

The *Banner* of Sovereign Grace Truth

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the Water**

Virtue that Counts

Marriages Made on Earth

**A Middle Easterner's
Perspective on the
War in Iraq**

A Periodical for Young and Old

THE BANNER OF
SOVEREIGN GRACE TRUTH

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“Family life is a school for character.”

— Martin Luther



What Will You Harvest?

“Neither say they in their heart,
Let us now fear the Lord our God.”

—Jeremiah 5:24

Harvest season is real in Zambia, where we live. Nearly every person, high and low, has a crop to reap. People look happy as they shoulder their burdens. It's very much like Israel in the Old Testament: workers cut the stocks by hand and carry the harvest with ox-driven carts to a grass-made barn.

In Israel, harvest season was a time of happiness. Deuteronomy 16 describes the three main feasts of Israel, of which the Feast of Weeks was a celebration of the firstfruits of the land (vv. 9–12). This foreshadowed the spiritual harvest that the Lord Jesus would reap and which was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). So years after the Holy Spirit started to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, I found myself considering Jeremiah 5:24 among my Zambian friends in harvest season.

What happens in Jeremiah 5? We picture the prophet entering the circle of celebration: harvest is here! “Hear now, o foolish people,” Jeremiah cries out (v. 21). The throng of happy people becomes uncomfortable. “Why does this prophet say this to spoil our party?” Let us listen further as the prophet speaks. In short, his message contains three parts.

First, he confronts the people's sin of not fearing the Lord. He has shown His power in creation (v. 22) and His kindness in their abundant harvest (v. 24), but they do not say “in their heart, Let us fear the LORD our God.” He gave them the early rain to make the seed to sprout and the latter rain to mature the crop; He allowed them the joy of harvest. Yet, they have not committed themselves to obey and love the Lord their God. They have not repented and promised to fear Him. God gave harvest, yet they haven't responded to the heart that gave it. The Lord sends Jeremiah to expose the sin of ungratefulness.

He also teaches them the consequences of sin. The noise of their harvest celebration drowned out the threatening sound of the approaching enemy army (v. 15), but with worried face Jeremiah opposes the crowd: “Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withholden good things from

you” (v. 25). He needs to warn them; the harvest is no proof that peace and comfort will continue. God has already decided to withhold His blessings from them—or, in terms of their own responsibility, they have turned them away by their own sin! And they needed to be told so by the prophet.

Did the party grow quiet after Jeremiah's solemn words? Still the Lord's message burns in his heart: “Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD; shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?” (v. 29). Judgment needed to come. The heart of the prophet pained him to speak such words. What greater punishment can befall God's people than God withdrawing from them? “On such a nation as this....” What kind of nation have My people become!

The application is clear. Many think like Israel: “Harvest means blessing; blessing equals divine favor.” Our full stomachs easily cover an empty heart. The filled storeroom easily disguises spiritual poverty. Is this only true in Israel long ago, or also in Zambia, far away? In North America, July and August are traditionally harvest months. It is good to enjoy the blessings God gives us. Today the Lord sends His prophet Jeremiah to us, and what does he say?

Has the goodness of the Lord led you to repentance (Rom. 2:4)? Have you purposed in your heart to fear the Lord? Has His kindness and patience moved you to love and obey Him? Our lives can prosper so much that the temporal blessings quench our thirst for the eternal. Have you harvested spiritually? Have you opened your barns to receive what God wants to give you in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3)? What will God say of His people? Has He withdrawn because of our sin? Or do we say in our hearts, “Let us now fear the Lord our God”? If we do, we will continue to reap His blessing!

Rev. Cees Molenaar serves as president of Covenant College in Zambia.

Targeting the 35-Yarder The Open-Conscience Unbeliever

This series of articles considers various church attendees and how a minister should preach to each of them. So far we have considered various ground rules for such preaching (March issue), then considered the easiest target—a healthy believer, whether he be an infant, a young man, or a father in grace (April issue), followed by a consideration of somewhat more difficult targets—the backsliding believer and those in spiritual bondage (May-June issue). These latter groups have been compared to an archer’s 25-yard target, whereas the former are like a 15-yard target. The present article addresses a still more difficult target, designated as a 35-yarder—the unbeliever who has an open conscience.

Jesus says there is a great gulf between believers and unbelievers (Matt. 25:1–13; Luke 16:26). Consequently, a minister must discriminate in preaching, aiming to have a word in due season to both groups. As Charles Bridges writes, there is no “greater delusion for the conscience of the unconverted, or greater perplexity to the sincere but unintelligent Christian, than an indiscriminate application of the Gospel to them both in one general mass.”¹

In other words, a minister must not give the unconverted the impression that when he speaks to believers, they are included; nor, when he addresses the unconverted, should he suggest to a sincere Christian that he may not be converted after all. In either case, the minister does his hearers a great disservice.

Thomas Scott says: “This undistinguishing way of preaching is ‘casting unto the dogs’; and, I am deeply convinced, is one of the worst mistakes that a preacher can fall into; tending most directly to stupefy the conscience and harden the hearts of the ungodly, and to ‘strengthen their hands, that they should not return from their evil way’; and, in proportion, discouraging the heart of the humble, broken, contrite believer.”²

Church members can be visibly adopted

into God’s church family but still lack its experiential power. Thomas Shepard describes their adoption as “external, whereby the Lord takes a people by outward covenant and dispensation to be his sons.” Thus all the Jews were God’s first born (Ex. 4:22), and unto them belonged the adoption (Rom. 9: 4–5), Shepard explains. Their children were accounted as sons as well as saints, and holy (1 Cor. 7:14; Ezek. 16: 20–21). But many fell from this adoption, as the Jews did.³

Today, this visible adoption applies to the New Testament church. Many church members have professed the gospel, but they do not know its power. Because they are not born again, they do not possess the spirit of adoption. That is not the gospel’s fault but their own; as Manton writes, “They are strangers to the grace of the covenant under which they live, by their own negligence and folly.” Manna is spread around their tents, but they would rather starve than gather it. “The Spirit is ready, but these [people] are lazy,” Manton concludes.⁴

Such people are “under a visible administration of the covenant of grace,” Manton says. They can experience impressions of the truth, as Agrippa did in Acts 26, and conviction of sin, as did Felix (Acts 24). Christ often gives them “common



gifts which he giveth not to the heathen world: knowledge of the mysteries of godliness; abilities of utterance and speech about spiritual and heavenly things; some affection also to them, called ‘tasting of the good word, the heavenly gift, and the powers of the world to come’ (Heb. 6). But despite having these common gifts of superficial Christianity, they lack true Christianity with its special graces.⁵

The faithful minister must target such people in the following ways:

First, he must encourage the impressed but unconverted to flee to Christ immediately, just as they are with all their sins, and ask for full and free salvation. He must encourage them to give up on themselves and their own righteousness, but not to give up on God and His righteousness in Christ. He must encourage them to stop looking for salvation anywhere but in Christ and to continue using the means of grace, always looking for Christ in them.

The minister must show such people that God does not take pleasure in their death but in their repentance and eternal life in Christ (Ezek. 33:11). He must declare that God is far more willing to save them in Christ than they are willing to be saved by a gloriously rich Savior who is our complete salvation. He must point them to Jesus, who can do for them what they cannot do for themselves, declaring that He is “exalted with the right hand of God to be a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). He must set Christ forth in all His sufficiency and grandeur, declaring that He has promised—and is both able and willing—to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him (Heb. 7:25). He must tell them to ask God the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit to quicken them from spiritual death to life (Luke 11:13).

Second, he must make clear that the Holy Spirit saves sinners by convicting them of their sinful unrighteousness and leading them to salvation in the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He must clearly set forth God’s ordinary way of converting sinners, teaching his listeners that true conversion consists of a heart-felt knowledge of sin and misery outside of Christ, heartfelt deliverance in taking refuge in Jesus Christ to find all our salvation in Him, and heartfelt gratitude to God for salvation provided in Christ (Ps. 50:15; cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. 2).

In the process, the minister must make clear the difference between legal repentance and evangelical repentance, historical faith and saving faith, and common impressions and saving impressions. Otherwise unbelievers will yield to presumptive faith. He must avoid leading such people into easy belief and self-made conversions or, on the other hand, into the belief that a special supra-scriptural revelation is necessary for faith (see *Canons of Dort*, Head V, Error 5).

Third, he must warn against self-deceit. Often those who live under impressions but have never fled for refuge in Christ for salvation secretly hope that God’s providential leadings or their experiences will save them. Such people need to under-

stand that there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ. He alone is sufficient for salvation.

John Calvin warns against self-deception by the reprobate, saying self-examination is crucial.⁶ He writes: “Let us learn to examine ourselves, and to search whether those interior marks by which God distinguishes his children from strangers belong to us, viz., the living root of piety and faith.”⁷ Happily, the truly saved are delivered from self-deception through proper examination. Calvin says: “The faithful are taught to examine themselves with solicitude and humility, lest carnal security insinuate itself, instead of the assurance of faith.”⁸

In preaching the need for self-examination, we, like Calvin, must emphasize Christ. We must examine ourselves to see if we are placing our trust in *Christ alone*, for this is the fruit of genuine, biblical experience. For Calvin, self-examination is not so much “Am I *trusting* in Christ?” as it is “Am I *trusting in Christ?*”⁹ Self-examination must always direct us to Christ and His promise. It must never be done apart from the help of the Holy Spirit, who alone can shed light on Christ’s saving work in the believer’s soul. Calvin says, “If you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation.”¹⁰

Finally, the minister must warn such people of the danger of remaining members of Satan’s family inwardly while they appear to be members of God’s family outwardly. He must call them to repent and believe in Christ and trust God’s mercy for salvation and adoption. As Roger Drake says, “Art thou an alien? O never rest till thou [dost] get into a [saving] state of sonship.”¹¹

1. Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 278.

2. *Letters and Papers*, 441; cited in Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 278.

3. Thomas Shepard, *The Sincere Convert and the Sound Believer* (Ligonier, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 251.

4. *Works of Manton*, 12:116.

5. *Ibid.*

6. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.2.11 [hereafter, Inst.].

7. *Commentaries of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), on Ezek. 13:9. David Foxgrover shows that Calvin relates the need for self-examination to a great variety of topics: knowledge of God and ourselves, judgment, repentance, confession, affliction, the Lord’s Supper, providence, duty, the kingdom of God, etc. (“John Calvin’s Understanding of Conscience” [Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont, 1978], 312ff.). Cf. J. P. Pelkonen, “The Teaching of John Calvin on the Nature and Function of the Conscience,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 21 (1969):24–88.

8. Inst. 3.2.7.

9. Anthony N.S. Lane, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Assurance,” *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979):47.

10. Inst. 3.2.24.

11. Roger Drake, in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate* (Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 5:340. This and the former article are adapted from my “Transforming Power and Comfort: The Puritans on Adoption,” in *The Faith Once Delivered: Essays in Honor of Dr. Wayne R. Spear*, ed. Anthony T. Selvaggio (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2007), 63–105.

The Golden Lamp

Read Exodus 25:31–39, 27:20, and Leviticus 24:1–4

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually. Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually.”

— Leviticus 24:1–4

“Darkness, darkness, darkness. Death, death, death.” Reuben didn’t know what to say or do. For six months, his beloved priest and mentor, Elnathan, had been sinking deeper and deeper into depression. He had tried praying for him and with him. He had tried encouraging him with Messianic prophecies. He had even risked mild rebuke. He had tried to relieve him of stressful duties. He had tried everything, and still Elnathan moped around, muttering over and over, “Darkness, darkness, darkness. Death, death, death.”

Reuben was doubly worried today because it was Elnathan’s turn on the Golden Lamp rota. The Golden Lamp was the second of three pieces of furniture behind the curtain in the Tabernacle’s Holy Place—the other items being the Table of Shewbread and the Golden Altar of Incense. The Golden Lamp had to be kept burning before the Lord continually, and this was what was stressing Reuben. It was Elnathan’s turn to refill the oil to keep the lamp burning, and yet Elnathan could hardly look at the Holy Place, never mind enter it and perform his duties. And if Elnathan didn’t replenish the oil, and the Golden Lamp went out, what would happen? Would God’s judgment fall? Would God’s presence withdraw from the Tabernacle? Would Elnathan be punished?

DEEP DARKNESS

Reuben approached Elnathan’s study-tent, hoping he might find his old friend in a better frame of mind today. Surely God would give enabling grace today. But, as he opened the tent door, the sobbing sound sank his heart. Then the familiar lament: “When, oh when will the light shine again? When, oh when will life return? As the hart panteth after the water

brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where *is* thy God? Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.”

Reuben fell to the floor and lay beside his broken-souled mentor. “Elnathan, sir, please come to the Tabernacle. It’s your turn to re-fill the oil of the Golden Lamp.”

“No. I can’t do that,” answered Elnathan. “I’m not fit to do that. I am so dark inside. It’s I that needs to be re-filled and re-lit.”

“But, sir,” pled Reuben, “perhaps God will shine into your heart through the Golden Lamp. Is it not worth a try?”

“Oh Reuben, you are a godly young man. Why do you bother with such an old, unworthy sinner like me? I should be teaching and encouraging you in the faith, and instead you are teaching and encouraging me in the faith. What a state I’m in! But, you’re right. I’m not going to get light and life lying here, am I? I should do my duty. Help me up, and bring me the horn of oil.”

TWO HOURS LATER...

At last, Reuben sensed some movement. It had been ages since he had pushed Elnathan beyond the curtain and into the Holy Place to refill the Golden Lamp with oil. As the curtain was swept aside, out bounded Elnathan—a changed man! “Light, light, light! Life, life, life!” he exclaimed. “Reuben, Reuben. Wait until I tell you what I’ve just experienced. You were right. The Lord shone into my dark heart through the Golden

Lamp. Oh, but of course, you've never seen the Lamp. Let me describe it and then I'll tell you what happened.

THE LIGHTGIVER

"The Golden Lamp is about the size of a small child and is made of fine gold—about seventy-five pounds in weight. The golden base has one main stem. Halfway up this main stem, six other stems branch out, making seven stems in all. On the end of each stem are small oil bowls each filled with high-quality oil and a burning wick. Our fathers taught us that the use of fine gold in the Tabernacle usually symbolizes deity. The fact that there are seven stems and seven lights supports this, as God often uses the number 'seven' to depict perfection and completeness. This perfection and wholeness is underlined by the gold being of one piece. So, we've always believed that the Golden Lamp was a picture sermon about God, the divine Lightgiver.

"However, our gracious God revealed something more to me today. As I re-filled the oil in each cup, the Holy Place began filling with light. So I prayed, 'Lord, lift up the light of Thy countenance upon me. Shine Thy light into my dark soul. Show me Thy salvation.' Then, while gazing at the Lamp, God revealed the Messiah to my soul. He showed me that one day the Golden Lamp will come alive. The divine Lightgiver will come to this earth. And He will not only enlighten the Holy Place; He will be the inextinguishable light of the whole world! Those who follow Him will not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. He will dispel the darkness of ignorance, error, and impurity, and replace it with the light of knowledge, truth, and purity. Oh, Reuben, light, light, light!

THE LIFEGIVER

"But that's not all. As the Holy Place and my own soul brightened, I examined the Lamp more closely than ever before. And I saw that the seven branches of the Golden Lamp were decorated with intricate patterns and shapes resembling the three stages of tree-life—bud, blossom, and fruit. The main trunk (three to four feet high), the six branches, and the ornamentation all together gave the impression of a beautiful, fruit-bearing tree. Of course, my memory went back to the Tree of Life, sadly forfeited by our first parents' sin. But before I plunged into despair again, the Lord showed me that this Golden Tree also looked forward and depicted the Messiah. Reuben, the Golden Tree will come alive when the Messiah comes. He will be heavy with the bud, blossom, and fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and more. He will be a Tree of Life whose leaves will be for the healing of the nations. Reuben, He is life, life, life!"

A NEW SONG

Reuben could hardly believe the transformation in his dear friend. God had graciously blessed him with two marvellous

insights into the person and work of the Messiah, revealing Him as the Lightgiver and the Lifegiver. In doing so, He had replaced Elnathan's darkness and death with light and life. The two friends embraced and walked home praising God with a new song in their mouths: "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

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Study Questions:

1. Study Zechariah 4 and identify parallels with this passage; then consider how those parallels point to Jesus Christ.
2. What causes "darkness and death" in the life of a believer?
3. What should you do when your own soul feels dark and dead?
4. In what practical ways can Christians be lights in the world (Matt. 5:14; Eph. 4:8)?
5. How do we increase the brightness of our light (John 8:12)?
6. What does the Golden Lamp teach us about heaven (Rev. 21:23)?
7. What does oil symbolize in the Bible?
8. Jesus was filled with the Spirit without measure, and anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows (John 3:34; Heb. 1:9). What did that mean for Him in everyday life?
9. What fruits of the Spirit are still in the bud or blossom stage in your life? How can you grow them beyond that to the fruitful and useful stage?
10. Read what happened to Belshazzar in Daniel 5:5 when he mishandled the Golden Lamp (KJV: "candlestick"). What does that teach us?



LIVING BY GOD'S CALENDAR

Read James 4:13-17

Many of us have calendars or day planners. Some of them simply have lines and grids which we fill in with our plans. Some are more sophisticated; they can be set to speak out loud and alert us to a meeting at 11:00 or an appointment at 2:30. But whether or not we use a calendar, we all talk about the future. James tells us that there are two basic voices from mortal man. One says, "I will...." The other says, "If the Lord will...." The first voice is one of presumption; the second is one of faith.

"I Will"

Our attitude toward the future is a good barometer of the level of our worldliness. How does the worldly person think about the future? We can boil it down to two words: "I will." James says, "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow *we will* go ...continue...buy...sell...get gain" (v. 13). The worldly person is confident about what he will do in a future which is not his to claim.

Only God is eternal and unchangeable. He alone is without beginning and without end. And yet, mortal man speaks and thinks as if he possessed those attributes. We see this frequently in Scripture. The rich fool said, "*I will* pull down my barns and build greater" (Luke 12:18). The Babylonian king said in his heart, "*I will* ascend into heaven" (Isa. 14:13). Pharaoh said, "*I will* pursue, *I will* overtake" (Ex. 15:9). But in each case, God answered, "You will not."

When we take a closer look at James 4:13, we hear the voice of a worldly person as he speaks about the future. If we analyze his speech carefully, we notice that he makes all sorts of presumptions. He presumes:

1. That there will be a tomorrow;
2. That he will be alive and healthy today and tomorrow;
3. That he will be able to travel safely to a city where he will do business;
4. That he will be safe and healthy throughout the coming year;

5. That he will be able to acquire and sell goods;
6. That his transactions will bring him a surplus or profit.

How many of *our* calendars are summed up by the attitude portrayed in James 4:13? How many investment portfolios reflect the mentality of James 4:13? How many business forecasts could be taken straight out of James 4:13? This is the mentality that keeps our societies buzzing with excitement and energy. Success gurus tell us to think positively and envision ourselves accomplishing all the things we would like to do.

Nevertheless, it is mere presumption. Only the eternal God can speak an immutable "I will." The Lord says in Isaiah, "Yea, I have spoken *it, I will* also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it, I will* also do it" (Isa. 46:11). In fact, Scripture reveals about the Lord that He does all that He purposed to do. Let's not act as if we can be like God. Let's not imagine that we can accomplish everything that we plan.

"Ye Know Not"

James responds to this presumptive attitude with these words: "Ye know not." Man says, "Today or tomorrow, I will...." James reminds him that he doesn't know the first thing about tomorrow.

How often have we gone into a day filled with "I wills," and been stopped with the reality that we don't know the future. Some unexpected event, some surprising twist in providence, a sudden phone call, and our ignorance is exposed. We say to each other, "I never expected this to happen. I never would have thought today would have turned out like this."

Since we lost the true knowledge of God, ourselves, and this world with the fall into sin, we have been grossly ignorant of all kinds of things. We need the Spirit of God to wield the Word of God and begin to unmask our ignorance. We might not like being faced with it, but it can be beneficial. Even in an area such as planning for the future, we can be stopped in the tracks of our own planning and instead learn to rely on God's knowledge of the future.

How often have we gone into a day filled with "I wills," and been stopped with the reality that we don't know the future. Some unexpected event, some surprising twist in providence, a sudden phone call, and our ignorance is exposed. We say to each other, "I never expected this to happen. I never would have thought today would have turned out like this."

The limitation of our knowledge is closely connected with the other limitations we have as human beings. We are mortal creatures. While God is eternal, we are transient. Our life is best compared to a vapor or a cloud, which is there one day and gone the next. In the book of Ecclesiastes, this same comparison is made. There we read that all is vanity. The Hebrew word, translated "vanity," literally means "vapor." You can't clutch onto vapor and hold it. Spurgeon writes, "We cannot reckon upon the clouds, their laws are so variable, and their conditions so obscure. Such also is our life.... Why do we choose to build upon clouds, and pile our palaces on vapour, to see them melt away, as aforetime they have often melted?"

"If the Lord Will"

If we have no real knowledge of what the future might bring, does this mean that there is no use whatsoever in planning for it? Is there no place for weekly planners or retirement accounts? A cynical person might feel that way. However, Scripture does not suggest an attitude of negligence about the future. It is very explicit about what we must do: "For that ye ought to say, If the LORD will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15). Here James shows us the proper and necessary attitude of the Christian.

It is still common in our circles to use the acronym "D.V." behind dates of planned activities. This, of course, stands for the Latin "*Deo Volente*" (the Lord willing). When used meaningfully, it expresses the thought that our plans are contingent upon the permission and blessing of the Lord. Some do not care for this acronym. Spurgeon, for one, wrote, "You know, it is a fine thing when you can put your religion into Latin, and make it very short. Then nobody knows what you mean by it; or, if they do, they can praise your scholarship, and admire your humility." His point is well-taken. We do not fulfill the intent of James 4:15 simply by using

the letters behind events we plan. How then must we fulfill James 4:15? What do we actually mean when we meaningfully use "D.V." in the right spirit?

We must *cancel out our own will* in the sense that we no longer presume upon it. Our own will is unable to perform the least thing when God's providence forbids it.

We must *submit ourselves to the will of God*. His will determines every circumstance of our lives. We must be content with what He wills for us. Remember, His will is perfect (Rom. 12:2)!

We must *obey His revealed will* as we find it in Scripture. We can only rightly do this through faith in Jesus. He did not seek His own will, but the will of His Father who had sent Him (see John 5:30).

We should *adore Him as God*. Aren't His decrees and the power with which He carries them out worthy of our praise and admiration?

We must *cherish each moment of life* as a gift of God. Life is not the sum of the actions we perform or the gains we make. James 4:15 says, "If the Lord will, *we shall live, and do.*" It is as if God is saying that our life itself has value, apart from anything we do. This thought should lead us to appreciate each day as He gives it to us.

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Study Questions:

1. Find other passages in the Bible that speak about life as transient and vaporous.
2. How can "God willing" become more than just words?
3. How can we show submission to the will of God? Suggest some practical attitudes or actions.
4. Read Jacob's words in Genesis 28:20-21. How do they mesh with James 4:15?
5. Why is it sometimes so hard to submit to God's will as it is revealed in the providences of our lives?

Virtue That Counts

Justification by faith alone is our defining doctrine

Evangelicals who visit Rome cannot help but enjoy the stately buildings and stirring sense of history. A few like it so much they never leave. Such is the case with Francis Beckwith, former president of the Evangelical Theological Society. Several months ago, the Baylor University philosopher rejoined the Roman Catholic Church.

Such defections always provoke a little evangelical soul-searching—in this case, about the classic doctrine of justification. Beckwith found the Protestant view, which assumes that sanctification follows justification, inadequate.

“As an evangelical, even when I talked about sanctification and wanted to practice it, it seemed as if I didn’t have a good enough incentive to do so,” Beckwith told *Christianity Today*. “Now [in Catholicism] there’s a kind of theological framework, and it doesn’t say my salvation depends on me, but it says my virtue counts for something.”

In describing his confusion, Beckwith has done us a favor, giving us an opportunity to explore a question that frankly many Christians ask: Why be good?

Justification by faith, which gives us assurance of our standing before God, is not just a pastoral doctrine. It goes to the very core of our theological tradition. Martin Luther described it as the “first and chief article” of Protestantism “on which the church stands or falls.”

So what is this “first and chief article of Protestantism?” Scripturally, it goes like this: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Alienated from God, hostile in mind, we practice evil behavior (Col. 1:21). Though we offend His perfect holiness, God acquits those who trust in Him and in what He has done for us through Christ: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Theologically, we understand it like this: In His perfect life and obedient death, Jesus succeeded where Adam failed and became the head of God’s new family. We belong to Christ; we belong to this new humanity. Christ is judged righteous, and we who believe have been made alive in Him.

The late medieval church framed its understanding of God’s grace in terms of merit: personal merit was never enough, and the infinite merits of Christ were available only through the sacramental channels of the church. Luther and the other Reformers used Paul to challenge the church monopoly on merit. They rightly taught that only Jesus’ merit counted before God and that only through faith could His merit be ours. God credits Jesus’ righteousness to those who trust in Him, declaring them just and acquitting them of their sins.

Such a radical idea has caused many to think: “This is too good to be true. Surely I must contribute something to the

process.” But we contribute nothing. We don’t even contribute faith. With God’s gift of faith, we paradoxically deny the meritorious nature of human action and affirm the work of Another. It is not faith in faith, but faith in Christ.

Thus, Protestants have agreed: We have peace with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Another question that has troubled Christians since the days of Paul is this: “Why bother to be good when it seems to make no difference to our salvation?”

Paul has little patience for such an attitude, partly because it displays a fundamental misunderstanding of what happens in justification. It is not only about getting rid of personal guilt; it is also about taking on a new corporate identity. “How shall we, that are dead to sin,” Paul says, “live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:2). We have been baptized into Christ’s death; shouldn’t we live with Him in resurrection life? As members of His new humanity, shouldn’t we live like it? Paul’s conclusion: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12).

Simply put, those who are truly justified will lead lives of holiness, knowing with Paul that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Sadly, many in our churches have sold the extraordinary gift of justification for the pottage of therapeutic religion. Rather than finding assurance in Christ, some assure themselves they have done nothing so bad as to deserve condemnation. Even worse, others flaunt their freedom, abusing the truth that Jesus covers a multitude of sins. Paul said this of people who accused him of teaching that we should sin to bring more grace: “Whose damnation is just” (Rom. 3:8).

Such attitudes do not exemplify trust in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who treats holiness with deathly seriousness. They turn the old notions of merit on their heads, treating a priceless gift—Jesus’ righteousness—as if it had no value.

The Bible says this type of faith—faith without good works—is as good as no faith at all. It’s as dead and meaningless as the selling of indulgences.

So, Professor Beckwith, virtue does count for Protestants: it signals our understanding that Christ’s virtue counts for everything, and that any good the Holy Spirit enables us to do is but a grateful response to God’s gift of justification.

When the church gets that, it gets our “first and chief” message, a message that still turns people’s worlds upside down.

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God's Mysterious Will

Providence, like Hebrew, can only be read backwards.

An encounter with a friend from my teen-age years reminded me of the wise and pithy words of the Puritan writer John Flavel: "The providence of God is like Hebrew words—it can be read only backwards." I was leaving a restaurant in my native town in Scotland one day and there was my friend being helped along by his elderly mother. His condition was just as someone had hinted to me. His had been one of those active, energized, intense spirits; but now his powers had been wasted by a serious car accident.

To my intense delight he recognized me, and for a moment the old energy seemed to surge into his being. Just as quickly it subsided, like a light bulb fusing in the moment of illumination. It was as though the sight of a friend from the past had deceptively invigorated him, only to remind him immediately of his terrible infirmity.

His gesticulations had always been one of his chief characteristics. Now the look in his eyes, the movements of his hands and body all created a wistful melody in the minor key. He was the one who had given me the first Christian books that ever made a real impression on me; who had poured out his own life-energy to befriend me and teach me.

Of this, and other experiences in life, I have sometimes thought, "It just does not seem to make sense." At such times, Flavel's words have often comforted me, and helped me to readjust my myopic spiritual perspective. They have reminded me to fix my mind and heart on God's wise, gracious, and sovereign rule, and on the assurance that He works everything together for His children's good, so that I do not inquire too proudly into why I cannot understand His sovereign purposes.

Of course one occasionally meets Christians for whom the Lord's purposes are "all sewn up." They know exactly what He is doing, and why He does it. Such comprehensive wisdom is difficult to dislodge; but sadly, it is the precocious wisdom of the immature Christian who has not yet learned that while "the things revealed belong to us and to our children," there are also hidden and secret things that "belong unto the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:29). God's ways and thoughts are not ours. We never have them "taped." We can no more read in detail God's secret purpose for our individual lives than we can understand Hebrew if we try to read it from left to right. To imagine we can is to be suffering from a form of spiritual dyslexia.

One great reason for this principle is to teach us to "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). So perverse are we that we

would use our knowledge of God's will to substitute for actual daily personal trust in the Lord Himself.

Flavel's Law (if we may so speak of his wise words) has widespread relevance for Christian living, but is particularly important in four ways:

The big decisions. It is true of the big decisions of life. God does guide His people, and leads them in the right paths (Ps. 23:3). It is a great thing to come to a major decision with the assurance that it is His will. But we would be mistaken to imagine that we therefore knew in detail the reasons behind His plan. Many a Christian has discovered that obedience to what they believed to be God's will seems to have led to great personal difficulties. Only later do we discover God's purpose in leading us to a new orientation or situation may have been very different from the extrapolation we made from the first points we saw on the divine graph of our lives.

The tests. It is true of the tests of life. We struggle to endure them for what they are in themselves. After the event we are relieved to have them at our back. But, in fact, earlier testings are often preparation to strengthen us for later ones. Only when we have been brought through the later one does the earlier one more fully "make sense."

The tragedies. It is true of the tragedies of life. We will not fully see their place in the divine economy in this world. Their ultimate explanation lies beyond our personal lives and even beyond time (think of Naomi's triple bereavement in Ruth 1, and how that led, in the slow unfolding of God's purpose, to Ruth's conversion, marriage, motherhood, the coming of David, and finally the birth of Christ). I have no special insight into God's purpose in the life of my friend; but that He has a gracious purpose is beyond doubt, however opaque it seems at present.

The whole. It is true of the whole of life. As C.S. Lewis illuminatingly put it, only when someone has died do we see his or her life in its completeness. But even then we catch only a fleeting glimpse of what will finally be made manifest. The ultimate unfolding awaits the day when "I shall know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Has it ever struck you that our Lord's words in the Upper Room had long-term as well as short-term significance? "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7).

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Unnatural History

C.S. Lewis was decidedly wary about learning from nature. He wrote: “If you take nature as a teacher she will teach you exactly the lessons you had already decided to learn; this is only another way of saying that nature does not teach.” Nature, said Lewis, is ambivalent; “there are worms in the belly as well as primroses in the wood.”

It is a salutary warning, for in 1999 Bruce Bagemihl published an earnest scientific tome, entitled *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, that investigated homosexual behavior in some 450 animal species. Here, readers are treated to page after page analyzing the homosexual behavior of penguins, monkeys, dolphins, and other animals. Subsequent studies have dealt with homosexuality in Japanese macaques (a kind of monkey), as well as in the ruff (a kind of Arctic sandpiper).

These studies have all been riveting, no doubt, and some have attracted public funding for their educational worth, and been taken seriously in American courts of law. It is, however, a somewhat perilous approach to ethics. A great many species practice infanticide, but so far I have not heard a single learned professor of ethics—not even Peter Singer—advocate infanticide on the grounds that father grizzly bears are prone to kill their own offspring. Nor has the most rabid feminist drawn attention to the fact that the female praying mantis devours her male counterpart.

For all that, the Bible does point to lessons that can be gleaned from nature. Proverbs 6 has a vigorous admonition to us all on the subject of diligence and organization: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest” (Prov. 6:6–8).

More negatively, it is better to meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly (Prov. 17:12). Also, toiling for wealth is not wise for “riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (Prov. 23:5). Lingering over the red wine bottle is dangerous, for “it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Prov. 23:32). Also, a man who strays from home is like a bird that strays from its nest (Prov. 27:8).

Some people are always demanding: “The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, Give, give” (Prov. 30:15). Such people are never satisfied. It is not our place of residence that defines our worth: “The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces” (Prov. 30:28).

Most memorable of all, surely, is the simile: “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly” (Prov. 26:11). We say that we learn from experience but somehow we still manage to repeat our sins and errors.

Jesus, too, would look out upon the natural world, and draw lessons or illustrations from it. The birds of the air do not sow or reap or gather into barns, but God feeds them (Matt. 6:26). The grass of the field is here today and gone tomorrow, yet not even Solomon in all his royal finery could match how God arrays the lilies of the field (Matt. 6:28–30). There is no place, therefore, for the kind of debilitating anxiety that in certain circumstances can easily overcome even the most committed Christian. The God of the Bible is the Lord of heaven and earth, who governs His world so that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground apart from His will (Matt. 10: 29–31).

Because this world is fallen and cursed, those who wish to are able to derive the wrong lessons from nature. Yet because this world is God’s world, we can glean lessons from what is good in it—the activity of the ants and the beauty of the flowers. The discerning observer can also learn from what is wrong with the world—that there are people who are like leeches that suck dry or like dogs that learn nothing from experience.

C.S. Lewis probably overstates the case regarding lessons to be derived from nature. The poets could point in two directions. Tennyson spoke of “nature red in tooth and claw,” while Gerard Manley Hopkins declared that “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Both are true, for this world is not as it once was because of human sin and rebellion. That is the first lesson to be derived from nature—and, more certainly, from Scripture.

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Marriages Made on Earth



We are all familiar with the phrase “a match made in heaven,” customarily applied to a marriage that seems to us to be ideal. But marriages are made on earth, too. They are the union of two people, two *sinners*, with a variety of in-built habits, dispositions, prejudices, idiosyncrasies, and differing spiritual enlightenment and theological awareness. Marriage, therefore, and the way it comes about, is not heaven! It is the bonding together of two needy sinners, the product of which is greater than the sum of either of them individually.

The biblical basis for marriage begins where the Bible begins—in Genesis and the creation story (Gen. 2:20–24). It is set in a context that precedes the advent of sin into the world and, therefore, as Alec Motyer has written, “marriage is not a concession to our sinfulness; marriage is a provision for our holiness.” Although creation is said to have been “good” or “very good” seven times in chapter 1, Genesis 2:18 alerts us to the fact that Eden was not yet complete. It was good but something was missing. Adam was created a social being and his relationship with the animate creation around him in part was designed to fulfill this need. The charming account of Adam naming the animals and birds (2:19) explains in part how we often relate to certain creatures in ways that form the strongest affections—dogs or cats, for example—even though post-fall, these relationships have been skewed by sin. The fact that some form stronger relationships with animals than with fellow humans, though understandable, reflects the corruption that sin brought.

God’s plan for Adam and the rest of humanity that followed, however, was marriage: “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him” (2:18). Eve, then, is God’s “helper matching him.” By himself, Adam was incapable of reaching the fullness God intended for him.

Several features emerge worth noting:

Marriage signals our need for companionship.

The 1662 Book of Common Prayer, reflecting Cranmer’s original 1552 edition, contains the significant preamble in its liturgy for the solemnization of marriage to the effect that marriage “was ordained for the mutual society, help,

and comfort.” What the Prayer Book placed third (following sex and baring children), the Westminster Confession places first (“marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife...,” WCF 19:2). Companionship is basic to the fabric of our humanity. It is not good to be alone. The pain of loneliness is all too common, even within otherwise highly populated environments, and it is a reflection of the way man was created as a social being. It is a reflection of God’s image in man; the Trinitarian relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a social one and our social expression of companionship reflects (though only in part) something within God Himself. The words often attributed to Matthew Henry, but more accurately written by Peter Lombard five centuries before him, are apposite here: Eve was formed from the rib of Adam, “not out of his head to rule over him, not from his foot to be trampled under him, but out of his side, to be cared for by him, under his arm to be protected by him.”

Marriage is a gift from God.

Nothing demonstrates the sovereignty of the provision better than the fact that Adam slept through the original creation of Eve! After what looks to be divinely induced anesthesia, Adam awoke to find the love and companion of his life. It was God’s design. Though every effort should be made to make room for the state of singleness, reflecting a careful explanation of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:7–8, it is not the norm intended for us. It can be a sinful disposition of our hearts to delay marriage unduly. In a materialistic society like our own (I write from the vantage point of modern America), it has become the norm to acquire worldly goods and a desired financial security before contemplating marriage.

Both of these are important and the ability of a husband to support his wife and potential family are crucial considerations for marriage; but they can become icons of idolatry and a sign of misplaced priorities.

Marriage elicits from Adam a sense of excitement; it brings out the poet in him!

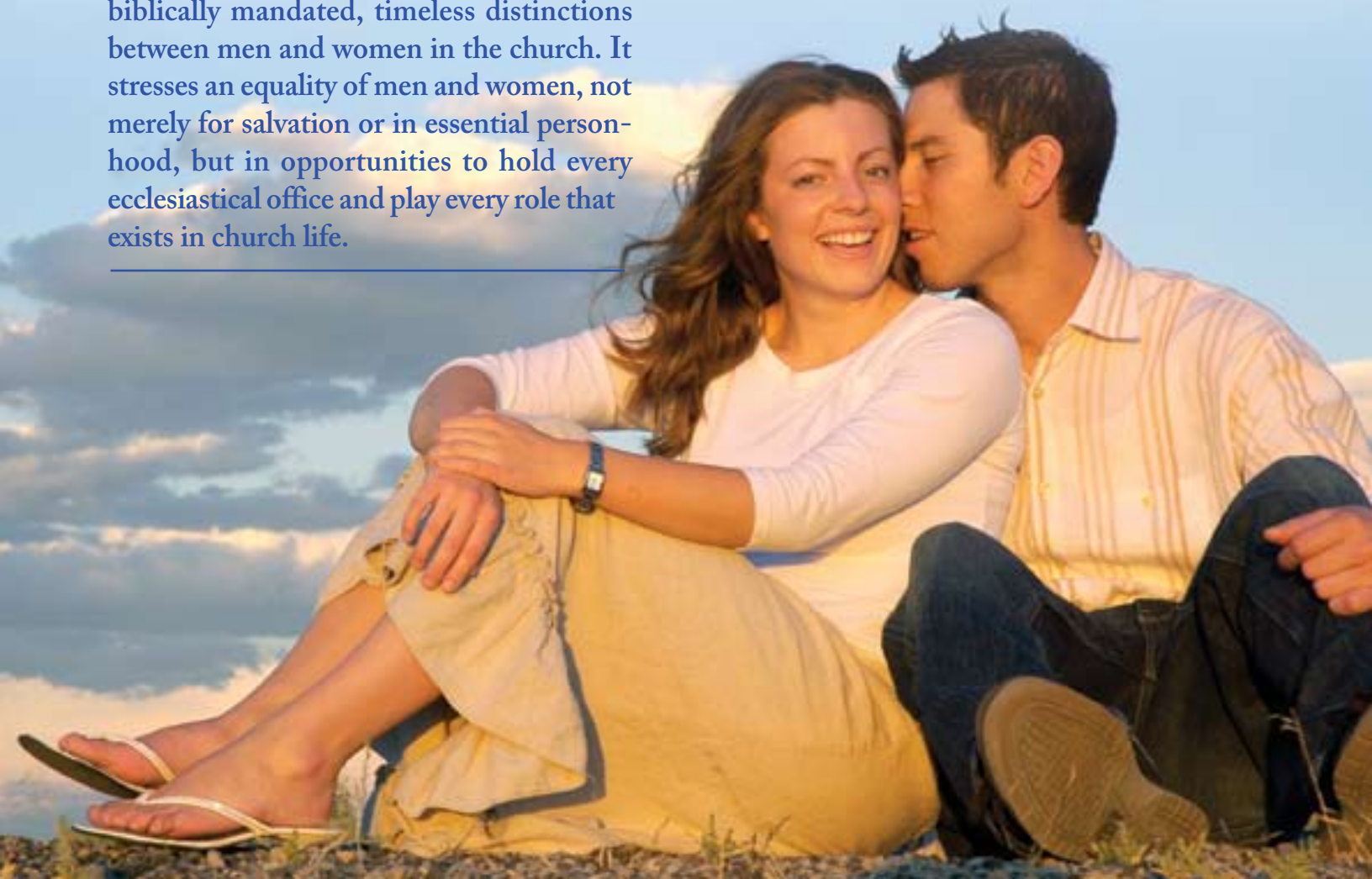
Hebrew specialists have examined the statement in verse 23 — “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” — suggesting that it contains all the forms of Hebrew poetry: assonance, word play, chiasms (the ABC/C’B’A’ form) and verbal repetition. The details need not concern us here but the fact that Adam’s response is reflective of the joy and élan he felt. Eve was a sign of God’s goodness to him. Eve was greater—more beautiful, more exquisite, more suitable—than anything he had seen in the animal kingdom. He felt attracted to her in a way that surpassed any attraction he might have felt for the creatures he had witnessed in the garden. He was drawn to her and she to him. There was what we might call “chemistry” between them. It is bad advice to tell a young Christian man to marry the first Christian girl he meets, just because she is a Christian and he is reaching the point of desperation! Or, as Richard Baxter more bluntly

Egalitarianism is the belief that there are no biblically mandated, timeless distinctions between men and women in the church. It stresses an equality of men and women, not merely for salvation or in essential personhood, but in opportunities to hold every ecclesiastical office and play every role that exists in church life.

advised: Look for “a competency of wit; for no one can live lovingly and comfortably with a fool.” It sounds outdated in the extreme these days, but it was the advice of a previous generation that while the *feeling* of love is a good thing, it is not always present initially to such a degree that makes the desirability of marrying this or that person sure. One should look, they advised, not so much for one whom one *does* love, here and now, but for one that one *can* grow to love with steady affection on a permanent basis. Whatever the precautions needed in such a stance, and there are many, it only becomes sensible advice in the context of a relationship which includes a sense of moral obligation: “Husbands, *love* your wives...” (Eph. 5:25).

Marriage is a complementarian relationship rather than an egalitarian one.

The terms are modern and may need some further explanation. I use them here in precisely the same way as John Piper and Wayne Grudem do in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, which they both edited. *Egalitarianism* is the belief that there are no biblically mandated, timeless distinctions between men and women in the church. It stresses an equality of men and women, not merely for salvation or in essential personhood, but in opportunities to hold every ecclesiastical office and play every role that exists in church life. *Complementari-*



Complementarianism, on the other hand, is the belief that there are certain timeless, divinely instituted and created restrictions on women’s roles in the church. They affirm that men in positions of authority should function in loving, supportive ways that do not lead to the abuse of those in subordinate positions, but equally maintain that certain roles are altogether prohibited for women.

anism, on the other hand, is the belief that there are certain timeless, divinely instituted and created restrictions on women’s roles in the church. They affirm that men in positions of authority should function in loving, supportive ways that do not lead to the abuse of those in subordinate positions, but equally maintain that certain roles are altogether prohibited for women. Hierarchy in this sense is not the result of sin or the *abuse* of power by men; it is God’s design. Adam was created *first*, then Eve—an historical fact from which Paul drew a moral principle (1 Tim. 2:13–14). Embracing this is the source of stability and cohesion to avoid the otherwise inevitable battle of sexes. Its misogynist-sounding stance is inevitable in a society skewed by feministic priorities, but we must be subject to Scripture and not the vagaries of a shifting societal prejudice.

Marriage is the union of *one man* and *one woman*.

Marriage is between a man and a woman. Sanctioning gay relationships as marriage or otherwise is a violation of the most fundamental nature of Scripture teaching on this matter. Homosexual desires, if yielded to, are fornication and morally culpable. For some, these desires are a cross they bear. They must be resisted, fought every step of the way with Jesus’ help. The struggle may be severe, but justifying homosexual friendships and marriages is not the path sanctioned by Scripture to aid those shackled by this problem. Sympathetic and understanding, rather than homophobic and pharisaical, as the church needs to be on this issue, the agenda of same-sex relationships is both pastorally misguided and morally ruinous.

Marriage is a relationship that is, in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer again, “till death us do part.”

Marriage is meant to be “forever.” Divorce, on grounds of “adultery or willful separation” (WCF 19:6) are allowances made by a loving Lord for a fallen world, but it was not how marriage was intended to be. Furthermore, sexual union is for marriage and for marriage *only*. The Bible is less squeamish about sex than Christians used to be and more so than Christians tend to be nowadays. Sex is not meant for the relief of boredom or loneliness or physical or mental tension. These cheapen God’s gift of sex—a gift which demonstrates that Adam and Eve, husband and wife, need each other and are

completed by each other. This “one flesh” (v. 24) heightens the sense in which husband and wife belong together.

The solemnity of the vows publicly expressed in marriage reflects the worshipful context of a marriage ceremony.

It is a covenant-making ceremony reflecting the way God brought Eve to Adam, adding the words, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (v. 24). “Leaving and cleaving” (in Israelite marriage, the woman left home to live with her husband in his parents’ home) reflects the change of relationship and authority. A new household has been formed with a new headship and responsibilities. Christian marriage is more than a civil ceremony; it is a sacred bond established and confirmed in the presence of God. Who but the indolent is unmoved by the opening lines of that traditional ceremony: “Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony...”? When these marriage vows are broken by the selfishness of adultery or cruelty of separation, offense has been given to all that is sacred. Marriage reflects the covenant of Christ with His church (Eph. 5:25f) and should be nursed and encouraged with the same care and attention that we would give to our relationship with Jesus. In the same way we encourage daily devotional habits of prayer and praise, so we must encourage daily marriage-building exercises of nurture and improvement.

This by no means presents a full picture of all that the Scriptures teach about marriage and its relationships and responsibilities. But this does provide us with something of a basis from which to grow Bible-based, Christ-centered, grace-infused, and God-glorifying marriages.

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The Art of Balanced Discipline

*“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath:
but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”*

—Ephesians 6:4

Notice that Paul mentions the fathers only. He has just quoted the words of the law—“Honour thy father and mother”—but now he singles out the fathers because the whole of his teaching has been, as we have seen, that *the father is the one who is in the position of authority*. That is what we always find in the Old Testament; that is how God has always taught people to behave; so he naturally addresses this particular injunction to the fathers. But the injunction is not to be confined to the fathers; it includes the mothers also; and at a time like the present, we have reached a position in which the order almost has to be reversed! We are living in a kind of matriarchal society where fathers, alas, and husbands, have *so abdicated their position in the home* that almost everything is being left to the mothers. We have to realize therefore that what is said here to the fathers applies equally to the mothers. It applies to the one who is in the position of having to exercise discipline. In other words, what we are introduced to here in this fourth verse, and it is involved in the previous verse, is the whole problem of discipline.

We must examine this subject carefully, and it is of course a very extensive one. There is no subject that is of such urgent importance as this whole problem of discipline. We are witnessing a breakdown in society, and it is mainly in connection with this matter of *discipline*. We have it in the home, we have it in the schools, we have it in industry; it is everywhere. The problem confronting society today in every walk of life is

ultimately the problem of discipline. Responsibility, relationships, how life is to be conducted, how life is to proceed—the whole future of civilization, it seems to me, rests upon this....

I venture on this assertion, this prophecy: If the West goes down and is defeated, it will be for one reason only: *internal rot*.... If we continue to spend our lives in jollification,¹ doing less and less work, demanding more and more money, more and more pleasure and so-called happiness, more and more indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, with a refusal to accept our responsibilities, there is but one inevitable result—complete and abject failure. Why did the Goths and the Vandals and other barbarians conquer the ancient Roman Empire? Was it by superior military power? Of course not! Historians know that there is only one answer: the fall of Rome came because of the spirit of indulgence that had invaded the Roman world—the games, the pleasures, the baths. The moral rot that had entered into the heart of the Roman Empire was the cause of Rome’s “decline and fall.” It was not superior power from the outside, but internal rot that was Rome’s ruination. And the really alarming fact today is that we are witnessing a similar declension in this and most other Western countries. This slackness, this indiscipline, the whole outlook and spirit is characteristic of a period of decadence. The pleasure mania, the sports mania, the drink and drug mania have gripped the masses. This is the essential problem, this sheer *absence* of discipline and of order and of true notions of government!

These matters, it seems to me, are raised very clearly by what the Apostle tells us here. I shall proceed to present these further to view and to show how the Scripture enlightens us in regard to them. But before doing so, let me mention something that will assist and stimulate your whole process of thinking. One of our problems today is that we no longer do our own thinking. Newspapers do it for us, the people interviewed on radio and television do it for us, and we sit back and listen. *That is one of the manifestations of the breakdown of self-discipline*. We must learn to discipline our minds! So I will give two quotations of Scripture, one on the one



side, and one on the other side of this whole position. The problem of discipline lies between the two. Here is the limit on one side: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son" (Prov. 13:24). The other is, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath." The whole problem of discipline lies between those two limits, and they are both found in the Scriptures. Work the problem out in the Scriptures, try to get at the great scriptural principles that govern this vital, this urgent matter, this greatest problem confronting all the Western nations, if not also others, at this hour. All our problems result from our going to one extreme or the other. That is never found in Scripture. What characterizes the teaching of the Scriptures always and everywhere is their perfect balance, a fairness that never fails, the extraordinary way in which grace and law are divinely blended.

We come now to the question of the administration of discipline.... Discipline is essential and must be enforced. But the Apostle exhorts us to be very careful as to how we exercise it because we can do more harm than good if we do not do it in the right way.

The Apostle divides his teaching into two sections, the *negative* and the *positive*. This problem, he says, is not confined to the children: the fathers, the parents, have also to be careful. *Negatively*, he tells them, "Provoke not your children to wrath." *Positively*, he says, "But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." As long as we remember both aspects all will be well.

We start with the negative: "Provoke not your children to wrath." These words can be translated, "Do not exasperate your children, do not irritate your children, do not provoke your children to become resentful." That is always a very real danger when we exercise discipline. And if we become guilty of it we shall do much more harm than good. As we have seen, both extremes are altogether wrong. In other words, we must exercise this discipline in such a manner that we do not irritate our children or provoke them to a sinful resentment. We are required to keep the balance.

How is this to be done? How is such discipline to be exercised by parents? Once more we must go back to Ephesians 5:18, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." That is always the key. We saw when we were dealing with that verse that the life lived in the Spirit, the life of a man who is filled with the Spirit, is characterized always by two main things—*power* and *control*. It is a *disciplined* power. Remember how Paul puts it in writing to Timothy. "For God," he says, "hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (*discipline*)" (2 Tim. 1:7). Not uncontrolled power, but power controlled by love and a sound mind—*discipline*! That is always the characteristic of the life of a man who is "filled with the Spirit."

How, then, am I to exercise this discipline? "Provoke not your children to wrath." This is to be the first principle governing our action. We are incapable of exercising true

discipline unless we are first able to exercise self-control and discipline our own tempers. People who are filled with the Spirit are always characterized by *control*. When you are disciplining a child, you should have first controlled yourself. If you try to discipline your child when you are in a temper, it is certain that you will do more harm than good. What right have you to say to your child that he needs discipline when you obviously need it yourself? Self-control, control of temper, is an essential pre-requisite in the control of others. So the very first principle is that we must start with ourselves. We must be certain that we are in control of ourselves, that we are calm. There must be this personal discipline, this self-control that enables a man to look at the situation objectively and to deal with it in a balanced and controlled manner. How important this is!

The second principle arises, in a sense, out of the first. If a parent is to exercise this discipline in the right way, he must never be capricious. There is nothing more irritating to the one who is undergoing discipline than a feeling that the person who is administering it is capricious and uncertain. There is nothing more annoying to a child than the kind of parent whose moods and actions you can never predict, who is changeable, whose condition is always uncertain. There is no worse type of parent than he who one day, in a kind mood, is indulgent and allows the child to do almost anything it likes, but who the next day flares up in a rage if the child does scarcely anything at all amiss. That makes life impossible for the child. Such a parent, I say again, fails to exercise a true and helpful discipline, and the position of the child becomes impossible. He is provoked and irritated to wrath and has no respect for such a parent.

I am referring not only to temperamental reactions, but to conduct also. The parent who is not *consistent* in his conduct cannot truly exercise discipline in the case of the child. A parent who does one thing today and the contrary thing tomorrow is not capable of sound discipline. There must be *consistency*, not only in the reaction but also in the conduct and the behavior of the parent. There must be a pattern about the life of the parent, for the child is always observing and watching. But if he observes that the parent is erratic and himself does the very thing that he forbids the child to do, again you cannot expect the child to benefit from any discipline administered by such a parent.

Another most important principle is that the parents must never be unreasonable or unwilling to hear the child's case. There is nothing that so annoys the one who is being disciplined as the feeling that the whole procedure is utterly unreasonable. In other words, it is a thoroughly bad parent who will not take any circumstances into consideration at all or who will not listen to any conceivable explanation. Some fathers and mothers, in the desire to exercise discipline, are liable to become utterly unreasonable; and they themselves

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Directions for Grieving over Ungodly Children

Direction 1: *Abhor it as a great sin to faint under this affliction, that is, either to be disabled for your duty or to sink in your comforts.* For it is a sign that you placed too much of your happiness in your children if their wickedness makes you faint under this calamity. I shall only plead with you as Joab did with David when he made that bitter lamentation for his son Absalom in 2 Samuel 19:6: "For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants." So I say to you, you hereby declare that you do not regard God and Christ if your soul faints under the burden of a disobedient child.

Direction 2: *Consider that this is an affliction that ordinarily befalls God's dearest children.* You must not think of this as if you were the first godly parents of ungodly children, or as if herein some strange thing happened unto you. I confess where a calamity seems singular or extraordinary, it is more apt to overwhelm the afflicted because they will be then apt to think that there is some extraordinary displeasure in God against them and to say with the church, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger" (Lam. 1:12). But this affliction is ordinary and is consistent with the saving and distinguishing grace of God to them and is a rod that is usually lain on the lot of the righteous.

Direction 3: *Consider that there might have befallen you greater miseries than this.* I will give you three greater evils that would have made you more miserable. First, you might have been a wicked, ungodly wretch yourself. And for the great Jehovah to have cursed and damned you forever would have made you unspeakably more miserable than to be tormented a while with a wicked child.

Second, you might have had an ungodly spouse to be as rottenness in your bones. Solomon seems to speak of a troublesome spouse as being more grievous than a wicked

child is. "A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping" (Prov. 19:13). This is like the constant dropping of rain into a house, which rots the building, spoils the goods, and ruins both house and inhabitants. To the extent that your spouse is nearer and ought to be dearer to you than your child, to be afflicted therein is a greater calamity. Third, God might have left all your children to perish in their sins. But if you have even one godly child, your joy in that should greatly abate your sorrow for your other wicked children.

Direction 4: *Let your sorrow be guided by Scripture and reason, so that you may not provoke God, defile your souls, and wound your consciences by sinful groans and tears.* For this end, observe two rules: First, mourn more for their sins whereby they provoke and dishonor God and defile and destroy themselves and others, than for any shame or loss in worldly things that befall you hereby. In this way, it may appear that the love of God and your children's souls, and not the love of the world, has the greatest influence on your sorrow. For I fear that there is usually in good parents too much of carnal sorrow and too little of godly sorrow in their mourning under this great calamity.

Second, do not let your sorrow disease your body and impair your health. God does not require us to mourn more for our children's sins than our own, and He never makes it our duty by sorrow for either to destroy our bodies, which are the temples of the Holy Ghost. The truth is that godly sorrow is the health of the soul and never hurts the body. For grace is always a friend and never an enemy to nature. Therefore, do not deprive yourself of all opportunities to honor God and serve His church. Do not make your spouse desolate or your children orphans by such sorrow that will neither please God, ease yourself, nor do any good to your wicked and miserable children.

Direction 5: *Labor to get your graces strengthened under this great affliction; for you have need of more knowledge, wisdom, faith, hope, love, meekness, and patience to enable and fit you to bear this than most other afflictions.* And you must see and enjoy more of God and Christ to keep your hearts up under this than under most other troubles. Yet by the strength of Christ, you may be enabled not only to bear this tribulation, but to glory in it. And the greater the trouble is, the more good you may gain by it.

Direction 6: *Comfort yourself in that the greatest and best things that you have most prayed for, trusted unto, expected, and chiefly loved and desired are all safe and sure.* God is and will be blessed and glorious forever, whatever becomes of your child. All His infinite perfections are working for His glory. Christ Himself is God's and does the whole work of a Mediator as His Servant and for His glory. All the blessed angels and saints will forever honor, admire, love, and praise Him.

God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are forever your own and will to all eternity be glorified in making you blessed and glorious. You have a bad child, *but a good God*. All your work will be done, your sins pardoned and killed, your graces perfected, and your body and soul glorified—and shall an ungodly child make all your consolations herein small to you?

Direction 7: *Last, consider this trouble will last but a little while.* I confess I do not know or can upon search find anything that can lift up the heart above this trouble but the knowledge and sense of the infinite love of God in Christ to a man's self and of that holy and glorious eternity which this love will shortly bring him unto. To tell you that this is and has been the case of other godly parents may allay something of your grief. But what is this but to tell you that others are and have been as miserable as you, or to tell you that children as wicked as yours have been sanctified and saved yields some hopes? But it can amount to nothing more than to think that they may be saved or they may be damned, and there is as much reason to fear the one as to hope for the other. But for a man to see a gainful death, ready to loose him into that world where there is none of this sorrow and to know that at the Day of Judgment he himself shall sit with Christ to judge them; and that he shall love and delight in the holiness and justice of the Judge of all the world in passing that sentence upon them, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41)—this is sufficient to overcome all immoderate grief for his ungodly children.

Edward Lawrence (1627-1695) was a Puritan minister who was frequently persecuted and imprisoned for preaching the gospel. He and his wife Deborah had nine children, two of which gave them great grief. Thus, he was no stranger of what he writes about in this article which is drawn from his *Parents' Concerns for their Unsaved Children*.

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may be very much at fault. The report they have received concerning the child may be wrong, or there may have been peculiar circumstances of which they are ignorant; but the child is not even allowed to state the position or to give any kind of explanation. Of course, one realizes that advantage can be taken of this by the child. All I am saying is that *we must never be unreasonable*. Let the explanation be given by the child, and if it is not a true reason, then you can chastise for that also as well as for the particular act that constitutes the offence. But to refuse to listen, to prohibit any kind of reply, is inexcusable. Such conduct is always wrong; that is to provoke our children to wrath. It is certain to exasperate and irritate them into a condition of rebellion and of antagonism.

That leads inevitably to another principle: Discipline must never be too severe. Here is perhaps the danger that confronts many good parents at the present time as they see the utter lawlessness about them, and as they rightly bemoan it and condemn it. Their danger is to be so deeply influenced by their revulsions as to go right over to this other extreme and to become much too severe. The opposite of no discipline at all is not cruelty; it is balanced discipline, it is controlled discipline.

Let me summarize my argument. Discipline must always be exercised in love; and if you cannot exercise it in love, do not attempt it at all. In that case, you need to deal with yourself first. The Apostle has already told us to speak the truth in love in a more general sense; but exactly the same applies here. Speak the truth, but in love. It is precisely the same with discipline: it must be governed and controlled by love. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." What is "the fruit of the Spirit"? "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22). If, as parents, we are "filled with the Spirit," and produce such fruit, discipline will be a very small problem as far as we are concerned. You must have a right view of parenthood and regard the child as a life given to you by God. What for? To keep to yourself, and to mold to your pattern, to impose your personality upon it? Not at all! But the child is put into your care and charge by God that his soul may ultimately come to know Him and to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Jollification: merrymaking; boisterous celebrations.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1900-1981), minister at Westminster Chapel, London (1938-1968), was one of the greatest Bible expositors of the twentieth century and author of numerous books. This article is reprinted from *Free Grace Broadcaster*.

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NEW RHB BOOKS



Union and Communion with Christ

Maurice Roberts

The work of Christ in His life, death, resurrection, and ascension is most impressive and foundational to the Christian faith. Yet these grand acts of redemption are of little benefit if one is not so closely associated with Jesus as to find his life and death in Him. In *Union and Communion with Christ*, Maurice Roberts offers us eighteen meditations on the Christian's union with Christ

and its accompanying fellowship. These reflections probe the essence of this blessed union, examine its evidences, and revel in its benefits. (130 pages, PB) \$10.00/7.50

The Gospel Ministry

Thomas Foxcroft

On November 20, 1717, Thomas Foxcroft presented a message on faithful gospel ministry and was strongly petitioned to have it published as a book. Foxcroft had not delivered this message at a conference for pastors, but at his own ordination. His intention was not so much to show his congregation what a proper minister should be like, but rather to attempt to press upon himself the importance and responsibility of the ministry for which he was being set aside. What proved a profitable exercise for him became a blessed gift for the church at large!

In this book, Foxcroft exhorts ministers to make Christ the focal point of their preaching. He shows the importance of character in ministry, calling for pastors to be wise and prudent in every aspect of their lives. Likewise, ministers are urged to visit with and know their flock, and busy themselves with attending the needs of their souls. Furthermore, ministers are reminded how their service to the Lord requires great diligence and should be supremely governed by a pursuit for the conversion and edification of people in Christ. This is a pertinent reminder that pastors are called to wait on the needs of the souls of men with the good news of Christ.

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This book contains practical guidance on two important areas of family life. First, it explains how we should prepare our families for public worship, how we should receive the preached Word, and how we should put that Word into practice. Second, it addresses the subject of prayer meetings, showing the scriptural and historical warrant for them, explaining their purposes, and detailing how to implement them. (80 pages, PB) \$6.00/4.00



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The Trusting Parent and Teacher

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

The Hebrew root of the word translated “trust” in this text means to “seek refuge in; to be confident of; to be sure of.” So to “trust” is to put our faith into action.

A large crowd gathered around a tightrope walker who once stretched a steel cable across the Niagara Gorge. “Who believes that I can walk across the gorge and back on this cable?” he called. The people all responded, “We do.” When he returned, he cried, “Who believes that I can cross the gorge and return on the cable pushing a wheelbarrow?” The crowd again responded affirmatively. After returning, he asked, “Who believes that I can cross the gorge on the cable with a person in this wheelbarrow?” The crowd again agreed. They believed it. “Okay,” he replied. “You—get in the wheelbarrow.” And he pointed to a person in the front who had called out, “I do.”

The situation suddenly changed for the person who was singled out! To say *I believe* is one thing, but to act on my belief is quite another. To step into the wheelbarrow is putting one’s belief into action. This is trusting. This is entrusting my life into the hands of another.

Our verse calls us to do just that: to place our needs, our circumstances, our very lives into God’s hands. “Trust in the LORD.” We are called to place everything into the hands of the ever-faithful, gracious, unchanging, covenant-keeping Jehovah. And we are told to do this wholeheartedly: “with all thine heart.” This means not partially, not limited to some things, not doubtingly, but wholeheartedly in all things. Do you know this wholehearted desire to trust the Lord?

Parents, this applies to your son or daughter. It applies to every circumstance and problem. Teachers, this text instructs you. It provides important guidance about where you are to go and where you should place your trust when dealing with your most challenging student.

Do you detect the struggle in Solomon’s heart as he wrote this? “And lean not unto thine own understanding.” This is the tension, the struggle, the holy war in the soul of a believer. Do you know this struggle to “trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding”?

We may think that we trust the Lord. We may feel quite confident that we do not rely on our understanding, especially when God leads us in ways that agree with our plans and desires. But what happens when the Lord directs our lives in a different direction and when events take place which make no sense to us? When matters seem to go backward instead of forward and when problems increase instead of decrease, then to trust in the LORD and not to lean to our own understanding, this is a struggle indeed! This is when we really learn how dependent we are on the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and to enable us to trust in the Lord with all our heart.

“But,” you say, “if you only knew the circumstances with my child or student! It is going from bad to worse. I have talked with him. I have asked others to help. I have prayed a lot. Nothing helps. There is only more rebelling, more hardening of the heart, more departing from God, and more embracing sin. I do not know what to do anymore!”

Consider your thoughts in light of this text. Yes, to your understanding, everything appears hopeless and impossible. Yes, it is true, nothing works when we lean on our own understanding. But is anything impossible for



the Lord? Is any soul outside of His reach? Is any circumstance beyond His control?

The key to unlock our verse and to free you from your anxiety is to identify your source of hope and trust. If you lean on your own understanding and trust in your abilities, you have good grounds to worry and despair. But our verse calls you to look higher. “Trust in the LORD.” Place your son or student into His almighty and gracious hands; do not hold the child back in yours. Trust God’s knowledge, not your own understanding. The circumstances may not change; the situation may not change for some time. There are parents who have departed this life without ever witnessing the changes God worked in their prodigal son or daughter. But when you trust God and exercise faith in Jesus Christ, your perspective and hope change.

Why could Paul and Silas sing songs of praise from the inner dungeon? Why could Daniel sit in peace in the den of lions? Why could his friends walk freely in the fiery furnace? Why could they do this *before* they were delivered from the circumstances? Because their belief was put into practice. They trusted God. They put this verse to the test and found that it stood true. Paul, Silas, Daniel and his friends were not special people, but they believed and trusted in a special God. Could not the Lord be using the very problems and fears that you struggle with most to teach you a valuable lesson? “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

Are you a trusting parent or teacher whose confidence is in God?

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OBSTACLES

Children, do you know what an obstacle course is? It is a game in which you must run along a marked path. On this path you encounter obstacles, things placed in your way to slow you down or even prevent you from finishing. Some obstacles might be fences, large rocks, walls, ditches filled with water, or anything that can get in your way. When it is only a game, it is fun, but obstacles on the way of salvation can mean life or death.

Perhaps some of you have been reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, the book we talked about in the last issue. In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the pilgrim, Christian, becomes aware of the great burden on his back. He must leave the City of Destruction, for he is not safe there! John Bunyan used this story to describe the lives of Christians on the road of salvation, and the challenges, trials, and joys they face. Did you notice that before Christian even takes a step outside the City of Destruction, he meets with obstacles? Let's look at them together.

The first obstacle was placed in his way by his own family. Christian read in the Book that their city would be destroyed. Instead of believing him, Christian's wife and children thought he was just really tired and that a good night's rest would make him feel better. When that did not help, they tried different tactics to get him to forget his fears. They ignored him; they laughed at him; they became angry; but nothing could remove Christian's burden. His family and friends saw no danger in their city: the sun rose and set as usual, children played happily, everyone went about their daily duties. Where was the danger? This is what happens when the Holy Spirit begins to work in a sinner's heart. He realizes his danger: we are all conceived and born in sin (Psalm 51) so we cannot stand before a holy and righteous God. We need to be washed clean in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The awakened sinner cannot rest until he finds safety in Jesus. So it was with Christian, but his wife and children did not see their danger. Because they saw no reason to leave the City of Destruction, they assumed Christian was imagining things.

Have you encountered this kind of obstacle, young

pilgrim? Has the Holy Spirit opened your eyes to your danger? When you began to pray and seek the Lord, did you come across obstacles like these? Did friends or even family try to distract you, or tell you that you were being too serious for a child your age? Did they ignore you, or tell you that you need to just enjoy life and not worry about sin and death? These are obstacles in your path to Jesus. Do what Christian did. He prayed more and read more often in his Book. Then Evangelist met him and told him what to do. He pointed Christian to the Wicket Gate. The Lord will most certainly direct you in the right path if you ask Him for wisdom.

Christian faced other kinds of obstacles. As he was leaving the City of Destruction, his friends and family sent two men to bring him back. Their names were Obstinate (meaning "stubborn") and Pliable (meaning "easily persuaded or changeable"). They urged him to turn around and go back, but when Christian refused, Obstinate gave up and returned to the City of Destruction, while Pliable decided to go with Christian. He was interested in the journey, eager to see the beautiful Celestial City. However, Pliable quickly changed his mind when he realized that the way was not easy. They both fell into the Slough of Despond, a muddy swamp. Angrily, Pliable climbed out and left Christian to struggle on his own. But poor Christian could not get out because of the great burden on his back.

Have you met people like Obstinate and Pliable? Obstinate is someone who refuses to leave the world. He has no use for the Bible



or seeking Jesus. Pliable, on the other hand, is a friendlier person. He is willing to listen to Christian and asks many questions. He is willing to be religious as long as it does not cause him any trouble. Have you met people like this? Or, worse, are you such a person yourself? You are not like Obstinate, to be sure, but what about Pliable? You are willing to go to church, attend Bible studies, and pray, but if you are asked to choose between God and sin, do you become angry and annoyed? Is it a difficult choice to make? Is it your greatest wish to honor God and to please Him? Is it your greatest fear to grieve Him? Pliable had no such wishes or fears, and so, tragically, he returned to the City of Destruction.

Dear children, where are you on the road of life? Are you still in the City of Destruction? Remember the message Evangelist gave to Christian: "Flee from the wrath to come!" Has the Holy Spirit awakened your conscience and spoken to your heart? Has He opened your eyes to your great danger? Are you still in the City of Destruction or have you begun to flee? Have you encountered obstacles? Who are your friends? What are your habits? Do you pray and seek the Lord? Do you study God's Word? Do you listen when you are instructed in the way of life?

Perhaps you are afraid that you might be just like Pliable. Have you set out once—or even more—and then turned back to your old ways? God is very patient and full of compassion; there is still time to repent and flee from the City of Destruction. As long as the Lord calls and warns us, there is time to flee. Christian ran, putting his fingers in his ears so that he would not be influenced by his friends and family.

Dear children, listen only to God and find instruction in His Word. The Lord will never lead you incorrectly; He will never deceive you. Do not give in to the obstacles. It is very difficult to keep going on the path of life when it seems as if everyone is telling you that you are making a big mistake and that you are taking things too seriously. Christian felt alone, too, and when he finally seemed to have a friend, the friend deserted him when he was in trouble. But the Lord is faithful, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful, full of compassion, always ready to help His pilgrims.

But God's patience will not last forever. One day, the end will come, and judgment will come to the City of Destruction. Then it will be too late to flee. The citizens will realize that Christian was right but it will be too late. You have the Book that Christian had; you also have Evangelist telling you every Sunday that there is life and safety in the Lord Jesus Christ. You have the same message that Evangelist gave to Christian: "Flee from the wrath to come!" Be wise and heed the warnings! Cling to the Lord and beg for His mercy. He is sure to hear and answer you. "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Bible Quiz

Here are the answers to last month's quiz.

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Tarshish | 11. Perish |
| 2. Preach | 12. Sackcloth |
| 3. Asleep | 13. Sacrifice |
| 4. Nineveh | 14. City |
| 5. Prepared | 15. Christ |
| 6. Tempest | 16. Likewise |
| 7. Mariners | 17. Pleasure |
| 8. Gracious | 18. Reconciled |
| 9. Wickedness | 19. Uttermost |
| 10. Shipmaster | 20. Redeem |

21. SALVATION IS OF THE LORD

Diana Kleyn is the author of numerous books for children and a member of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Please send your puzzle answers to:

Banner Puzzles and Questions

Attn: Mrs. Diana Kleyn

540 Crescent St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

e-mail: ckleyn@comcast.net

Thanks again to all of you who answered last month's quiz.

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Daniel Beeke | Nicholas Meschke (2) |
| Tara Beeke | Ashlyn Roos |
| Mariah Bleeker | Kimberly Roos |
| Leah Boerkoel | Aaron TenElshof |
| Neal Boerkoel | Danique Veldhuizen (2) |
| Brian Boesterd | Erwin Veldhuizen |
| Becky Boot | Wilena Veldhuizen (2) |
| Shelly Boot | Karilyn Van Brugge |
| Faith Carlson | David Van Vugt |
| Hope Carlson | Lauren Van Vugt |
| Alexander DeHaan | Jason Van Woudenberg |
| Caleb DeVries | Leah Van Woudenberg |
| Jonathan DeVries | Louis Watson |
| Lydia Engelsma (3) | Jamie Westrate |
| Annemieke Engelsma (3) | Tommy Westrate |
| Jonathan Gillies | Audrey Zevenbergen |
| Amanda Koppert (2) | William Ziegler |
| Samuel Kranendonk | |

CODE

A = 1

B = 2

C = 3

D = 4

E = 5

F = 6

G = 7

H = 8

I = 9

J = 10

K = 11

L = 12

M = 13

N = 14

O = 15

P = 16

Q = 17

R = 18

S = 19

T = 20

U = 21

V = 22

W = 23

X = 24

Y = 25

Z = 26

' = 27

There are many instances in the Bible telling of people who faced obstacles to believing in the Lord Jesus and His saving power. Some people were able, by God's grace, to overcome these obstacles, but others turned away. Use the code to fill in the blanks. Do as many as you can.

- _____ bringing their _____ to _____ were stopped
 by the _____. (Matthew 19; Mark 10; Luke 18)
- _____ couldn't see _____ because he was _____. (Luke 19)
- Someone from his _____ told _____ not to ask
 for _____ anymore because his _____ had _____. (Matt. 9; Mark 5; Luke 8)
- Some of _____ no longer
 Him because of His _____. (John 6)
- _____ and his _____ could not get to
 _____ because of the _____. (Matthew 9; Mark 2; Luke 5)
- _____ could not see _____ because he was blind. Also, the
 _____ told him to _____. (Mark 10)
- _____ were surrounded by obstacles: _____
 _____ behind them, _____ in front of them,
 and _____ around them. (Exodus 14)
- _____ obstacle to following _____
 was his _____. (Matthew 19; Mark 10; Luke 18)
- _____ could not do many _____ in _____ because of
 their _____. (Matthew 13; Mark 6; Luke 4)
- In the _____ of the _____ the invited guests had many
 _____ to stay away: _____,
 _____, and _____. (Matthew 22; Luke 14)



The Little Intruder

One Sunday afternoon, Mama was sick. Mary and Ellen, sisters aged nine and eight, asked if they could go to church together. It would be their first time on their own, but church was only a short walk away. They begged to be allowed to go, promising to sit very still and listen carefully so that they would be able to tell their mother all about it when they came home. Mama agreed.

At first Mary and Ellen were very attentive, not looking around to see other little girls sitting near them, nor talking to one another. They looked up the Scripture passages and the song selections. They found the text in the Bible from which the preacher spoke, and listened to what he was saying. They were determined to let their mother see that she could trust them to go alone another time if she could not go with them.

All was going well until a little intruder entered the chapel. The intruder was a little mouse which crept out into the chapel from behind a door. At first the girls were frightened, but they soon got over their fear, and became so interested in watching the curious little mouse, that before they knew it the service was over. The mouse, startled by the noise the people made in leaving, ran away.

Mary and Ellen were sorry to see the little mouse run away. They had rather enjoyed watching it. On the way home, they said to each other that they thought the service was very short. As soon as they got home they excitedly began to tell their mother about the service. "Mama! Mama! Guess what happened at church!" And then they told her all about the mouse. Their mother listened without saying a word until they had finished their story, and then asked them, "What about the sermon? You promised to tell me everything you heard there. What did the minister preach about? What was the text? What songs did you sing?"

Mary looked at Ellen, and Ellen looked at Mary, and both hung their heads in shame. Neither girl could remember anything — not the text, nor the topic, nor the songs. The little intruder — the little mouse — had kept them so preoccupied, that they had forgotten everything else.

Mother asked Mary to get her Bible. "Look up the Song of Solomon, chapter two. Read verse fifteen for us," she said.

Mary read it. "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."

"Do you know what that verse means?" Mama asked.

The girls shook their heads.

"Solomon wanted to teach us that foxes in a vineyard can do a lot of damage. If people wished to have grapes, they had to catch these little foxes so that they would not ruin the vines and prevent the grapes from growing and ripening. It is often the little things that Satan uses to call away our thoughts from the great and important things of God and eternity. This makes us unhappy, just like the people who have no grapes to eat at harvest time. We must watch against these little things and ignore them, or do something to get rid of them."

Mary and Ellen looked at each other to see if they understood what their mother was telling them. Ellen asked, "Should we have chased the mouse away?"

"No, we couldn't do that while the minister was preaching. We should have ignored the mouse and looked at the minister instead," suggested Mary.

"Yes," agreed mother. "You should not have chased the mouse away during the service, but you could have silently asked God to help you concentrate on the sermon. You had good intentions, but we need God's help to overcome the things that try to draw our attention away from Him. We need His help to catch the 'little foxes.'"

Mary and Ellen never forgot about the danger of a "little intruder," or about "the little foxes that spoil the vines." Good intentions are not enough. Our sinful nature leads us away from God. We need the Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts and to live within us so that we will follow Him. "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name" (Psalm 86:11).

Adapted from *A Wonderful Field and What I Learned about it: An Allegory; and Other Stories*, by C. E. H.. London: The Gospel Book Depot, n.d.

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

MINISTERIAL CALL

Rev. David Lipsy has accepted a call to labor in the Yellville, Arkansas church group.

Rev. Mark Kelderman has received a call to labor in the Heritage Reformed Congregation of Franklin Lakes, New Jersey.

INSTALLATION OF REV. D. LIPSY

All are heartily invited to the installation of Rev. Lipsy as pastor of the Reformed Church of Yellville on Friday, July 25, God willing. The installation service, to be conducted by Rev. Neels, begins at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Lipsy's inaugural message is at 7:00 p.m. that evening. For information about the service location contact Tim den Hollander at (870) 321-1352 or rcoclerk@cox.net. A light meal will be provided between services. You are also welcome to join us for worship the Lord's Day following. Services are 10:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. at the Woodmen of the World building, 446 Highway 14 South in Yellville, AR. If you can't be with us in person, please join with us in your prayers.

CHURCH NEWS

ANNOUNCEMENT OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Lord willing, the Office-bearers' Conference, Classis Prayer Service, Theological Seminary Committee, and Classis meeting will be held respectively on October 22-24 in Jordan, Ontario. The combined HRC/FRC Office-bearers' Conference will be held on October 22 at 3:00 p.m. with Dr. David Murray speaking on "Leading Souls to Christ." Rev. Michael Fintelman will then preach the Classis prayer service at 7:30 p.m.

October 23, 8:00 a.m. Theological Seminary Committee Meeting

This committee will meet in the Jordan church to assess progress of the seminary, discuss future plans, and interview applicants.

Men who believe they are being called to the ministry of the gospel and desire to be admitted into the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary should contact either the president (Mr. John Beeke, 905-892-2048) or secretary (Rev. Michael Fintelman, 712-439-9352) of the Theological Seminary Committee, or the president of their own consistory for further information on the procedures and requirements in order to obtain a consistory attest.

For those desiring additional information regarding the call to the ministry or admission to Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, a catalog is available from PRTS, 2965 Leonard St., NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49525. You may also call 616-977-0599 ext. 120, or e-mail: info@puritanseminary.org

*"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying,
Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?
Then said I, Here am I; send me."*

—Isaiah 6:8

October 24, 8:00 a.m. Classis Meeting

The Classis meeting will be held in the Jordan church. Consistories and Classis-appointed committees are reminded that all material for Classis should be forwarded to Mr. Bill Tanis, Sr. via e-mail (wjtanis@jungle.net) or on computer disk by September 10 for distribution to the consistories.

MEN'S CONFERENCE

Plan to attend the 2008 HRC Men's Conference to be held September 5 and 6, 2008. This year's conference will be held at a beauti-

ful retreat near London, ON. The location is situated in Fingal, ON (west of St. Thomas) at Pearce Williams Christian Centre. All men are invited to receive further instruction in serving our Creator with our stewardship before God. The topics and speakers are:

Stewardship of Time – Rev. J. Neels

Stewardship of Finances –

Rev. D. Kranendonk

Stewardship of Family –

Rev. D. Overbeek

Look for application forms in your local churches or a downloadable form at www.hnrc.ca. Contact Burgessville HRC Men's Conference Committee for further details. aaverink@295.ca - 519-863-5579.

REFORMED SINGLES FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE

Date: Saturday, September 13, 2008

Time: 8:45 a.m. Registration

Place: Jordan Christian School

4171 15th St., Jordan Station, ON

Speaker: Dr. Joel R. Beeke

Topic: Reformed Conferences Around the World

Dr. Beeke will give highlights, using a visual presentation, of some Reformed conferences in which he has participated.

Conf. Fee: \$50.00 (Canadian and U.S.)

Singles 30 years and over are invited to attend our annual conference. Morning coffee break, lunch, and supper are included. Afternoon activities include cycling or hiking depending on your preference. For those who are cycling, please bring your own bicycle.

For further information, call 905-892-2048 or e-mail: rsf@christian.net. To register, please send your name, address, phone number, and payment, by September 1, to RSF, P.O. Box 1134, Fonthill, Ontario, Canada LOS 1E0.

Obituary notices and church events are printed free of charge; marriage and anniversary notices will be charged at \$20.00 per issue and must be individually submitted. Other announcements and/or requests will be approved by the editorial committee on an individual basis as received.

ANNIVERSARY

1968 August 24 2008

With humble gratitude to our faithful, covenant-keeping God, we announce that on August 24th, 2008, our beloved parents,

Mr. and Mrs. Simon Bax

hope to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary.

"The Lord that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion" (Ps 134:3).

With love from,

Dave & Elizabeth Hughes (nee Bax)

Emily, Matthew

Jeffery & Darlene Bax (nee Evers)

Nadeen, Kendra

Open house to be held at: Durham Christian Home,

100 Glen Hill Dr. S, Whitby

Saturday August 30, 2008 1-4 p.m.

Best wishes only

Home Address:

10 Flint Cres., Whitby, Ont. L1R-1K3

"Godly mourning is better than carnal rejoicing."

—William Plumer

OBITUARIES

TEUNISSEN, Cornelius, aged 82, passed away on Saturday, May 24, 2008 in Byron Center, Michigan. He was preceded in death by his son, John, and daughter, Shirley. He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Johanna; Children—Jim (Bonnie) Teunissen, Rita Spoolstra, Gert Teunissen and Mike Drozdowski, Berniece DeLong, C. Lee (Robyn) Teunissen, Grace Teunissen, Jacoba (John) Alberts, Joyce Teunissen, Betty (Rafael) Del Castillo, Janice (Mike) Kunst, and Rose Teunissen; Brothers—Bert (Vera) Teunissen, Hank (Dee) Teunissen; Sister—Jacoba Nagel; 36 grandchildren; 58 great-children. (Dr. J. R. Beeke, Heb. 12:9-11; 9:27-28).

VAN GIESSEN, Esther, aged 73, formerly of Kalamazoo, MI, passed away on May 30, 2008 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She was preceded in death by their only son, James Allen, two grandchildren, Amanda and Lauren Vroegindewey. Esther is survived by her husband of 52 years, Jacob; Daughters—Kathy (Mark) Scholten, Elizabeth (Kevin) De Vries, Joan (Roger) Vroegindewey; Brothers—Barney, Peter, and John Sluys; Sister—Alice VanDyken; Brothers-in-law—Garrett (Helen) VanGiessen, Bart (Anne) VanGiessen; Sister-in-law—Mary (Robert) VanBeck; step-brothers-in-law—Albert and James Sikkema; 16 grandchildren. (Dr. J. R. Beeke, Philipians 1:21; Rev. Mark Scholten, committal).

TEACHERS NEEDED

The Heritage Reformed Christian School of the Hull, Iowa, HRC invites applications from qualified elementary, middle school, and high school teachers

for the school year beginning August 2008. We currently offer grades K-9 in a multi-grade setting. Our plans are to add grade 10 in 2008 with the intent to have all 12 grades in three years, D.V. Please submit your resumé, statement of faith, and philosophy of education to Doug Post, 2787 360th St., Rock Valley, Iowa 51247, phone: 712-722-4258, fax: 712-722-8859 or e-mail: doug.post@interstates.com.

Lewis Independent Christian School invites applications from qualified primary school teachers for the year beginning August 2008. We are a small Reformed parent led school. Please submit your CV, statement of faith and philosophy of education to: Mr. William Macleod, Secretary, 80 Newmarket, Isle of Lewis, Scotland HS2 0ED, Tel: 01851 703282, E-mail wmacleod4@googlemail.com

Plymouth Christian Elementary School, Grand Rapids, Michigan is seeking applications for elementary teaching positions for school year 2008-2009. Those interested in more information or an application form are requested to contact either Mr. David Engelsma, principal, (616) 453-8623, or Mr. Kevin Ash, school board president, (616) 364-8705.

Rehoboth Christian School in Copetown Ontario, is soliciting applicants for possible classroom teaching positions in Elementary (K-8), High school (9-12), and Personal Support Workers to begin in September, 2008. For more information, check out our website at www.rehoboth.on.ca. Applicants please send a cover letter and resumé to the attention of: Mr. Jack Westerink, Principal, 198 Inksetter Road, P.O. Box 70, Copetown, Ontario L0R 1J0, tel. 905-627-5977, fax 905-628-4422 e-mail: jwesterink@rehoboth.on.ca

ITEMS FOR PRAYER AND MEDITATION

On Abortion: Psalm 139:13-16: "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

On who is in control: Matthew 8:26-27: "And he [Jesus] saith unto them, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?' Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men [disciples] marvelled, saying, 'What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!'"

On Persecution: Romans 8:35-37: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

On earthquakes: Matthew 24:3b & 7-8 (the disciples ask Jesus about His Second Coming to earth): "And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Jesus answers: "...for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."

Nagara
Reformed Bible Conference

*Reformed Evangelism
in the Local Community*



Conference Speaker

Rev. L Anthony Curto

Associate Professor of Evangelism
Greenville Presbyterian Theological
Seminary

September 26,27 2008

**Immanuel ORC
2900 Fourth Ave.
Jordan Ontario**

NATIONAL NEWS....

Nearly Half of Health Insurance Plans in U.S. Cover Abortions

Forty-six percent of health insurance plans in the U.S. cover abortions, according to The Heritage Foundation. Some states even require it. "Your tax dollars going into the state Legislature has basically forced the citizens of the state to finance a procedure that they may find unethical. It may be worth a complaint to the insurance company. And employees always can look into other insurance options," said Dr. Robert Moffitt, director of health policy studies at The Heritage Foundation. Dr. Omar Hamada, a Christian OB/GYN in the Nashville area, said it's hard to believe insurance companies will pay to kill preborn babies, yet balk at many primary care services. "It really makes me speechless," he said. (*Citizen Link*)

California Rules in Favor of Same-Sex 'Marriage'

The California Supreme Court ruled that a law defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman is "unconstitutional," allowing same-sex couples to marry. The ruling struck down Proposition 22, a voter-approved statute protecting traditional marriage. Glen Lavy, senior counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund, said the only way to permanently protect marriage in California is to amend the state

constitution. A law like Prop. 22 does not carry the same legal weight as a constitutional amendment. "The court's decision clearly demonstrates that marriage is not ultimately safe from tampering by activists and others in government until the voters have amended the constitution," he said. (*Citizen Link*)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS....

Europe Sees Further Collapse of the Family

One marriage breaks up and one abortion occurs nearly every 30 seconds in Europe, according to a report by the Institute for Family Policy. *The Evolution of the Family in Europe 2008*, based on research from the 27 European Union countries, described the birthrate as "critical," with almost 1 million fewer babies born last year than in 1980. One in five pregnancies ends in abortion, and two out of three households have no children. In addition, the marriage rate fell by 24 percent between 1980 and 2006. Jenny Tyree, associate marriage analyst for Focus on the Family Action, said Europe's future hangs in the balance. "Children are a nation's hope for tomorrow," she said. "Abortion, coupled with fewer births and a high divorce rate, spells social disaster. Hopefully, this report will awaken European nations to the value of marriage and children, so these trends can be reversed." (*Focus on the Family*)



CHINA IN FOCUS

In 2008, the eyes of the world are on China, site of the Summer Olympics and, more recently, a massive earthquake known as the Sichuan earthquake, which measured 7.9 in magnitude, with over 90,000 dead and missing. Eighty percent of the buildings in Sichuan province's Beichuan county collapsed after the quake, raising fears the overall death toll could increase sharply. The earthquake sent thousands of people rushing out of buildings and into the streets hundreds of miles away in Beijing and Shanghai. The temblor was felt as far away as Vietnam and Thailand.

It is posing a challenge to a government already grappling with discontent over high inflation and a widespread uprising among Tibetans in western China while trying to prepare for the Beijing Olympics this August. Officials of the Communist country are rushing aid to the people, and China's centralized government is erecting temporary and intermediate-term shelters for many of the earthquake victims. Many newly dammed up rivers pose a flooding hazard, requiring immediate attention on top of caring for the quake casualties. (AP)

The earthquake may divert the world's attention from focusing on a probe of China's human rights gains and abuses ahead of this year's Olympic Games. Among key issues raised is religious freedom, with China watchers reporting ongoing restrictions on freedom of worship, particularly for unregistered church groups; arrests; detention in labor camps; and confiscation of Christian literature. The government has stepped up an official campaign against human rights activists and lawyers in recent months yet increased its suppression of religious believers, particularly members of unregistered Protestant and Catholic groups. (*Compass Direct*)

TRAGEDY IN MYANMAR (BURMA)

On May 2, 2008, Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar with 103 mile per hour sustained winds, causing, by some estimates, over a hundred thousand fatalities. Nargis (which means "daffodil" in Indo-Aryan) is being recorded as the eighth deadliest cyclone of all time. Myanmar is the largest mainland country in Southeast Asia, with over 261,000 sq. miles of land, and is about the size of Texas. Its population of 55 million is ruled by the military (see BSGT, Dec. 2007) and is 89% Buddhist (see BSGT, Apr. 2008 on Buddhism). Initially, the insular military regime blocked necessary foreign aid, while millions of its citizens were exposed to hunger and disease.

The Christian relief agency, World Vision, had six hundred workers in Myanmar when Nargis struck, and is one of the few relief agencies able to receive and distribute aid. The HRC Disaster Relief Fund has forwarded \$15,000 to World Vision from our reserve funds, with the anticipation that other collections will follow for future relief.

There is fear that the impending southwest summer monsoon season (June through September) will further exacerbate the situation, causing more deaths due to disease and lack of shelter. Foreign aid workers estimate that 2 to 3 million are homeless in the worst disaster in Burma's history, comparable with the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. The hardest hit area, the Irrawaddy Delta, is a fertile area for rice growing, and is known as the "rice bowl" of the British Empire. The United Nations has estimated that Nargis impacted 65% of the country's rice paddies. (*Various sources*)



A Middle Easterner's Perspective on the War in Iraq

BY JOHN MUSTAFA

John Mustafa is an M.Div. student at PRTS and a citizen of Syria, but ethnically a Kurd. His mother died when he was an infant and his father died when he was a young boy. He was raised in a Muslim home by his uncle and aunt. John was educated in Syria and was an English teacher at the University of Aleppo. He is now a student at PRTS and looks forward to ministering the Word of God. This article gives his perspective on freedom in the Middle East. May this testimony motivate us to pray more fervently "for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:2).

Many people have been led to misunderstand the war in Iraq. They think it is a military struggle. In fact, it is; however, there is more. The war in Iraq is unique in the sense that it transcends its military contexts and includes some important humane, social, and political dimensions. Though the war is in Iraq, it affects the entire Middle East region. After five years, many Middle Easterners see that the war unveiled the reality of al-Qaeda, liberated persecuted peoples, and opened mouths and eyes to both injustice and the possibilities of peaceful government.

Overthrow Is Symbolic

The war in Iraq destroyed the stereotype that a dictatorship can live forever. The Iraqi people, having suffered for so long time under the rule of brutal dictators, now saw that a dictator can be removed, and a brutal and corrupt president can be tried for crimes against society. Saddam Hussein was a kind of legend, a powerful, brutal leader in the eyes of his people and all others in the Middle East. His defeat symbolized the beginning of the defeat of all the brutal forces in Middle East.

On April 9th, the day when Iraq was liberated, an old woman exclaimed, "Now my sons may not die in vain for trivial reasons." Though uneducated, she saw the link between the removal of a dictator in Iraq and the possible breakdown of the other dictators in the region. The common feeling among ordinary people in the region is: I still fear the brutal regime, but I worship it no more.

The presence of US troops on the border and in the region gives feelings of security and comfort to most people, particularly religious and ethnic minorities. That is why the official television stations in the Middle East air ongoing propaganda against the liberation of Iraq, giving the US military the image of an invader and are trying to convince people that liberation is a myth and that the war is between the good and evil, between Islam and its "enemies."

Changes for the Better

The war paved the way for some democratic values in Iraq and surrounding countries. Since 2003, the whole Middle East has changed. Such changes would never have happened without the

presence of the US troops in the region. Let me give some examples. Women in Kuwait received the right to vote in 2006. More writers and thinkers emerged in Saudi Arabia and began to speak publicly against the Islamic clergymen and authorities. Free elections were held for the first time in Egypt. Syria withdrew from Lebanon. Most importantly, there has been no systemic persecution and genocide against any religious and ethnic minority since 2003, except for Darfur.

It is not a coincidence that these changes happened in this short period of time. They were possible because the war freed many freedom-loving people, giving them credibility and consideration in society again.

The war also succeeded in combating the al-Qaeda terrorist organization, transforming it from an organization working at the international level to a local terrorist group fighting other Islamic groups and sects. The war broke the sway of al-Qaeda over many people; al-Qaeda is no longer the "holy" organization people thought it was before the war. Public support for al-Qaeda diminished after many saw its brutal, terrifying acts in Iraq. Al-Zawahiri, the second man in authority in al-Qaeda, repeated in his last video release¹ the old story that al-Qaeda will fight in Palestine. Most Arabs and Muslims do not take this seriously and some even consider it an admission of failure. Abdul Rahman al-Rashed wrote in al-Hayat newspaper, "Because of the constant losses, al-Zawahiri invented the idea to appear on TV,... All these things refer to the idea that al-Qaeda leadership has problems contacting its insurgents or its supporters. That is why this leadership chose constant audio-visual appearances to keep some of its credibility."²

A Door of Hope

Do not look at the war only in the military context. It is a war of ideas and ideologies. The war itself did not achieve everything most people in the Middle East long for, but it was the cornerstone in the process of change. We know that the war had terrible casualties, but this is the nature of every change in history. I find myself agreeing with Mr. Massoud Barazani, the president of the Kurdistan region, when he said, "The war in Iraq opened the door of hope in front of our peoples."³

¹ This video release was aired on al-Jazeera and other Arabic websites and TV channels at the beginning of April, in which al-Zawahiri and associates were defending themselves against many charges and questions directed to them by Muslims themselves.

² Al-Hayat, London, April 7th; and also appeared on www.alarabiya.net.

³ Al-Sharqalawsat Riyadh, April 7th, and also appeared on www.krg.org (Kurdish government website).



Self-Image (2)

Ripples in the Water

MAARTEN KUIVENHOVEN

In the last issue, we discussed the standards by which we measure ourselves: the world's standard or God's standard. The world's standard looks at the outward, but God's Word informs us of our heart condition. Keep this in mind as we continue to explore what self-image is.

It is hard for us to fathom what it was like for Adam and Eve to be in constant communion with God, never sinning, always content because they were worshipping and glorifying their Creator. The sad fact is that this image in them was shattered when Satan came and successfully tempted them. Last month's article spoke briefly about their Fall in the Garden. This is where the image of God in all its purity, uprightness, and holiness was shattered.

Adam was created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, in God's image, but when he sinned, that perfect image of God in him was lost. Through Adam, we have not lost the *entirety* of God's image in us; we are able to think and reason, and these are remnants of God's image. Imagine yourself out on the lake in your canoe. You look over into the water and the water is perfectly calm, reflecting your image. Then, suddenly, your paddle falls in the water, rippling the water and distorting your image. This is what sin has done to God's image in us, but on a far greater scale. Adam's sin is our sin. This is where our broken self-image began.

The world's standard will tell you that a person with positive self-image is happy with life, has popular friends, is dressed in the right clothes, wears his hair the right way, says all the right things, and knows how to play the best sports. A person with a negative self-image, however, is one who is not so attractive, who doesn't have popular friends, who seems different from the rest. You might be familiar with the positive vs. negative self-image distinction. It's played out almost every day in your

lives: in the halls of schools, in the classroom, at church, or even at home. "Self-image has everything to do with who you are," the world tells you, and let's face it: all of us are afraid to have a negative self-image and strive to have a positive self-image.

But there is one fundamental problem in the positive vs. negative self-image distinction: all are sinners in need of grace, in need of the re-creation of God's image in us as it was in the beginning, to have God's image restored. As we look overboard at our image reflected in the "water" of God's Word, we must all come to the same conclusion: our images are distorted by sin no matter who we are. God's Word is clear: "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22b-23). We don't need to be afraid to be placed in either category, because the Bible is clear as to what our view of self should be: we are sinners in Adam, but if we are in Christ, then we are being conformed to His image who is the image of God.

So how do you change your self-image? Begin with the Word of God and let it inform you of the root of your problem, which is sin. But let the Bible also inform you of the solution to your problem: Jesus Christ. In Him alone we have the solution to our broken self-image. When we are born again, Christ represents us as the second Adam. He did what the first Adam failed to do; He lived uprightly and made full payment for sin by His blood. When His blood cleanses us from sin, God's image is restored in us. Ripple by ripple, the water is smoothed and we begin to see a new image, not our own, but Christ's.

Maarten Kuivenhoven is a theological student at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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PERIODICAL
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DAY BY DAY

Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure,
Gives unto each day what He deems best,
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Every day the Lord Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is Counselor and Pow'r.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid;
"As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure,"
This the pledge to me He made.

Help me then in every tribulation
So to trust Thy promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation
Offered me within Thy holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land.

— LINA SANDELL BERG

The *Banner*
of Sovereign Grace Truth

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