden of Gethsemane when a crowd of people came to arrest Jesus. Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of one of the men in the crowd. In response, Jesus healed the man’s ear and reprimanded Peter, saying, “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). Here Jesus showed by example that violence with the intent to kill or to physically harm an attacker is not an option, even when defending another person.

Some people will say that such a stance on nonresistance is the same as lying down and taking whatever comes with an attitude of complete passiveness. But this is not the case. Jesus, whose example

Christians are called to follow, did not surrender His life until God's timing had been fulfilled. Before that time, when Jesus was approached and threatened by His adversaries, or when someone else was threatened, He found ways to get out of those situations without violence or retaliation. At times, Jesus simply walked away and escaped, and other times, such as when the Jews brought to Him the woman caught in adultery, Jesus used reason and conversation to calm the situation and avoid tragedy. In the case of the woman caught in adultery, the Jews were planning to kill her, but instead of saving her with force, Jesus reasoned with the Jews and secured her release peacefully.

Some people will also argue that if physical violence is removed from the options for a Christian in a threatening situation, there is no way to stop an evil person. However, there are peaceful ways to avoid tragedy and violence in a volatile situation that usually are more successful than violent retaliation. Above all, Christians should pray and ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance as they respond. They must show love and act in a Christlike way as they deal with the attacker. Negotiation and reason can also be used fairly effectively to convince an attacker to not carry out his plans. On the contrary, confronting

a dangerous person with a gun or with a threat of violence will almost surely result in the death or serious injury of someone involved. A few exceptions may be made, where some sort of force might be used, such as to restrain a violent person or someone who is determined to do evil. It can be argued that this type of physical restraint can be done in Christian love, since it is a harmless way to keep them from harming someone else.

The Bible calls for Christians to live a Christlike life of love toward all people, including enemies. This means practicing Biblical nonresistance in everyday life. While different people will develop different personal convictions about nonresistance, everyone should follow Scriptural principles as the basis of their position, rather than human feelings and reasoning. The Bible instructs Christians to live out a consistent life of Biblical, loving nonresistance. While this lifestyle sometimes may be difficult and uncomfortable in modern America, the Bible gives a word of encouragement to the believer: "If you fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well" (James 2:8). ■

—The above article was written by a student at Elnora Bible Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Biblical Ethics course.

—JOSEPH P. BONTRAGER . . . cont'd. from page 1 —

During World War I Brother Bontrager visited Mennonite boys in the western camps challenging them to remain true to the faith. During the Second World War Joseph visited Mennonite boys in the California C.P. S. camps.

In 1931, at the age of 59, Bontrager was asked to move again, this time to Winton as pastor. While there he continued laboring in the church and also along the Pacific coast.

In 1948 Brother Bontrager was instrumental in organizing yet another conference, the South Pacific Mennonite Conference.

Joseph Bontrager loved children and young people. He was concerned about their spiritual needs and struggles. He mentored the youth by taking them on boardwalk evangelism trips because he was interested that they actively serve the Lord.

Brother Bontrager was a congenial, gentle, gracious, and loving man who stayed true to the Word of God. He understood people and knew how to work with different personalities.

Joseph P. Bontrager served his Lord faithfully until God took him "home" at the age of 77 on June 8, 1949. He died quietly in his earthly home at Atwater, California.

— Gail L. Emerson

From the Editor's Desk



Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

Learning to Pray

by Mark D. Avery

The first obvious answer to prayer that I prayed happened when I was in high school. During the summer before my junior year, my parents decided to enroll my sister and me in a Christian school. We were both excited about the prospects and looked forward to our first year out of the public school system.

Knowing my parents were sacrificing to send us to the Christian school, it seemed like I needed to do something on my own. Of course, new clothes and a new school year always go together. This year I decided rather than asking Dad to buy my clothes, I would ask God to do it.

My meager summer job income was inadequate for my needs, but Dad would have been happy to buy a couple of changes of clothes. All I had to do was ask, yet it seemed reasonable at least to try God first.

I prayed. The words of my prayer have long since been forgotten. It was probably a short, poorly constructed paragraph at most, but I prayed.

The time frame between my prayer and its answer has also been forgotten, but the answer came. An uncle who was about my size gained weight and cleaned out his closet. I was the beneficiary, receiving about

thirty changes of clothes.

I am still learning about prayer.

An important lesson about prayer is that prayer is about God. We emphasize faith, and faith is important. Yet even faith must be about God. Faith is not about coercing God into doing what I want. Faith is understanding He can do what I cannot.

Andrew Murray wrote *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. Most would agree that we are in the early stages of learning to pray. Praying involves so much more than knowing how to put words together in an address to God. Praying involves the passions, the will, the intellect. Praying includes humility and surrender. It is acknowledging that we are inadequate in ourselves.

God likes to be asked. Of course, He knows what we need. He knows everything about us. He could surround us with everything we need without our asking; He often does. Yet we would not learn the strength of dependence if He always worked in that way.

If there is anything God does not understand, it must be our concept of impossible. Many of us have faced impossible situations. Recently I prayed, knowing nothing could be done to remedy the problem. Yet

(continued on page 18)

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

MAY 1, 2011

Christ, Worthy of Worship

Philippians 2:1-11

May's lessons, taken from Philippians 2 and Revelation 4, focus on worship. Today's lesson from Philippians focuses on the object of our worship, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, man's Redeemer and example. The lessons from Revelation portray worship scenes in Heaven and in the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. In addition to seeing Whom to worship we also see the why and how of worship. Allow these lessons to strengthen your commitment to worship and deepen your understanding of the why of worship.

In this passage from Philippians we clearly see why Christ is worthy of our worship. He is the Son of God, co-creator with the Father, and upholder of all things created (Colossians 1:15-17). Another aspect of the worth of our worship of Him is noted in verse 8. Christ willingly went to the cross to redeem us from the bondage of sin and thus free us to live for Him and enjoy eternity with Him.

The character of Christ is described in verses 5-8. He was humble. Though God, He did not use His position to elevate Himself, but lowered Himself for the benefit of mankind. Though God, He took on the role of a servant, laid aside His glory, and served His creation. It is difficult for us to fathom such self-abasement. Natural man grasps at recognition and eminence. Only by the transformation of our minds can we model Christ's character in our attitudes and actions.

As we model Christ's character in our lives it enables us to live in harmony with

our fellowman. We find mutual encouragement through our unity in Christ. We give value to others. We submit to others. We seek agreement with our fellow believers. We share our resources with those in need. We practice humility in relationships and show concern for the welfare of others. We attempt to duplicate the mind of Christ in all of our actions and attitudes.

As we are individually united to Christ, we will be collectively united in Christ. The mutual exercise of Christ's mind-set will create a harmony of human relationships not otherwise achievable. An understanding of the implications and origins of this unity provides impetus for the worship of our Saviour and life-model. There is recognition that such is not achieved by our own efforts. It draws us to Him in praise.

Christ is now the exalted One. His position was given by the Father in recognition of His humility, service, and sacrifice on man's behalf. As the exalted One, He is worthy of worship. Those who have accepted the gift of salvation through His sacrifice, worship Him willingly. A time is coming when all mankind will bow the knee to Him in recognition of His worthiness. Some will bow with joy. Others will bow in simple acknowledgment and regret. In that day God the Father will be glorified through the praise and adoration given to His Son.

For thought and discussion

1. How do we achieve "the mind of Christ"? Perhaps first define exactly what that is.
2. What is the route to harmony in the Christian brotherhood? Discuss.
3. Why did Christ humble Himself to become human?

4. If the Philippian believers' harmony pleased Paul (v. 2), think how much more it must have pleased God. In light of the thrust of this passage, what caused God's pleasure? Think carefully.
5. Be certain that you will bow the knee willingly to Christ in recognition of His saving grace. And do what you can to enable others to do the same.

Lesson emphasis: As we model the character of Christ in all human relationships we realize His tremendous sacrifice. That calls forth our praise and worship.

Key verse: 5

MAY 8, 2011

Unceasing Praise

Revelation 4

In this first lesson from Revelation we find John in the throne room of Heaven. He had just completed the messages to the seven churches and was now invited to the heavenly realm to view "things which must [happen] hereafter." The first several chapters of Revelation are instructive. From Chapter 4 on the book is prophetic and warning. There are also numerous scenes of worship which will be our focus in these next four lessons.

The first thing John saw in his heavenly vision was a throne. The personage seated on the throne defied human description, but of His identity there was no doubt. He was none other than the Creator God, as we note in verses 8 and 11. His was a position of authority and glory. John could only describe Him in human terms, likening Him to precious stones, encircled by a brilliant rainbow.

There were other beings in this heavenly scene. Twenty-four other thrones surrounded the main throne, each one occupied by an elder dressed in a white robe with a crown of gold on his head. These elders were likely representative of redeemed saints. White robes are indicative of righteousness; the casting of their crowns before the Almighty (v. 10)

indicates reverence and homage.

John also saw four living creatures around the throne giving perpetual praise to the One seated thereon. From their description and function they were likely cherubim (see Ezekiel 1). John also saw seven lamps of fire representing the seven Spirits of God (see 1:4). These are possibly angels, poised to carry out God's bidding. (Note references throughout Revelation.) All of this was in a setting of indescribable beauty likened to a sea of crystal clear glass. The lightning, thunder, and voices emanating from the throne were indicative of power, and presaged judgments that were to follow.

John quickly noted that the function of the four living creatures was giving unceasing praise to the One on the throne. They ascribed holiness to the "Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." They give glory, honor, and thanks to the eternal God.

The exultant cry of the four living creatures inspires the twenty-four elders to bow before the Lord in worship. They cast their crowns before Him in an act of submission and homage, and proclaim Him worthy to receive glory and honor for His creative and sustaining power. We can assume, if we take these elders to be representative of the redeemed, that their praise also included thanksgiving for His saving grace.

The challenge for us is to also bow before the Almighty in worship and praise for providing us the opportunity to escape coming wrath and to spend a glorious eternity with Him.

For thought and discussion

1. Try to picture in your mind the glorious scene opened up to John. Allow this to deepen respect and honor for the One seated on the throne of glory.
2. Why do you suppose John was given this vision? (A complete reading of the Book of Revelation will enhance your understanding.)
3. What does this scene tell us about God? Good for discussion.
4. What are acceptable forms of worship,

given the holiness, power, and majesty of God? Discuss.

5. How does your awareness of God's holiness and omniscience affect your everyday living?

Lesson emphasis: To recognize the holiness and majesty of God and form appropriate measures of worship to Him.

Key verses: 11

MAY 15, 2011

Worthy of Praise

Revelation 7:9-17

John had just witnessed the opening of six of the seven seals (see Chapter 6) on the book in the hand of the Lamb (Chapter 5). Chapter 7 is an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals of judgment (see Chapters 6 and 8). At the beginning of Chapter 7 there is a halt called in judgments until the sealing of a symbolic 144,000 servants of God. These 144,000 were redeemed from the twelve tribes of Israel, sealed with a mark of security and ownership. These were marked to be preserved from the wrath to come upon the opening of the seventh seal.

However, John also saw another group of people standing before the throne. Here was an innumerable multitude from every nation, people and tongue, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. Their white robes and palm branches signified purity, or righteousness, and victory. We discover from verse 14 that they were souls who had made it safely through the great tribulation period when God's righteous judgments were visited upon unbelieving mankind.

This multitude of redeemed stood before the throne of God Almighty and before the Lamb who had redeemed them and gave praise and adoration to them for the salvation they had provided (see Luke 21:36). When they unleashed their praise, the angels, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures (see Chapter 4) also raised their voices in praise and bowed down in worship before God. In their praise they

ascribe blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might to Him who lives forever.

That they were victorious under test gave them the privilege of standing in the presence of God and serving Him continually. God Himself would dwell among them, protect, and provide for them. This bliss was their reward for faithfulness and victory. They will not know further want nor danger nor discomfort. They are eternally secure.

This passage speaks to the universality of the Gospel, to Jew and Gentile alike, to all kindreds of people. It also speaks of God's saving and keeping power. He watches over His people and promises to be with them in all circumstances. He is eminently worthy of our praise.

John, in his vision of future events, saw an innumerable multitude of blood-washed people giving everlasting praise before the throne of God and before the Lamb who was sacrificed for their redemption. We can be assured of being in that number as we, too, submit to the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Revelation 1:5). Then we, too, can join our voices in praise to the Father and the Son for the saving grace they have provided. Our faithfulness will assure us of His loving protection and providence, both in this life and throughout eternity.

Worthy of praise? Beyond doubt.

For thought and discussion

1. Find Scriptures to support this mixed multitude which stood redeemed before the throne of God and the Lamb.
2. What will make us worthy to stand before God's throne with a note of praise on our lips?
3. What is our part to play in the salvation experience? Look closely at the latter part of verse 14.
4. What are some Scriptural principles we can deduce from this passage? Discuss.
5. How does the picture in these verses challenge our daily living? Discuss.

Lesson emphasis: To acknowledge God worthy of praise, and to praise Him for His redeeming power and grace.

Key verse: 12

May 22, 2011

The Heavenly Kingdom

Revelation 21:1-8, 22-27

The picture John portrays here in Chapter 21 follows many scenes of turmoil and judgment upon earth (Chapters 8–18). It also follows, in Chapter 20, the thousand-year reign of Christ and His saints who had come out of the Great Tribulation, and the final, eternal destruction of the influence of Satan and his cohorts. Chapter 20 ends with the great white throne judgment and all enemies of God being cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death, eternal damnation.

The first thing John saw in this vision in Chapter 21 was a renewed or renovated universe. Evil has been done away (2 Peter 3:7-13), and the earth made new to be a suitable habitation for God and His holy people. The sea, depicting evil (13:1) and unrest (Isaiah 57:20), was gone. This all was the work of God as we note in verse 5.

The next thing which caught John's eye was the New Jerusalem, a holy, glorified city, descending from God out of Heaven. (A physical description of this city is found in verses 11-21, between our texts, and should be read for context.) This city was to provide the dwelling place for God and His redeemed, sanctified people as our text clearly states in verses 3, 7, 24, and 27.

In this new city there will be no crying, no sorrow, no pain, no death. Those are things of the former life. They have passed away. Here the Father God will comfort and tenderly care for His people, people redeemed to Him at the cost of His Son's sacrifice. These are souls who have overcome the onslaughts of the evil one and are now recorded in the Lamb's book of life.

The eternal God, the Alpha and Omega (see 1:8), now declares the redemptive work of His Son to be completed. The struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, is over. Satan has been once and for all defeated, the holy God reigns supreme and unchallenged. The unbelieving will suffer

eternal punishment, which is the second death, a never-dying death (v. 8). By contrast, the overcomers will enjoy all of God's richness and blessing, again, forever and ever.

Curiously, John noted in the holy city there was no temple, no specific center of worship. And of course there was no need, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb would now be dwelling among their people, intermingling, interacting. Neither was there need for a source of light for the glory of God and of the Lamb illuminated the city.

The universal reach of the Gospel is alluded to in verse 24, depicting saved ones from every tribe and nation. Also, all honor and glory will now be directed to God and the Lamb. All will bow in submission to them for their saving act. Here saints are secure and protected. No harm can reach them, no evil befall. They dwell in radiant purity.

Scholars' opinions vary as to whether this scene depicts the millennial kingdom or the eternal kingdom. Whichever, it is where God dwells among His redeemed people and shields them from all harm and evil. I want to be there, don't you?

For thought and discussion

1. Is your imagination vivid enough to take in this scene described by John? Allow your imagination to run. Read some background for help. What does all this say about God's power and glory?
2. What are the requirements for entry into this heavenly city? Discuss.
3. In verse 7 we are told that those who overcome will inherit all things. What are these things the faithful will inherit? Discuss.
4. Stop to think of God's goodness. Why does He do what He does for mankind? What does it do for Him? Discuss.
5. Whatever your eschatological viewpoint, just make certain that you have fully embraced God's mercy, are living worthy of being classified as His child, and have your passport in hand for the Heavenly Kingdom.

Lesson emphasis: To catch a glimpse of the glory that awaits God's redeemed saints.

Key verse: 3

May 29, 2011

Heaven at Last

Revelation 22:1-9, 13-17

The first five verses of Chapter 22 continue the description of the spiritual aspects of the New Jerusalem begun in Chapter 21. These verses portray a paradise not seen since the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2. The picture is one of peace, contentment, and unlimited provision. Here is where God dwells with His people in unending bliss. This in contrast to the many trials, tribulations, and sufferings God's people have had to endure to reach this place of rest and contentment. Here is their final rest. Here is the reverse of the curse in Eden. Here is fulfillment of the promise of Ephesians 1:18.

Out of the throne of God flowed a pure river of life-giving water. It flowed through the middle of the city and watered the tree of life on its banks. This tree of life, transplanted here from Eden, provided sustaining fruits and healing leaves. These are likely symbolic since our glorified bodies will not likely need food or medicine (see verse 17; Genesis 2:9; Psalm 46:4; and Revelation 2:7).

This city, as we have seen in the previous lesson, will be free of the taint of sin since here God dwells with His redeemed saints. His servants are marked as His and they will serve Him and reign with Him forever. Again, as we noted in the previous lesson, God Himself and the Lamb will provide light for this holy city.

The angel who was showing these things to John reminded him that he had been instructed to write these things on God's behalf (see 1:1, 19; 4:1; and 22:16). Jesus Himself then reminds John that His coming will be swift and sudden and thus it behooves those who read the sayings of this book to be prepared and instantly ready for that event. John's response at being chosen for this outstanding task was to worship the angel who had given him this revelation. However, the angel directed him to worship only God. He, like John, was only a servant.

The passage closes with a word from

Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the One who was, who is, and who is yet to come. Those who obey the Word of God, who heed the instruction contained in this book, will be welcomed into the eternal city. Those who disbelieve and disobey will remain without and suffer eternally for their choice. However, as long as the door is open the invitation stands: "Come. Whosoever will, and take the water of life freely."

And so the Book of Revelation, containing many scenes of turmoil and conflict, ends with a scene of peace, an invitation, and a warning. The forces of evil will abound as long as time lasts. Yet it is not God's will that any should perish and He has made provision for the salvation of all who will heed and accept. Eerdman says: "It is beyond question that this book was written to encourage all believers to be patient in persecution, steadfast in days of trial and tribulation, assured that to be loyal to Christ is to be on the side of right, of truth, of ultimate triumph, and of eternal joy."

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

For thought and discussion

1. Why was the tree of life removed from Eden, and why does it now appear here in Revelation 22?
2. Explore the implications of "no more curse" mentioned in verse 3. Discuss.
3. Why is it so crucial to "keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book"? The answer is at hand.
4. Explore again the implications of Jesus being the Alpha and Omega.
5. What are the requirements for entry into this celestial city? Who is excluded? Why?
6. The invitation is still open for whosoever will to come. How well are we promoting that invitation to a dying world? In light of the message of this book, that should cause us to do some sober thinking.

Lesson emphasis: To rejoice in the provision God has made for His faithful children, and be challenged to more faithfully share the message of salvation to lost humanity.

Key verse: 17



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

Science Discrimination

“SAN ANTONIO — Some of the world’s preeminent experts on bias discovered an unexpected form of it at their annual meeting.

“Discrimination is always high on the agenda at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology’s conference, where psychologists discuss their research on racial prejudice, homophobia, sexism, stereotype threat, and unconscious bias against minorities. But the most talked-about speech at this year’s meeting, which ended Jan. 30, involved a new ‘outgroup.’

“It was identified by Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at the University of Virginia who studies the intuitive foundations of morality and ideology. He polled his audience . . . liberals made up 80 percent of the 1,000 psychologists in the ballroom . . . when he asked for conservatives, he counted a grand total of three.

“‘This is a statistically impossible lack of diversity,’ Dr. Haidt concluded, noting polls showing that 40 percent of Americans are conservative and 20 percent are liberal. In his speech and in an interview, Dr. Haidt argued that social psychologists are a ‘tribal-moral community’ united by ‘sacred values’ that hinder research and damage their credibility—and blind them to the hostile climate they’ve created for non-liberals.

“‘Anywhere in the world that social psychologists see women or minorities underrepresented by a factor of two or three, our minds jump to discrimination as the explanation,’ said Dr. Haidt, who called himself a longtime liberal turned centrist. ‘But

when we find out that conservatives are underrepresented among us by a factor of more than 100, suddenly everyone finds it quite easy to generate alternate explanations.’

“The politics of the professoriate has been studied . . . [and] found that Democrats typically outnumber Republicans at elite universities by at least six to one among the general faculty, and by higher ratios in the humanities and social sciences . . . nearly 80 percent of psychology professors are Democrats, outnumbering Republicans by nearly 12 to 1.

“‘If a group circles around sacred values, they will evolve into a tribal-moral community,’ [Haidt] said. ‘They’ll embrace science whenever it supports their sacred values, but they’ll ditch it or distort it as soon as it threatens a sacred value.’

“Daniel Patrick Moynihan . . . in 1965 . . . warned about the rise of unmarried parenthood and welfare dependency among blacks—violating the taboo against criticizing victims of racism.

“‘Moynihan was shunned by many of his colleagues at Harvard as racist,’ Dr. Haidt said. ‘Open-minded inquiry into the problems of the black family was shut down for decades, precisely the decades in which it was most urgently needed. Only in the last few years have liberal sociologists begun to acknowledge that Moynihan was right all along.’

“Similarly, Larry Summers, then president of Harvard, was ostracized in 2005 for wondering publicly whether the preponderance of male professors in some top

math and science departments might be due partly to the larger variance in I.Q. scores among men (meaning there are more men at the very high and very low ends). ‘This was not a permissible hypothesis,’ Dr. Haidt said. ‘It blamed the victims rather than the powerful. The outrage ultimately led to his resignation. We psychologists should have been outraged by the outrage. We should have defended his right to think freely.’

“Instead, the taboo against discussing sex differences was reinforced, so universities and the National Science Foundation went on spending tens of millions of dollars on research and programs based on the assumption that female scientists faced discrimination and various forms of unconscious bias. But that assumption has been repeatedly contradicted, most recently in a study published Monday in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* by two Cornell psychologists. . . . After reviewing two decades of research, they report that a woman in academic science typically fares as well as, if not better than, a comparable man when it comes to being interviewed, hired, promoted, financed, and published.”

—Excerpt from “Social Scientist Sees Bias Within” (<http://j.mp/ScienceDiscrimination>) in *The New York Times*

* * * * *

Mice Detectors

According to *New Scientist*, Israeli scientists created a device that detects when people are carrying drugs or explosives. The device looks like a full-body scanner, but contains cartridges of mice. Each machine has 24 specially-trained mice that, when they smell explosives or drugs, run into a side chamber triggering an alarm. —Source: *The UK Daily Telegraph*

* * * * *

Individual Mandate

A new bill proposed in South Dakota requires all adults 21 or older to buy a gun “sufficient to provide for their ordinary self-defense.” Rep. Hal Wick (R-Sioux

Falls) who’s sponsoring the bill says the bill is to prove the point that Obamacare is unconstitutional. He says, “Do I or the other cosponsors believe that the State of South Dakota can require citizens to buy firearms? Of course not. But at the same time, we do not believe the federal government can order every citizen to buy health insurance.”

—Source: *The Sioux Falls Argus Leader*

* * * * *

Text Message Kills Suicide Bomber

“A ‘Black Widow’ suicide bomber planned a terrorist attack in central Moscow on New Year’s Eve but was killed when an unexpected text message set off her bomb too early, according to Russian security sources.

“The unnamed woman, who is thought to be part of the same group that struck Moscow’s Domodedovo airport on Monday, intended to detonate a suicide belt near Red Square on New Year’s Eve in an attack that could have killed hundreds.

“Security sources believe a message from her mobile phone operator wishing her a Happy New Year, received just hours before the planned attack, triggered her suicide belt, killing her at a safe house.

“Islamist terrorists in Russia often use mobile phones as detonators. The bomber’s handler, who is usually watching his or her charge, sends the bomber a text message in order to set off his or her explosive belt at the moment when it is thought they can inflict maximum casualties. We’ve heard about the dangers of texting, but this was a bit unexpected all around.”

—Excerpts from “Text message blows up suicide bomber by accident” (<http://j.mp/TextMessageBomber>) in *The Daily Telegraph*

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VA to Regulate Abortion Clinics as Hospitals

The Virginia General Assembly has agreed that abortion clinics should be regulated as hospitals instead of physicians’ offices, a move that antiabortion activists

have sought for almost two decades, insisting that it would improve clinic safety.

“Abortion rights advocates say it will make the state one of the most restrictive for abortions in the country and could force as many as 17 of the state’s 21 abortion clinics to close.

“Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R) has said he will sign the bill, which gives the state’s Board of Health 280 days from the law’s enactment to write new rules for clinics that perform at least five first-trimester abortions a month.

“The bill’s passage came as the Democratic-led state Senate voted 20 to 20 Thursday to approve the measure after a lengthy and emotional debate. The tie was broken by Lt. Gov. Bill Bolling (R), who cast his vote in favor of the bill. All 18 of the chamber’s Republicans backed the bill, as did two conservative Democrats.”

—Excerpt from “Va. General Assembly agrees to regulate abortion clinics as hospitals” (<http://j.mp/AbortionClinicsVA>) in *The Washington Post*

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Jesus in an Afghani Prison

“A brother in Christ and an employee of the International Red Cross, Said Musa, was arrested in Afghanistan in late May 2010 after footage was nationally televised of Afghan Christians being baptized and participating in prayer gatherings. The broadcast triggered protests throughout the country and calls to execute Christians, including one from a deputy leader in parliament. Musa, a father of six and an amputee with a prosthetic leg, explained in a letter written from Oullayat prison in Kabul that he had been beaten, forcefully sleep deprived, and sexually abused by prisoners. He added that Afghan judicial officers granted him no protection and at times encouraged the abuse.

“On December 11, 2010, he wrote from his jail cell that he rejoices in the Lord amidst great suffering. ‘I saw a vision dur-

ing my sleep one night. I saw the heaven opened and a person, His clothes like snow, His face in dazzling light. He came to me and put His hand on my shoulder and on my head, and told me: “Please be happy, I am always with you in this jail. I chose you and you should announce my good news to the people of Afghanistan and all over the world.” On that moment I was shaking and trembling with fear. I fell down and could not stand on my feet. He took my hands and I woke up.’

“Five days later, on December 16, he wrote again about an unusual occurrence, this time involving a Taliban prisoner: ‘A person who is accused of murder is sleeping in front of me in the corridor of the jail. He’s a hundred percent extremist, a Talib person. One night he wanted to kill himself. I prayed for him and told him: “Please be patient, believe in Jesus Christ, He’s the only person to forgive you and save you and release you from this jail.” At first he began screaming and insulted me. He told me: “You’re not clean, you’re not a Muslim!” But I told him: “Oh, my friend and brother, please think about my word.” Then I prayed for him throughout the night.’

“Musa continued: ‘While all the prisoners were at sleep, he woke up and sat on his place. He came near my bed and told me: “Please forgive me, brother. You’re really a true person. I have seen wonderful dreams. A very light person spoke with me. He was an amazing person. I fell down on my knees and to the ground. He told me, please believe in your friend Said Musa. I am the Lord Jesus Christ. I forgive you now. I was shaking in my body from fear and then I woke up.” He told me he now believes in Jesus Christ.’

“Various human rights organizations have taken up Musa’s case and call for prayer for him and his family.”

Reprinted with permission from “Afghanistan: Jesus appears in prison” in *Joel News International*, issue 764 (JoelNews.org).

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The History and Impact of the Book: *The Genesis Flood*

by John C. Whitcomb, Th.D.

The Genesis Flood has been a life-changing experience for its authors, ever since 1961 when our book was published. My highly esteemed and longtime friend Henry M. Morris, co-author of *The Genesis Flood*, joins me in giving praise to God for allowing our 518-page book to be published and I quote: "The publication of *The Genesis Flood* made a tremendous difference in my life, culminating in a change from engineering to full-time concentration on creationism and Christian evidences. There were numerous speaking requests, then the formation of the Creation Research Society [1963], then eventually the Institute for Creation Research [1970], and extensive seminars, conferences, debates, etc., all over the world. Many have attributed the global revival of scientific Biblical creationism to the catalytic effect of *The Genesis Flood*."

In His merciful providence, God sent Henry Morris to Grace Theological Seminary (where I was professor of Old Testament) in September 1953, to present a paper entitled, "Biblical Evidence for a Recent Creation and Universal Deluge" to the American Scientific Affiliation meeting there. This revolutionized my entire approach to ultimate origins, and God motivated me to spend four years writing a 450-page doctoral dissertation entitled, "*The Genesis Flood: An Investigation of Its Geographical Extent, Geological Effects, and Chronological Setting*" (Winona Lake, IN: Grace Theological Seminary, 1957). Soon, he agreed to co-author *The Genesis Flood*. Both he and I agreed that a project of such magnitude,

dealing with stupendous scientific and theological issues, needed the perspectives of a scientist as well as a theologian.

In this enormously time-consuming process, twenty-one scientists, nine theologians, and two grammarians were asked to review all or part of the manuscript. In retrospect, it seems significant to us that 1959 was also the year of the great Darwinian Centennial celebration in Chicago, at which Sir Julian Huxley, and other atheistic evolutionists, announced that creationism was essentially dead. In retrospect, however, this "graveside service" appears to have been premature!

Negative Responses to THE GENESIS FLOOD

In the late 1980s, about twenty-five years after the publication of our book, two significant counter-movements began to appear. Both of these movements were opposed to naturalistic Darwinism, but, at the same time, were opposed to Biblical and scientific creationism.

From a Biblical perspective, this was sadly predictable. Paul confronted the church at Corinth with these words: "*There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you*" (1 Corinthians 11:19). On the one hand, this can be a healthy process. God's people must not adopt any view just because of a human authority figure, however brilliant or eloquent. Each of us needs to examine "*the scriptures daily*" to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11). On the other hand, large numbers of Christians have been deceived into abandoning Biblical truth.

Progressive Creationism

The first of these movements is called “progressive creationism,” represented especially by Dr. Hugh Ross, a Christian astronomer. He believes that creation began many billions of years ago with a so-called “big bang”; that animals were supernaturally and periodically created (not evolved) through millions of years; that Adam’s rebellion against God did not cause death in the animal kingdom; and that the Flood was local in extent. He believes that the Bible’s 66 books are fully inspired, but need to be reinterpreted in the light of a 67th book, namely modern science.

In January 2003 the Institute for Creation Research responded in depth to the challenges of “progressive creationism.” I was invited to join three scientists and another theologian to participate in eight panel discussions and responses to the views of Dr. Ross. (*After Eden: Understanding Creation, the Curse, and the Cross.*) I was especially amazed at the futile effort of “progressive creationists” to reduce the Genesis Flood to a Mesopotamian catastrophe in order to justify millions of years of sedimentation and fossilization before the creation of mankind.

The Intelligent Design Movement

The second counter-movement is even more amazing to behold. It is called “the intelligent-design movement (IDM), and is dedicated to the proposition that atheistic naturalism and neo-Darwinian evolutionism have completely failed to explain the irreducible complexity of living things. ID scholars also believe that evolutionism can be defeated by scientific and rationalistic arguments without any appeal to the Bible or to the Creator of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every Christian should applaud legitimate efforts to restore sanity and reality to the study of ultimate origins. Most IDM augmentation is, to this extent, on target. *The tragedy* of the movement, however, is that it deliberately stops short of honoring

God’s written revelation on origins, the Bible. In fact, the Book of Genesis as literal history seems to be *an embarrassment and an unwanted and unnecessary burden to bear* in their debate with evolution-oriented scientists.

Dr. Philip Johnson, IDM’s leading spokesman, counsels: “Get the Bible and the Book of Genesis out of the debate, because you do not want to raise the so-called Bible-science dichotomy. Phrase the argument in such a way that you can get it heard in the secular academy and in a way that tends to unify the religious dissenters. That means concentrating on, ‘Do you need a Creator to do the creating, or can nature do it on its own?’ and refusing to get sidetracked onto other issues. . . . They’ll ask, ‘What do you think of Noah’s flood?’ or something like that. Never bite on such questions because they’ll lead you into a trackless wasteland and you’ll never get out of it” (“Berkeley’s Radical” in *Touchstone* 15:5 [June 2002], p. 41).

Indeed, to assert that the universe is the product of an Intelligent Designer is *an essential foundation for origins study*. But it is only the very bottom rung of the ladder that leads upward to full Creation Truth. *It is vastly insufficient!* To truly honor God and to bring genuine light into this enormously important question, one must also believe in the divinely inspired account of origins in Genesis 1 and 2 and in God’s record of the magnitude of the Flood in Genesis 6–9. True Christians should be deeply shocked to learn that *the Son of God, by Whom all things were “created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth”* (Colossians 1:16), the One “*in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (Colossians 2:3), the ultimate Designer of all life, matter, energy, space, and time, *has been practically ignored* by these who write so eloquently of “intelligent design.”

In response, we humbly insist that *it is essential to believe the Genesis record of origins in order to please God. This obviously includes the manner in which living things were created* (“full-grown,” with a superfi-

cial appearance of history); *the order in which things were created*; and *the duration of creation events* (six 24-hour days only a few thousand years ago). Our Lord explained that Adam and Eve were created “at the beginning”—not millions of years after the earth came into existence (Matthew 19:4). Thus, it is also essential to believe that *death in the animal kingdom* did not occur before the creation of mankind, but *was an effect of Adam’s rebellion* (Genesis 1:31; and Romans 5:12 in the light of Romans 8:20-23). Trillions of fossilized plants and animals all over the world, with very rare exceptions, can only be explained in terms of *the global catastrophism of the Genesis Flood*.

In the creation/evolution debate today, there is a truly frightening element that is sadly neglected and can lead to one’s eternal loss. Our Lord said: “*Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory*” (Luke 9:26). If we leave Christ Himself out of the discussion, how, then, can we truly help people who are walking in the darkness of materialistic evolutionism?

We agree that discussions and debates concerning Intelligent Design can (in God’s providence) temporarily catch the attention of unbelieving minds. But *saving faith* can only come through the acceptance of the living and powerful Word of God (Hebrews 4:12) and its witness to the finished work of Christ upon the Cross and His bodily resurrection from the dead (cf. Romans 10:9, 10). That is why the Apostle Paul ended his powerful presentation of Intelligent Design to the Athenian philosophers on Mars’ Hill by asserting that the true and living God of creation “*now commandeth all men every where to repent*” (Acts 17:30). Finally, “*He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained* [i.e., Jesus—v. 18]; *whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*” (v. 31). It was because he honored the Lord Jesus in this address

that some men joined him and believed (v. 34).

Here, then, is the burning question that modern proponents of Intelligent Design must answer: Are people believing in Christ as Lord and Saviour and experiencing a profound renewing of their hearts and minds as a result of hearing their message?

God’s words, not ours, can change men’s destiny. Saving faith comes “*by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Romans 10:9, 17). This is the only “wedge” that can separate evolutionists from the blindness of sin and bring them to *a full knowledge of Christ the Creator of the world and the only Saviour of men*.

Thus, while Dr. Hugh Ross and his followers have attempted to reduce the mountain-covering, year-long Deluge in the days of Noah all the way down to a local flooding in Mesopotamia, the Intelligent Design scientists and philosophers officially ignore not only the Genesis record of the Flood, but also the entire Book of Genesis and the sixty-five God-inspired books which follow it.

Conclusion

Truly, God’s people around the world must make a huge decision concerning the origin of the world: either we take God at His Word because of Who He is, namely, God, who never lies; or surrender our minds to the ever-changing opinions of finite and sinful men who are saying more loudly than ever before: “Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” But God gives us His infinite and eternal perspective on such thinking: “*This they willingly are ignorant of, . . . the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*” (2 Peter 3:5, 6).

Our Lord Jesus Christ confirmed to us that in the days of Noah “*they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away*” (Matthew



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 E-mail to: Editor, Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, VA 22803; swandtrump@verizon.net.

Testifying for Christ

by Douglas Wantz

Dr. James Stewart, professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh, described what he thought is the greatest threat to the church. He said, “It’s not communism, atheism, or materialism; the greatest threat is Christians trying to sneak into Heaven incognito without ever sharing their faith.”

—The Bible Illustrator, TOPIC: Testimony; INDEX: 3599-3605

If you were asked to testify about your faith in Jesus Christ, would you be willing to do so? If so, what would you say?

How would you go about it?

To “testify”—simply means “to bear record,” or “to give evidence,” or “to give an honest report.” Those who are testifying are simply telling what they have seen or heard. They are telling what they know personally. Testifying for Jesus, then, is simply telling people what you know about Him and how He has made an impact on your life. It is a way of introducing others to the Saviour so that perhaps they will come to know Him too.

A prime example of someone testifying about Jesus is found in John 1:19-34. The person giving the testimony is John the Baptist—the man who was called by God to prepare the way for the earthly ministry of Jesus. God wanted to use John’s testimony to help people develop a hungering for the kingdom which their coming Messiah would be offering, and to recognize Jesus as the Messiah once His earthly ministry

would get under way.

As we look at the testimony of John the Baptist concerning the person and the work of Jesus, we find three principles that can help us to testify about Jesus and introduce people to the Saviour today.

1. *Get the Focus Off Yourself* (John 1:19-28)

Though what you do for Christ may get people’s attention, do not hesitate to tell them, “It’s not about me!” (verses 19-23). John the Baptist was a unique individual with a unique ministry that drew a lot of attention—so much attention that the religious leaders in Jerusalem needed to send a delegation to personally “check him out.” God had been silent for 400 years (as far as His sending a prophet to Israel was concerned) when suddenly The Baptist appeared on the scene.

John’s appearance, his manner of life, and his bold style of preaching (including his scathing rebukes of the current Jewish religious authorities) reminded many people of the Old Testament Prophet Elijah. All these things led many people to go out into

the wilderness to hear the Baptist's message of repentance, and when they did, they also engaged in an unusual activity—they were being baptized (symbolizing their acceptance of John's message and desire for repentance). While baptism had previously been practiced in Israel, it had been limited to Gentiles who wanted to convert to the Jewish faith; never before had *Jews* been baptized, as if they had some "uncleanness" to be washed away—yet this is exactly what John was doing! Perhaps some were even wondering if The Baptist might be the promised Messiah, and for this (as well as the previous reasons), the religious leaders (whom John the Apostle refers to as "the Jews") saw fit to send an official delegation to ask the questions, "Who are you?" and "What right do you have to say and do these things?"

Though he seemed to be the center of attention, John was quick to point out that he was not the one people should be attracted to; he was just preparing the way for the Person *that everyone should be seeking*. He took the focus off himself and instead placed it on his work, preparing the way for the coming Messiah (Jesus). His first answer, "*I am not the Christ*" (verse 20) implies that this was their first question; and they asked if he were "Elijah," and later, if he were "The Prophet" (referring to Moses' statement in Deuteronomy that God would send to Israel another Prophet like himself). In each instance, John's answer was a definite, "*No!*" Finally, they were left to ask, "*Who art thou?*" (verse 22), to which John replied by using the words from the Prophet Isaiah, "*I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord.*"

Very often, as we reach out to hurting people in Jesus' name—the first thing they will see, is us; and if we have touched their hearts in some way, or if the ministry God has given us has a high visibility, there may be an unconscious desire (at the very least) for these people to be drawn to the messenger rather than the message. It is important for us not to be "caught up in our own press clippings" (which could lead to pride and

ultimately a fall). Like John the Baptist, we need to remember (and not hesitate to proclaim), that we are simply the messengers. It is very important to remember the message (the Gospel) and the One from whom this message comes (Jesus).

If people ask why you do what you do, share how you are simply submitting to Jesus' authority, obeying what He has called you to do (verses 24-28). The questions concerning John's identity led to the question of authority: "If you are not any of the anticipated prophetic figures, what (or who) gives you the right to do what you do?" Behind the question was probably a sentiment, expressed in their tone of voice, that was saying, "How *dare* you? Who do you think you are, telling *us* that we need to *repent*?" When John did not seem to meet the "credentials" they were looking for, the attitude of the delegation (which included some Pharisees) quickly turned to resentment. Deep down inside, God was likely bringing conviction upon their hearts, but rather than repent, they refused to listen to His promptings and instead took offense at the message John was proclaiming.

People often do not like to change—change involves admitting you may have been wrong—and people today will react the same way they reacted to John, when God begins to convict them of sin. Those who witness must not be disheartened, if persons who hear the testimony react that way. Remember, ultimately they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting God's message that you are proclaiming (dealing with a guilty conscience by trying to "shoot the messenger").

John did not get defensive, and neither did he waiver; instead, he again diverted attention away from himself and focused upon the greatness of the One whose coming was imminent—the One whose way he was preparing. He was saying, in effect, "My baptism is only symbolic of what God is doing in a person's heart; but the One coming after me is the One who actually can change hearts and lives. He is the important One; compared to Him, I am nothing. I am not even worthy

of being the lowest of His servants. Get ready, for He is amongst you even now!”

Is this not then the same attitude we should have, and the same message we should be sharing? There is nothing about any of us, humanly speaking, that makes us worthy of ministering for Jesus—yet He has given us that privilege and calling. Our message (if we are truly giving out the Gospel) is *His* message, and like His physical arrival to begin His earthly ministry in Israel was to happen at any moment in John’s day, Jesus’ coming again in glory could happen at any moment in ours. While we wait for that event, Jesus gives us the authority to speak on His behalf, and He backs us up by being present in our lives through the power and person of the Holy Spirit. As it was with the Baptist, so it is now: we are not the important ones—Jesus should be the center of attention, and it is to Him that we need to continually direct people. *He is everything; it is all about Him!*

2. Take Advantage of Opportunities That Arise (John 1:29-31)

Help people to recognize Jesus’ presence (verses 29, 30). When Jesus physically came to where John was baptizing, he clearly identified who Jesus was and what He would do in people’s lives. John called Jesus “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”—using imagery that was no doubt impressed upon the listener’s hearts (for most had likely witnessed the sacrifices for sin that were offered up at the temple). John, therefore, was saying, “Here is the Person you are looking for. He is the One who can bring you forgiveness and make you right with God.”

How can Jesus do that? Because He is not just a man, but He is also God! This was the meaning of John’s words, “*He has surpassed me because he was before me.*” John was saying, “I may have begun my ministry first, but Jesus is greater because, as God, He existed eternally, and He is the one who gave me the ministry that I now perform.”

As we point people to Jesus, it is important that we give them an accurate portrayal

of who He is. Too many times, people give an incomplete picture of Jesus (pointing only to the “Jesus” they think people want to hear about—a loving Jesus, a kind Jesus, a great man, a great teacher, etc.). While we do not want to back up a “truckload” of theology and “dump it on them” all at once—nevertheless, we do need to be sure people realize how utterly unique Jesus is (fully human, yet fully God), that He offers forgiveness but also demands repentance; that He loves them as they are, but also loves them too much to leave them where they are, and so on. Most of all, we need to let them know that Jesus is greater than any mental image we could ever create of Him, and the relationship He desires to have with us will continually challenge (as well as comfort) us, as our faith in Him matures. We constantly are learning more about Jesus as our relationship with Him deepens.

Help people to recognize times when God is working in a special way (verse 31). While John was an earthly relative of Jesus, and may have had contact with Him as the two were growing up, He did not know Jesus as *the Christ* until it was specially revealed to him by God. The event where God revealed Jesus’ identity as Messiah, was when Jesus came to be baptized (an event that John will share more about in the coming verses). He was not told when this event would happen; it simply occurred while John was serving God, preaching in the wilderness, and fulfilling the calling God had given him. Recognizing what God was revealing, John could then share the identity of the Messiah with others.

God still uses everyday events in life to speak to people; but to get His message, we have to look at the circumstances from His perspective (or help others to do so too). Too often, people miss seeing God working in their lives because they attribute things that are happening to “luck” or to “chance.” From God’s perspective, however, He is using the various happenings in our lives to speak to us—but we have to have our hearts attuned to Him to receive His message. When we are sensitive to God’s leading in

our lives (and able to hear the Holy Spirit speaking to us, teaching and guiding us in both good times and bad), then we will be able to help others recognize His working as we testify about His guidance in our own, just as the Baptist was doing here.

3. Speak From Both Your Head and Your Heart (John 1:32-34)

Speak from your head by sharing what God revealed to you about Jesus, that allowed you to recognize Him and be drawn to Him (verse 33). John's testimony was based upon divine revelation. John did not have to guess or rely upon divine revelation. John did not have to guess or rely upon his own wisdom to "figure out" the identity of the Messiah whose way he was preparing; God had promised to reveal the Messiah at the appropriate time. The sign to confirm the Messiah's identity would be unmistakable: out of all the people John baptized, there would only be one on whom the Holy Spirit would come down, and that one individual, God said, would be the Messiah whom John was preparing people's hearts to receive.

God's inspired, inerrant Word (the Bible) is our source of divine revelation that reveals Jesus to us. In God's Word, we have the prophecies of the Old Testament that point us to Jesus, and in the New Testament we have the fulfillment of those prophecies as evidence that Jesus is, indeed, God's Anointed One—the Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Statistically, the odds of one person fulfilling even a portion of those prophecies is astronomical; yet Jesus fulfilled *every* prophecy related to His coming, and we can be assured that likewise He will also fulfill *every* prophecy related to His Second Coming—when the time for that event arrives! In the meantime, as we await His return, we can also look at the character and the works of Jesus portrayed in Scripture, all of which further confirm His working in our lives. Trusting in Jesus requires faith, but not *blind* faith; God has given, in His Word, all of the objective information we need to come to know the Saviour, and it is this objective, authoritative evidence that

we can then share with others without hesitation.

*Speak from your heart regarding your experience in coming to know Jesus (verses 32, 34). As he shared the objective evidence (the word God has spoken to him), the Baptist then confirmed that evidence by his experience: "God told me what to look for, and I saw it happen when I baptized Jesus, so I know He is the One!" Notice, chronologically, that Jesus' baptism had already occurred at this time (John does not write about those events because, being the last Gospel written, he knows people already have those details written in Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, then led out into the wilderness, and the testimony John gives is happening just prior to Jesus' return from the wilderness to embark upon His earthly ministry. John is therefore giving a further assurance: "Jesus will be able to baptize with the Holy Spirit because, first, the Holy Spirit rested upon Him and remains in Him, and second, because He is the Son of God—God come to us *in the flesh*."*

We, like John, can also testify to people how Jesus has worked in our lives, and while we do not base our faith upon experience, we can share with people on a personal level the changes that God has made in our lives as we have taken Him at His Word and placed our trust in Him.

Testifying about our faith in Jesus is one reason God allows us to remain here on earth after we come to know Him—*He wants us to tell others about Him!* Testifying about Jesus—sharing Him with others—is actually a precious privilege that God has given to us, for by doing this, we are participating with Him in ministry to this world. Do not try to go through this world incognito; God does not want "secret agents," He wants "witnesses." Rest assured that, while you may not think your testimony is spectacular, there is someone God will bring into your life who is waiting to hear what you have to say; but you will never know who that person is until you make your faith in Jesus known. ■

Why Is Humility Necessary?

by Cleason Martin

Humility is the state of being humble. Webster says that to be humble means “to be lowly, not proud, or haughty or arrogant, to be meek, lacking all signs of pride or self-assertiveness.”

Pride is something God hates. “*God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*” (James 4:6).

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God promised Solomon, “If my people would humble themselves, then God would hear, heal, and forgive their sin.” If there is no humility, there is no grace, nor forgiveness.

Humility is not only required at conversion, but all through life. “*The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit*” (Psalm 34:18). This is a present-tense experience.

Humility is directly commanded by God. “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up*” (James 4:10). In Colossians 3:12, Paul reminds us, as Christians, that humbleness of mind and meekness are virtues we should put on. Prophet Micah gives three things that the Lord requires of us: “*To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God*” (Micah 6:8).

I. Examples of Humility

1. Christ, our perfect example.
2. “*Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*” (Numbers 12:3).
3. Saul, when he was made king, said, “Who am I?”
4. Solomon said, “I am but a child.”

II. Evidences of Humility

1. A child-like spirit, one who is teachable.
In Matthew 18 Jesus used a child to teach an object lesson His disciples, who were concerned about who should be the greatest.
2. A humble person will be lowly and meek

(Eph. 4:2). Humble and meek people never fall far, and only those who highly exalt themselves get the hardest tumbles. The difference between humility and humiliation is that humility is lowliness, and humiliation is wounded pride.

3. A humble person will find it easy to practice submission.
4. A humble person will not have an I-know-it-all attitude, or make it appear that they have all the answers, or insist on having the last word in a discussion or argument.
5. A humble person will not have a high opinion of himself.
6. A humble person will welcome advice and counsel from others.
7. A humble person will not elevate himself or herself to have a better-than-thou attitude.

Let us remember humility is from the inside out, not from the outside in. And according to Isaiah 57:15, God will only dwell in a humble and contrite heart. What is in our hearts—pride or humility?

Humility is a gateway to the grace of God. If there is no humility, there is also no forgiveness; thus only the humble can truly look forward to Heaven.

God always answers the prayers of the humble. “*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land*” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

God still delights in answering the prayer of the meek and lowly as we come to the throne of grace.

God rewards humility. “*By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life*” (Proverbs 22:4). ■

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Song of the Month

Douglas A. Byler, Music Editor

“... singing with understanding!”

“That Day of Wrath”



by Scott/Read

Lyrics: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). The subject of the Judgment Day (and the endtimes in general) is one of those somewhat polarizing topics that people tend to either ignore or overemphasize. Some segments of Christianity make the Judgment Day their primary focus. They spend so much time trying to figure out when it will occur and convincing others of their viewpoints that they have little time for the ongoing work of God in the “here and now.” The tendency of this mindset is to work hard to get people “saved,” and then ignore the ongoing sanctification and spiritual growth of believers.

The opposite extreme is present in much of today’s liberal Christianity. Not only is the Judgment Day an impolite thing to talk about, but the wide acceptance of the theory of evolution has made a cataclysmic end of the world seem somewhat improbable. The Apostle Peter predicted this when he wrote that men would say, “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as [they were] from the beginning of the

creation” (2 Peter 3:4)

This month’s hymn “That Day of Wrath” is a call to think for a moment about “That Day.” The text describes the day in a nutshell, and asks one important question: “What power shall be the sinner’s stay?” The last line answers the question: “Be Thou, O Christ, the sinner’s stay / Tho’ heav’n and earth shall pass away.”

The text for this hymn is translated and condensed from a much longer (19 verses) and older (13th century) Latin hymn, the “Dies Irae” (pronounced “dee-es i-ray,” with a short “I” sound). Originally taken from Zephaniah, this hymn is believed to have been written by Thomas of Celano, although there are differing opinions on the authorship. It was part of the liturgical canon until 1962, when the Catholic Consilium voted to remove it because of its “negative spirituality.”¹

Music: The tune that was originally associated with the Latin text of this hymn (shown here with the Latin text) has become quite famous in its own right. It is very typical of the Gregorian Chant of this time period, and is often used by music educators as an example of this style. It has even found its way into several famous pieces of classical music. Since the “Dies Irae” is typically

That Day of Wrath

WINDHAM L.M.

THOMAS OF CELANO, 13TH CENTURY
Dies irae, dies illa
 Tr. WALTER SCOTT, 1805

DANIEL READ, 1785

1 That day of wrath, that dread-ful day, When heav'n and earth shall pass a - way!
 2 When, shriv'-ling like a parch-ed scroll, The flam-ing heav'ns to - geth-er roll,
 3 O on that day, that wrath-ful day, When man to judg-ment wakes from clay,

What power shall be the sin-ner's stay? How shall he meet that dread-ful day?
 And loud-er yet, and yet more dread, Swells the high trump that wakes the dead?
 Be Thou, O Christ, the sin-ner's stay, Tho' heav'n and earth shall pass a-way. A-men.

sung at funerals, this tune has become the universal musical symbol for death.

The tune printed with the English text, "Windham," is also an effective tune for this text, and has much the same character as the original chant. It would have *very* much the same character as the original if one were to remove

the rhythmic variation from the tune, and sing all the notes as quarters instead of halves. It would give it much more of the somber, chant-like feeling that is characteristic of the older, Latin version. Try it sometime!

1. Wikipedia.org

Di-es i-rae, di-es il-la, Sol-vet sae-clum in-fa-vil-la: Tes-te Da-vid cum Sy-bil-la.



"Try Jesus! If you don't like Him,
 the devil will take you back."

Why God Foretells

by John Mark Weaver

I was just joking. I didn't mean anything by what I said."

Did God say that? No, indeed! Such words are in man's domain, for the Creator gives no idle words. There are no chapters in God's Word to fill space, nor is His message to us in legalese, although language and translation limitations can make it harder for us to grasp certain passages. After all, no human language can fully portray an awesome God and His ways.

Everything God tells us is for a purpose, with the overall purpose being redemption. The Redeemer does all He can, short of making our decisions, to woo us to Himself. Even His foretelling is to call us to Himself.

While the goal of prophecy is redemption, we could name many more specific reasons for it. I have chosen to highlight three main points.

First, God foretells to warn and to give hope.

Jeremiah was given divine direction to purchase land at the same time he was given a message of destruction (Jeremiah 32). Why buy land when the city is under siege? In essence, the message was "judgment now, but Israel is not finished." Such was a recurring theme from the Old Testament prophets.

How often were they told what would happen if they rebelled, and yet, when the judgment came, the Lord still gave them a message of hope. The messages to the churches in Revelation also have judgment and hope intertwined, but without the national aspect given to Israel.

In 1945, just a few days after delivering the atomic bomb destined for Hiroshima, the USS Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine. Due to the secrecy surrounding the ship's movements, the sailors

were not missed and spent five days floating and dying on the ocean before they were sighted. The captain of the rescue ship pondered how to help the dying sailors as he had several hours of sailing to reach them. He thought, "What better thing can I offer them than hope?" As it was night, he used the ship's powerful searchlight, which was a very dangerous act in waters where enemy submarines roamed. The beam, shining through the hopeless darkness, told the drifting sailors, "We are coming. There is hope."

Likewise, God beams His searchlight of hope from the future back to us, "Hang on. Deliverance is sure and near." Hope keeps us going on the right road. "*And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure*" (1 John 3:3).

After our first parents sinned, God not only pronounced judgment, but also offered a remedy for sin.

Research the prophecies concerning Jesus' first coming and their fulfillment. Did most of the predictions come to pass? What was the Creator's average? If only *most* of the prophecies came true we are in real trouble, for then how do we know which unfulfilled promises or prophecies will or will not be completed? There is no room for error with God, or obviously we would have to say He is a liar.

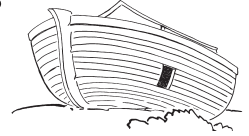
God's judgment and salvation are sure, for every detail prophesied of Christ's first coming was fulfilled completely in detail.

Second, God foretells to "distinguish Himself from the competition."

With God, no competition can threaten His throne, as in the business world, where competitors force a company to fight for survival, but, with man, the devil offers all sorts of religions, gods, and counterfeits



Beginning Issues



What Does Scripture Really Say?

by John Mullett

The authority of Scripture is a subject core to this column's intent and it's been mentioned frequently as a result. I'd like to touch on it again, but from a little different angle. Let's begin by asking ourselves a few questions. Does Scripture say what we think it says? Have you ever found yourself surprised when reading a passage and realized it doesn't actually read as you thought it did? Perhaps it *said* something other than what you expected or maybe it *didn't say* what you previously thought. I've been surprised on more than one occasion when I went to Scripture to *verify my thoughts*, only to discover it wasn't worded quite the way I remembered! Sometimes it's even been the content of some of the more familiar passages that surprised me.

Once we think we know what a passage says, it becomes very difficult to read the text in any other "light" other than what we already believe, making it easy to overlook precise wording and meaning, not to mention broader context. I don't intend to make this an article addressing hermeneutics, but it does intersect with the subject. It is important that when we read Scripture that we are reading it exegetically (read out of) and not eisegetically (read into). When I'm understanding Scripture based on what I thought it meant (affected by preconceived ideas), my interpretation very quickly becomes susceptible of being based on eisegesis. This should remind us to always

approach Scripture with the greatest of care. Our goal should be to understand the writer's AIM, as Tim Chaffey of AIG puts it. I'll let him explain in his own words: "In other words, exegesis is finding the AIM (Author's Intended Meaning) of the passage because **its true meaning is determined by the sender of the message, not the recipient**" (emphasis mine).¹

Here is an example of a familiar passage that may surprise you in what it actually says. Raise your hand if you know what message the angels sang the night Jesus was born. They did sing, didn't they? A number of our well-known Christmas hymns proclaim how they sang and bent near . . . to touch their harps of gold. Many titles including, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing" and "Do You Know the Song the Angels Sang" proclaim the fact that the angels sang that night. What you won't find though is one single reference in the Bible that explicitly says they sang anything. The passage that probably jumps to our minds most commonly is Luke 2:10-14, but I encourage you to read it for yourselves and see what it really says. Now please understand, this is not a diatribe to declare war on any song or idea that suggests the angels sang on that night (or any other night), but just an illustration of how easy it is to assume the Scriptures say something other than what they actually say.

(continued on page 27)

How to Get Assurance

(Part 1)

by B. Charles Hostetter

I. YOU CAN KNOW

In a cemetery near New York City is a very unusual tombstone. This stone is very plain with only one word, "Forgiven," on it. This grave, although marked, has no name, eulogy, date of birth, or death.

What finer testimony could anyone leave! To be forgiven of one's sins and to have peace with God is the highest possible achievement on earth. The Lord has made it possible for us to be saved and to know it. He has provided eternal life for all who will accept it. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

A large group of church members today have no confident proof that they are saved. They try to convince themselves that all is well, but many times they are uncertain and fearful about it. When you ask Mr. Average Church Member if he is saved, you often get a blank stare, a shrug of the shoulder with the words, "I'm not sure, I hope I am." Or he may talk about his good deeds, as if they prove that he is saved. Spiritual counselors find that the lack of assurance of salvation is the most common problem of those seeking spiritual help. Are you sure that you are saved? On what grounds does a person get God's forgiveness and assurance that he has eternal life?

Many people claim to be saved, but have a false basis for their confidence. Others are fearful and worried about their relationship to God when they need not be. They lack assurance because they are using a wrong measuring stick. It is easy to understand why one will get an incorrect answer if he judges from a false standard.

Knowing the character and work of Satan, we would expect him to make every

effort to give the unsaved a feeling of security in their sins. Likewise, he works on Christians, trying to give them doubts, fears, and insecurity. It's his dirty business. We are not surprised that those living in sin are not worrying about the judgment of God. The devil has blinded them to the truth and calloused their consciences. So don't be shocked when a sinner says he feels that he will probably get to Heaven, since no one is perfect and we all have our weaknesses. Neither need one be too alarmed when he finds conscientious Christians who have periods of concerns and doubts about their salvation. Satan works overtime to discourage and upset the righteous. The Bible warns, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12).

Always be certain that God is deeply concerned about you. He longs to save you and give you a guarantee for it. God's provision of salvation covers all mankind. Irrespective of one's past sins or his sex, age, nationality, position, or condition, God's grace can reach him, if he comes to God in His appointed way. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Christ's all-inclusive declaration says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Christianity differs from all other religions in the world on the doctrine of assurance of salvation. Only the Christian religion has a guarantee of Heaven for its true followers while they are still living. God says in His book, the Bible, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

There are some people who think that one can never be sure he is saved. They feel that one is boasting or presuming if he claims it. They say man is too sinful, unstable, and ignorant, and God too holy, mysterious, and exacting for man to make such claims. They classify Christian assurance as a false doctrine because they have their theology twisted. They minimize the grace of God and magnify the works of man in their theory of salvation. No one will ever feel secure by looking at himself and his accomplishments. The Bible says, "But when the kindness of God our Saviour and his love toward man appeared, he saved us—not by virtue of any moral achievements of ours, but by the cleansing power of a new birth and the moral renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he gave us so generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:4-6).¹

To say we cannot be saved and know it makes God responsible for a terrible system. Then one would have to gamble with eternity all through life. He would have to leave this world with fear and trembling, not knowing whether he would wake up in God's presence or in the judgment of Hell. With such an arrangement no one could ever really enjoy life or relax. He would never be quite sure where he would spend eternity. Such uncertainty would be a kill-joy in life. It is inconsistent with the nature of God as revealed in Christ and the Bible to keep man in such a dilemma. The suspense could be demoralizing.

Suppose you hired a man to work for you, but you wouldn't outline his job or tell him the rules of your organization. Yet you would tell him that if he didn't do his work properly or broke the rules, he would be dismissed. One couldn't be happy working under such circumstances and likely no one would take a job with these provisions.

However, the person who says one can't know that he is saved, makes God the author of a similar unfair program. He is saying that God has a plan whereby man can be saved, but He won't reveal it. Therefore, man must do what he thinks is right and hope he is

lucky enough to have stumbled onto the right combination. But he won't find out for sure until after he dies. Many Scriptures tell us that eternal life or salvation is a present experience, not something that begins when we die. If you meet God's conditions, you can be saved and know it this very moment. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life" (John 3:36). It's a present possession. Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). How plainly Jesus tells us that the moment we accept Him as our personal Saviour, we have been given eternal life!

Did you ever get the impact of that little word *now* in Romans 8:1? "There is therefore *now no condemnation* to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." It says that the experience of *no condemnation* before God can be enjoyed *now!* The Apostle Paul says further, "Therefore being justified by faith, we *have* peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). God "*hath* delivered us from the power of darkness, and *hath* translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). These blessings are in the present tense. Right now every true Christian is a part of Christ's kingdom and he has *no condemnation*. What a blessed experience, and he can enjoy it now!

Peter told the seeking Cornelius that "whosoever believeth in him [Jesus] shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). And Paul preaching at Antioch said, "Through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are *justified from all things*" (Acts 13:38b, 39a). These servants of God tell us that in this life we are already acquitted through Christ.

The Bible gives us another blessed assurance when it says, "Now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:2). In other words, we can enjoy here and now the blessings of having a heavenly Father. Those who are born again by the divine Spirit, immediately are adopted into God's family. The Scriptures

1. From *The New Testament in Modern English*, © J. B. Phillips, 1958. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company and Geoffrey Bles, Ltd. Other quotations from this work are indicated by the author's name.

tell us, "You did not receive the spirit of a slave, to make you fear. But you have received the spirit of a son of God. That is why we cry, 'Father, dear Father.' The Spirit of God is bearing witness with our spirits that *we are* children of God. If we are God's children we are also to be God's heirs" (Romans 8:15-17).²

A good earthly father would naturally warn his child who is in danger. And certainly God, a more concerned heavenly Father, would try to guard His children from the way that leads to eternal judgment. Characteristics of Jehovah God—love, mercy, and goodness—naturally make Him do this. Jesus said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:11).

God's people in the Bible were not living in fear of their eternal destiny but had calm assurance. They did not doubt the reality of their own spiritual experience. David said, "The LORD *is my* shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). Paul said: "For to me . . . to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1). The guarantee of their relationship with God gave them full assurance of eternal life.

II. YOU SHOULD KNOW

Have you ever had the experience of driving your car on a foggy night when the roads were icy? It is nerve-racking and fatiguing. One must strain to see and then he often sees dangers that are only optical illusions. He is constantly keyed up to meet the unexpected, and the continuous risks put him on edge. Few experiences are more exhausting. Usually we arrive safely, but worn-out.

Driving on icy roads in a fog is only done in rare emergencies. How pleasant, enjoyable, and relaxing it is to drive one's car

when the sun is shining, the roads are well marked and dry, the car is working well, and one is not meeting a close deadline! Traveling under such conditions is delightful, and one feels secure.

Many Christians traveling on their journey to Heaven never really enjoy it. Much of the time they are fearful, insecure, and frustrated. Instead of their Christian life being one of joy and satisfaction with assurance of faith, they seem to be traveling on icy roads through a fog. How unfortunate!

God wants a Christian to know that he is saved. Assurance is essential for a healthy Christian life. Thomas Boston put it this way, "Assurance is not necessary for the being of a Christian, but it is necessary to the well-being of a Christian." Those who don't know for sure that they are children of God are missing some of God's choicest blessings. They cannot really enjoy life until they are sure of their standing with God.

Every saved person should know he is forgiven and has eternal life, because first, he needs assurance of salvation to take away his fear of death which come at any moment. He needs confidence to face this experience. Even though a Christian can't resist or avoid death, yet by faith he is unafraid of it. Knowing that Jesus Christ died and paid for his sins and rose again for his justification, the Christian can say that for him death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

C. H. Spurgeon tells about a Swiss martyr who was about to be burned at the stake. His executioner expressed sorrow that he had to burn him. Then the martyr invited the executioner to put his ear close against his heart. "Hear how it beats," he said. "Am I not more calm than you are?" He who had to put him to death confessed that it was his heart that was fluttering; but the child of God, even between the jaws of death, was calm.

The Apostle Paul also faced death without alarm. He said, "I am now ready to be

2. Frank C. Laubach, *The Inspired Letters in Clearest English*. ©1956 by Thomas Nelson & Sons, New York, N.Y. Used by permission.

offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Timothy 4:6, 8a).

Some years ago an old lady left Buffalo, New York, by boat to visit her daughter in Cleveland, Ohio. The ship encountered such a terrible storm that the passengers were afraid for their lives. But through it all, the old lady was calm and relaxed.

After the storm had subsided, many of the passengers asked her how she managed to stay so calm in the great danger. Then she explained, “Well, it’s like this. I had two daughters. One died and went to Heaven; the other lives in Cleveland. When the storm arose, I wondered which daughter I might visit first—the one in Cleveland or the one in Heaven, and I was quite unconcerned as to which.” She was ready to meet either one, so she was unafraid.

The true Christian has been delivered from the bondage of fear. He has become a son of God and a joint-heir with Christ (Romans 8:15-17). It could be maddening to be uncertain about the eternal destiny of one’s soul. Therefore, God wants us to know where we stand with Him.

A second reason why a Christian ought to have assurance is that no one can really be happy if he is not sure where he is going to spend eternity. It’s miserable to be in doubt. How can you rejoice or praise God if you are staggering with doubt about the welfare of your soul? There is torment in uncertainty. Suspense with such enormous implications is extremely frustrating.

Assurance gives one peace of mind and rest of heart. And it’s clear from the Bible that God wants us to have these in order to enjoy time and to anticipate eternity. Jesus said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

Some years ago a man took a trip to Europe. Since he was poor, he decided not to use the ship’s dining room. He purchased a few things that would not spoil easily. Then when the others went for their meals, he stayed alone and ate his cheese and crackers.

Near the end of the trip he became very

hungry. He decided he would splurge and take one warm meal on the boat. Just then he met an officer and asked him the cost of a meal in the dining room. To his surprise the officer told him that he had paid for all his meals when he bought the ticket for the trip.

There are many people who are saved but are miserable because they don’t know it. They are like the man on the boat; they live in spiritual poverty while they are millionaires. They have a gnawing fear, when they could be enjoying assurance and many other rich spiritual blessings.

In the third place, a Christian needs assurance to give him endurance for the tests of life. All of us must go through the proving grounds occasionally. Sickness, death of a loved one, criticism, imperfections, and failures all test the reality of our faith. Such tests can uproot and rob a man of his peace and joy if he doesn’t have Christian assurance.

When a person is sure of his relationship to God, he does not lose his moorings during testing experiences. Rather he says confidently, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). Latimer said, “When I sit alone, and can have a settled assurance of the state of my soul, and know that God is mine, I can laugh at all troubles, and nothing can daunt me.”

Our fourth reason for needing God’s guarantee of eternal life is that it gives power and confidence in the hour of temptation. Assurance is essential for victorious living. The Bible says that assured faith is a shield whereby we are able to stop all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Ephesians 6:16).

One writer says, “From a national standpoint, all the army of Israel belonged to God the day Goliath challenged them, but there was only one who had the assurance in his soul that God would be with him. David dared to assert his position as a child of the Lord, and he went out against the giant in the name of the God of Israel.” Assurance makes a man bold to stand his ground in a spiritual conflict. A person who has doubts about his salvation is an easy mark for Satan. Since he questions his relationship

to God anyway, he may yield to the pressure. To live a triumphant and victorious life, one must know that he is saved.

Assurance of salvation is a must, in the fifth place, if one is to serve the Lord. No one can effectively witness for Christ until he knows he has passed from death unto life. Billy Graham says, "At the turn of the century, Professor Starbuck, who was known as a leading thinker in the field of psychology, observed that Christian workers generally were recruited from the ranks of those who had had a vital experience of conversion."

It's obvious that no one can effectively witness to anything that he has not experienced himself. A salesman who is hesitant and unsure about his product doesn't sell much. No one can effectively represent Jesus Christ and eternal life if he is not sure he possesses them. Neither can he forthrightly and enthusiastically present the plan of salvation if he does not have assurance in his own heart. One man says, "What we say about Christ's saving power never carries conviction unless, like Paul, we can preach with all confidence." Herbert Lockyer says, "Faith will make us walk, but assurance will make us run."

Finally, a Christian needs assurance of salvation so that he can attest and confirm the Gospel as truth. When a man is sure he is saved, he has proof that God's spiritual kingdom is real. One can find no better way to answer false teachers and skeptics than to validate the Gospel by his own life and testimony.

When a person is confident that he is a child of God, his life and the Christ that he represents have an urgent appeal. But when we don't demonstrate what we say and only halfheartedly accept the claims of the Gospel, we help defeat the cause of Christ. If we are uncertain about the reality of eternal life in Christ, we are implying that the Christian church has overstated the blessings, promises, and truths of the Gospel. Men are looking for something positive and real. They want evidence of a Christ who meets their needs. They are not searching the Bible or books to find theory, but observing men and their claims to find proof.

We can readily see how important it is that every true Christian should have God's guarantee of eternal life. Almost everything else in the Christian life depends upon it. Spiritual vitality, happiness, power, victory, and effective Christian service are bound up with the doctrine of assurance. Findlay says, "It was this confidence of present salvation that made the [early] church irresistible."

The Apostle John outlines the plan of salvation beautifully. Test your experience by it. "God has given men eternal life and this real life is to be found only in his Son. It follows naturally that any man who has genuine contact with Christ has this life; and if he has not, then he does not possess this life at all. I have written like this to you who already believe in the name of God's Son so that you may be quite sure that, here and now, you possess eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13, J. B. Phillips). Thank God we can be saved and know it!

III. WHY SOME DON'T KNOW

She was blind and past her ninetieth birthday. As her pastor, I was making one of my regular visits to this dear lady. On this occasion she sensed that we were alone. Her daughter-in-law had gone to another part of the house.

"Are we alone now?" the blind old lady asked, in a half whisper.

I said, "Yes."

Then she opened up her heart and told me that she wasn't sure she was saved. For years she had felt insecure about her salvation. It was a real thrill to help her and to see her expression of confidence as the light of truth dawned upon her.

This sweet old lady with her doubts is typical of many people in our churches today. Finding assurance seems to be a difficulty for both old and young. In fact, a Christian businessman came to see me just as I was writing this. His problem basically was that he was not quite sure where he stood with God.

Why is this such a universal problem when salvation is a gift from God and offered to everyone? The Bible says, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus

Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Surely everyone knows how to accept a gift. Why then are there so many church members who lack assurance of salvation? Here are some reasons.

First, many church members don’t know where they stand with God because they are indulging in sin. Scriptures nowhere support the idea that a person can continue to practice known sin and still be saved. Whether one is a church member or not, whether one is baptized or not, whether one practices the Golden Rule or not, he cannot get peace in his heart if he willingly continues to sin. The Lord told Joseph and Mary, “Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In other words, Jesus was sent to save us out of our sinful ways. The Bible is clear from beginning to end that without peace and holiness no man shall see the Lord.

This does not mean that a person must be faultless before he gets assurance. A saved person does not gain ultimate perfection in his life. But there is a vast difference between the one who deliberately and with desire practices sin, and the one who is caught off guard, or through ignorance or thoughtlessness commits a sin. The Bible says, “The man who lives ‘in Christ’ does not habitually sin. But the man whose life is habitually sinful is spiritually a son of the devil” (1 John 3:6, 8, J. B. Phillips).

How clear! No one has a right to say or to feel that he is on his way to Heaven if he continues to practice sin or if he covers up past sins. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). This clearly tells us that forgiveness and cleansing are based upon confession and repentance. Naturally Satan, the father of lies, would have us believe otherwise.

A second reason why many feel insecure about their salvation is because some spiritual leaders have been intolerant of other viewpoints and quite self-righteous in their own position. These leaders are biased and prejudiced. In teaching the Scriptures they imply that those who disagree with them or who hold to a different viewpoint are lost.

Then often those under the influence and ministry of such men meet people who have different Biblical interpretations, yet are spiritual, Christlike, have a ringing testimony, and assurance of salvation. This, then, confuses them, and they become shaky about their own standing with the Lord. Their findings are different from what they have been taught with dogmatic certainty. So into a fog they go.

I am convinced that many times these spiritual leaders are teaching their point of view honestly. And we should be persons of deep conviction and have certainty about our faith. But let us always be humble and tolerant. No one has the last word or has arrived at the ultimate. We can all learn and grow. Therefore, a wise leader should teach that each one of us must be true to *his* understanding of the Scriptures. We should leave the judging of others to God and always remember that *we* can improve, be enlightened, and find new truth. The Bible says that now we know in part, now we see through a glass darkly. We should, therefore, refrain from being dogmatic and intolerant. Such a spirit often creates problems for us later on, as well as for those who trust us.

Jesus had to correct this same spirit in some of His disciples. On one occasion John said, “Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49, 50). At another time because the people didn’t respond to them as they thought they should, James and John said, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he [Jesus] turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of” (Luke 9:54, 55).

In the third place, some leaders destroy peace and assurance in their members because they insist that only those of their group are saved. They imply that they are the only true church. In great demonstration and oratory they use a few Scriptures to the exclusion of many others to support their position.

When a person from childhood has been

so trained and taught, it becomes a part of him. I know some parents who would rather that their children should die without becoming a member of any church if they refuse to join the one of which they are members. Such self-righteous positions often lead to confusion, despair, and doubt to those who see God working in and through people of other persuasions.

The answer is not to have all people in one denomination. We are too different in our training, background, personalities, and convictions to accomplish this in our day. There is something good about differing points of view. It keeps one examining his position, praying for light, studying the Scriptures, and sharing his convictions. This causes growth. Monopoly always deteriorates in time. It encourage complacency, stagnation, and blindness to facts. Therefore, I don't find fault with the system of denominations, but rather with bigoted and unChristlike methods often used in their promotion.

A loving spirit produces kindness, thoughtfulness, and humility, and not pride and self-righteousness. The Bible says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."

Finally, let me say that some people never get assurance of salvation because they have been taught that it is a false doctrine. They believe that one can never really know his standing with God until he dies. Such persons never expect to find out in this world where they will spend eternity. Their faith never gets beyond, "I hope I'll make it."

I am convinced that God does want us to know our spiritual standing. The Bible says, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13). How clear and positive assurance of salvation is taught here!

Christ died for our sins and thereby provided salvation. When we yield our lives to Him and repent of our sins, we have met the conditions upon which a holy God can give us eternal life. The Bible says, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9, 10).

To be continued in next issue

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Counseling From the Word

Biblical Counseling and Accountability

by Jeremy Lelek

Sin has again reared its evil head among well-known evangelicals, this time in the form of spousal abuse and divorce. Last week, news articles revealed the tragic episode that transpired outside of an Atlanta hotel in which highly revered minister Juanita Bynum was brutally attacked by her husband Bishop Thomas Weeks. Adding to the mayhem, renowned televangelists Randy and Paula White announced they are now engaged in divorce proceedings that will end a marital covenant of 17 years. As these travesties unfold, the Church would do well to remember several key elements when addressing such sin and pain within the members of its own Body.

Churches must form a Biblical structure of church government to which all pastors and ministers are subject. Overseers and elders should courageously govern over all matters of unrepentant sin (i.e., spousal abuse and potential divorce) among those within their congregations (1 Timothy 3; Matthew 18:17). For the abused woman, such a structure may offer solitude and comfort as men of God (the elders) confront an abusive husband, and provide proper counsel, support, and instruction to her regarding safety and the necessity of godly rebuke towards her spouse (Luke 17:3). Often, abused women are afraid and ashamed to speak up on these matters because the church has failed in its function of offering such refuge. Addi-

tionally, the elders must boldly call the abusive husband to repentance, and offer adequate and appropriate discipleship, discipline, and oversight in the process. The same structure is warranted regarding issues of marital conflict and divorce.

Churches must not fear following through with appropriate church discipline when necessary. Church discipline is not a punishment for being bad, it is a God-ordained measure to encourage repentance among the brethren. Failure in this area is a failure to “love thy neighbour” (Matthew 19:19). The Apostle Paul found rebuking others to be a difficult process (2 Corinthians 7:8). However, his love for his brothers and sisters and desiring to see them repentant before God motivated him to overcome this difficulty (2 Corinthians 7:9). Churches over which “larger-than-life” personalities preside (i.e., televangelists) should not be afraid to confront (in love) those individuals with godly rebuke and discipline when necessary. Conversely, such “leaders” should always function under the authority of a governing Church body.

Christians must always remember Christ in their midst. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” This is not a passage referring to a small group gathered during a worship service. In context, it refers to Biblical confrontation. Following Jesus’