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Equipping believers for deeper life

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THE REDEMPTION OF CHRIST JESUS

Spurgeon on

Sin and **Forgiveness**

by Charles Haddon Spurgeon

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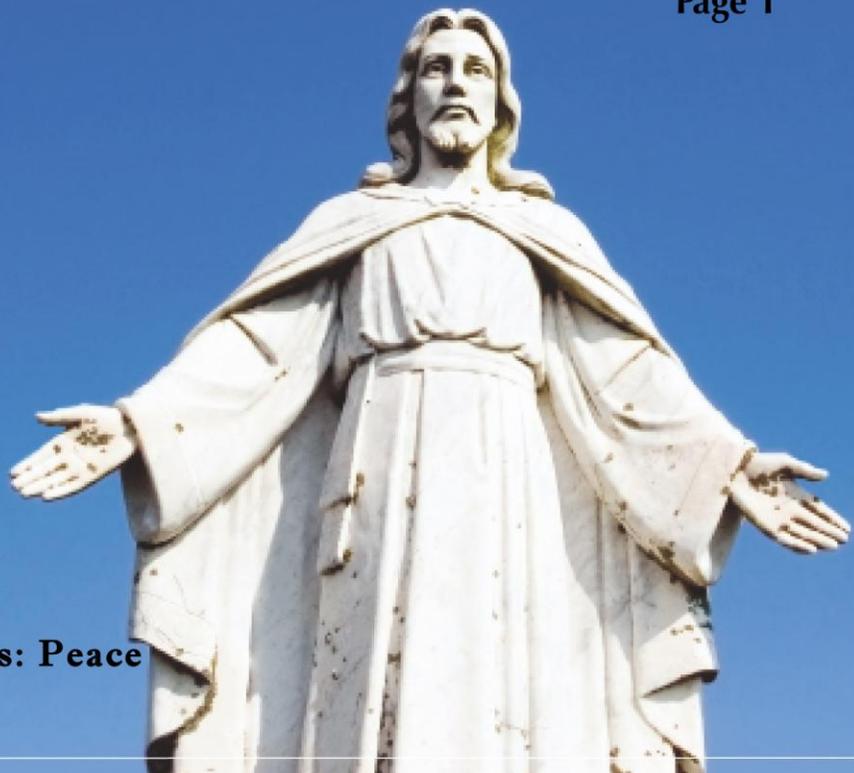


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The Redemption of Christ Jesus: Spurgeon on Sin and Forgiveness

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

I. Christ Receives Sinners

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:1-2).

Observe the condescension of this fact. This Man, who towers above all other men, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners—this Man receiveth sinners. This Man, who is no other than the eternal God, before whom angels veil their faces—this Man receiveth sinners. It needs an angel’s tongue to describe such a mighty stoop of love.

That any of us should be willing to seek after the lost is nothing wonderful—they are of our own race; but that He, the offended God, against whom the transgression has been committed, should take upon Himself the form of a servant, and bear the sin of many, and should then be willing to receive the vilest of the vile, this is marvelous.

“This Man receiveth sinners”; not, however, that they may remain sinners, but He receives them that He may pardon their sins, justify their persons, cleanse their hearts by His purifying word, preserve their souls by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and enable them to serve Him, to show forth His praise, and to have communion with Him. Into His heart’s love He receives sinners, takes them from the dunghill, and wears them as jewels in His crown; plucks them as brands from the burning, and preserves them as costly monuments of His mercy. None are so precious in Jesus’ sight as the sinners for whom He died.

When Jesus receives sinners, He has not some out-of-doors reception place, no casual ward where He charitably entertains them as men do passing beggars, but He opens the golden gates of His royal heart, and receives the sinner right into Himself—yea, He admits the humble penitent into personal union and makes Him a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. There was never such a reception as this! This fact is still most sure today, He is still receiving sinners: would to God that sinners would receive Him.

II. Christ Justifies the Sinners He Receives

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:23-26).

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory looks back upon past sins, with deep sorrow for the sin, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come; for Christ has paid the debt of His people to the last jot and tittle, and received the divine receipt; and unless God can be so unjust as to demand double payment for one debt, no soul for whom Jesus died as a substitute can ever be cast into hell.

It seems to be one of the very principles of our enlightened nature to believe that God is just; we feel that it must be so, and this gives us our terror at first; but is it not marvelous that this very same belief that God is just, becomes afterwards the pillar of our confidence and peace! If God be just, I, a sinner, alone and without a substitute, must be punished; but Jesus stands in my stead and is punished for me; and now, if God be just, I, a sinner, standing in Christ, can never be punished. God must change His nature before one soul for whom Jesus was a substitute can ever by any possibility suffer the lash of the law.

Therefore, Jesus having taken the place of the believer—having rendered a full equivalent to divine wrath for all that His people ought to have suffered as the result of sin, the believer can shout with glorious triumph, *“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?”* (Rom. 8:33). Not God, for He hath justified; not Christ, for He hath died, yea rather hath risen again.

My hope lives, not because I am not a sinner, but because I am a sinner for whom Christ died; my trust is not that I am holy, but that being unholy, He is my righteousness. My faith rests not upon what I am, or shall be, or feel, or know, but in what Christ is, in what He has

done, and in what He is now doing for me. On the lion of justice the fair maid of hope rides like a queen.

III. Christ Advocates for the Sinners He Has Justified

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

“If any man sin, we have an advocate.” Yes, though we sin, we have Him still. John does not say, “If any man sin he has forfeited his advocate,” but *“we have an advocate,”* sinners though we are. All the sin that a believer ever did, or can be allowed to commit, cannot destroy his interest in the Lord Jesus Christ, as his advocate.

The name here given to our Lord is suggestive. *“Jesus.”* Ah! Then He is an advocate such as we need, for Jesus is the name of one whose business and delight it is to save. *“They shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins”* (Matt. 1:21). His sweetest name implies His success.

Next, it is *“Jesus Christ”*—*Christos*, the anointed. This shows His authority to plead. The Christ has a right to plead, for He is the Father’s own appointed advocate and elected priest. If He were of our choosing He might fail, but if God hath laid help upon one that is mighty, we may

safely lay our trouble where God has laid His help. He is Christ, and therefore authorized; He is Christ, and therefore qualified, for the anointing has fully fitted Him for His work. He can plead so as to move the heart of God and prevail. What words of tenderness, what sentences of persuasion will the anointed use when He stands up to plead for me!

One more letter of His name remains, *“Jesus Christ the righteous.”* This is not only His character but His plea. It is His character, and if the Righteous One be my advocate, then my cause is good, or He would not have espoused it. It is His plea, for He meets the charge of unrighteousness against me by the plea that He is righteous. He declares Himself my substitute and puts His obedience to my account. My soul, thou hast a friend well fitted to be thine advocate, He cannot but succeed; leave thyself entirely in His hands.

Three selections from *Morning and Evening*

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), “the Prince of Preachers,” was a renowned pastor and author who served as pastor of London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle for 38 years. His works are still widely read today.

Conquering Criticism

By Alan Stewart

A legend is told about a group of tiny frogs who held a competition to see who could reach the top of a very high tower. A huge crowd had gathered to see the race and cheer on the contestants. As the race began, no one in the crowd really believed that the tiny frogs could reach the top of the tower. Some said, “They will never make it to the top,” and others said, “There is not a chance they will succeed.” One by one, the tiny frogs began collapsing. But, there were a few brave souls that kept climbing higher. The crowd continued to yell louder, “It is too difficult! The tower is too high and no one will make it!” More tiny frogs grew tired and just gave up the effort.

There was one frog, however, that continued to climb higher and higher. He simply would not give up, and after a tremendous effort, became the only frog to reach the top. With great excitement, all of the other frogs wanted to know how this one frog managed to succeed when all the others had failed. A contestant asked the tiny frog how he had found the strength and determination to succeed in reaching the goal. As it turned out, the successful frog was deaf!

There are few things in our life journey that are as painful and paralyzing as facing the sting of criticism. We find the wounds of criticism cut so deeply because our hearts take it so personally. Even the mere threat of

criticism has left many a life in underachieving mediocrity. American author Elbert Hubbard wrote, “To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing.”

However, anything that is ever worth accomplishing for God will come with its fair share of criticism. When you study the lives of those who undertook great tasks for God, you quickly discover they wore more mud than medals.

Perhaps no one, outside of Christ, ever faced the depth of criticism that Moses was forced to endure. In Exodus 15:24, you find a phrase that was used time and again, *“And the people murmured against Moses....”* He could never do anything, it seemed, that pleased the people. Yet, in the presence of God he found the only opinion that really mattered. When a man lives only to please God, he knows that while his critics may know some things, God knows all the rest. Living with a critical appraisal is difficult to our ego, but those who learn to conquer it seem to walk on a higher spiritual plateau with God. How can a man navigate his way through the minefield of criticism and successfully obtain vindication and victory over his critics?

I. In Order to Conquer Criticism We Must Listen with a Discerning Ear

Although Moses faced constant criticism, he was often startled and surprised from where the criticism came. In Numbers 16, it came from three men “...*famous in the congregation, men of renown.*” But, in Numbers 12, “...*Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses...*” His criticism came from those who were respected, but also from those who were relatives. The great lesson here is that just because someone is close to us does not guarantee they are close to God. When we listen to criticism from those we have trusted with influence in our life, it is easy to allow their selfish interests to overshadow our spiritual instincts.

There is a great question to ask ourselves when trying to discern the legitimacy of criticism; “Does the criticism embrace the will of God or exclude the will of God?” A heart persuaded of God’s will can never be dissuaded of it by criticism. Long before Noah heard the ridicule of the crowd, God had told him the rain was coming. Long before Nehemiah saw the winks of disbelief, God had showed him a wall of defense. German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, “Against criticism a man can neither protest nor defend himself; he must act in spite of it, and then it will gradually yield to him.” When God is directing the ship of a man’s life, the waves of His calling are always mightier than the winds of criticism.

II. In Order to Conquer Criticism We Must Learn from a Dependable Example

In Exodus 18, Jethro watched as Moses grew weary under the weight of well-doing. Jethro then spoke a seasonable word of criticism, “...*The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away...*” (Ex. 18:17). Moses was well on his way to becoming an ineffective leader, and Jethro gave a stern but gracious warning.

The acid test of constructive criticism is the fact it only has as its aim to correct and never to condemn. We should never fear criticism when we are right, but we should never ignore it when we are wrong. Esther was determined to play it safe, but Mordecai’s gentle rebuke gave her determination to do what was right. Martha was busy performing, but a loving rebuke from Jesus helped to balance her priorities. Apollos was a talented young preacher, but was limited in his knowledge. Aquila and Priscilla graciously took him aside “...*and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly*” (Acts 18:26) A.W. Tozer once said, “Never be afraid of honest criticism. If the

critic is wrong, you can help him; and if you’re wrong, he can help you. Either way, somebody’s helped.” Any time criticism drives us to the heart of God, you can rest assured it was both noble and necessary for our life.

III. In Order to Conquer Criticism We Must Limit All the Damaging Effects

After years of handling the criticism so well, in Numbers 20, we find a breaking point in the life of Moses. Once again, the people were thirsty and criticized Moses’ leadership. In a moment of frustration and weariness, Moses strikes the rock twice to get water rather than speak to it as God commanded. The contagious nature of criticism had spread to unbelief and disobedience in Moses.

The longer we allow the words of a critic to linger in our minds, the greater the chance exists of developing a cynical and critical spirit ourselves. A wounded man is just as dangerous to himself as he is to others. As Elijah pondered Jezebel’s threats, the more cowardly and skeptical he became. As John the Baptist pondered Herod’s threats, the more discouraged and doubtful he became. Adrian Rogers once said, “It is as much a Christian’s duty to avoid taking offense as it is to avoid giving offense.” When verbal javelins are hurled in our direction, the decision then becomes ours as to whether or not we return the javelin. It is worth remembering that in a single decision a man can quickly move from the critical to the hypocritical.

My grandmother always seemed to have a kennel of dogs when I was growing up. Every time we went to her house, it seemed one dog would start barking and it set the entire kennel to barking. Most of the dogs were clueless as to why or even at what they were barking. However, if you just ignored them and did not give them something else to bark about, they eventually stopped barking and went back inside their dog house. Therein lies a great secret in dealing with criticism—the sooner you turn a deaf ear and stop giving them something to bark about, the sooner the dogs will quiet down and go back home,

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Faith of the Faithless?

By Justin Lonas

That God answers prayer is an essential article of our faith. We know that He answers according to His perfect will and His mercy (not according to our desires and finite plans), and in His time (which is not ours). We even

know that He answers at least some of the prayers of the unsaved, as He answered the first prayer of each believer for salvation (which was prayed from “outside” of His family). He is not deaf, and He is active in the lives of men.

What about, however, the prayers of those who neither know God nor worship Him? In Genesis 24, we see an interesting display of the prayers of a man seemingly in such a position. The scene opens with Abraham, advancing in years, concerned for the spiritual well-being of his son Isaac and the perpetuation of his line according to the promise of God. Abraham wants Isaac to marry from among his own people, not from among the pagans in the land of Canaan, and so he asks his servant (whose name is not given in this passage) to swear to travel to his relatives and find a wife for Isaac. The servant obliges, and sets out on his errand.

Upon his arrival in Mesopotamia, he utters a prayer that belies 1) his position outside of Abraham's beliefs, 2) his confusion at Abraham's orders, and 3) his worry that he cannot complete his task. "*O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today, and show lovingkindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I am standing by the spring, and the daughters of the men of this city are coming out to draw water; now may it be that the girl to whom I say, 'Please let down your jar so that I may drink,' and who answers, 'Drink, and I will water your camels also'—may she be the one whom You have appointed for Your servant Isaac; and by this I will know that You have shown lovingkindness to my master*" (Gen. 24:12-14).

He sounds unsure of himself and detached from the God to whom he prays. He prays not so much for himself but according to Abraham and Isaac's faith and makes an outlandish "damp fleece" request of the Lord—but he prays! He steps out in the faith he has seen modeled in his master's household and calls out to God with at least some recognition that only the Lord could accomplish the task he was sworn to by Abraham.

God not only answers the servant's earnest plea for a successful completion of his mission, He does so immediately. "*Before he had finished speaking*" (v. 15), Rebekah walks up to the well and performs exactly the unusual set of actions he had prayed for as a sign. "*Then the man [the servant] bowed low and worshipped the Lord. He said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the Lord has guided me in the ways to the house of my master's brothers'*" (vv. 26-27). He proceeds from there to seal the deal with Rebekah's family and bring her back to marry Isaac, praising the Lord for His provision (vv. 42-49).

Reading an attitude of skepticism into the servant's prayers may be a bit "Western" of me (the language is such that he may have been simply honoring Abraham as his master even in prayer), but his amazement at the Lord's sudden and exacting answer is palpable in the text. God will answer whom He will answer, and whether or not the servant was a partaker in Abraham's faith "*reckoned to him as righteousness*" (Gen. 15:6), the Lord showed up in response to his earnest request.

To say that the Lord answers the prayers of the faithless is, in any case, misleading—there are no faithless prayers. All true prayer is born out of a person's honest belief "*that [God] is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him*" (Heb. 11:6)—a request made from any other attitude is just hollow and meaningless talking to the ceiling. Prayer is faith in action.

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

The Abomination of Desolation

Matthew 24:15-22

From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers

[15] The word "*therefore*" (*oun* [3767]) connects "*the end* (*télos* [5056], terminal point)" in verse 14 with the event being introduced here. "*When*" (the Greek conjunction *hótan* [3752]), focuses on a specific event within the nation of Israel, which will be miraculously preserved. The appearance of the abomination of desolation is connected with the worldwide preaching of the gospel of the kingdom at "*the end*."

This is the closest Jesus gets to answering the disciple's question of when in verse 3. However, the "when" is eclipsed by a "what", that is, some physical

object called an "*abomination of desolation*" is given in place of a date. There will be a day and hour when this profane, sacrilegious idol will be erected, but the disciples were to deduce the time from the sign, not the sign from the times.

Once in this discourse, *hótan* is qualified only by anticipatory waiting (*prosdokāō* [4328]; v. 50). In three other instances, the expectation of "*then*" is connected with signs that are empirically observed (here the abomination of desolation, in v. 32 the branch putting forth leaves as summer approaches, and in v. 33 "all these things"). In looking at the magnificent temple, Jesus had said (v. 2) that one stone would not be left on another, but the entire

structure would be “thrown down” or destroyed (from *katalúō* [2647]).

Jesus now spoke of “*the abomination of desolation.*” Abomination is the Greek noun *bdélugma* ([946] from the verb *bdelússō* [948], to emit a foul odor or to turn away through loathing or disgust). The abomination, then, whatever it is, will cause desolation. The verb translated “shall see” is *idēte* (the aorist active subjunctive of *eídon* from *horáō* [3708], to see and perceive with emphasis on perception). Believers will see or perceive this disgusting thing at the completion of the age (*suntéleia tou aiōnos*; v. 3). Furthermore, they will need to “mind” what was written in the book of Daniel to perceive accurately how this event fits into the general scheme.

In 1 John 2:18 we read, “*Little children, it is the last hour: and as you have heard that antichrist (antíchristos [500] from antí [473], against; and christós [5547], anointed one) comes (from érchomai [2064], to come), even now there are many antichrists; so we know it is the last hour*” (a.t.).

An antichrist is one who opposes Christ. “*Antí*” also means “in place of,” so this last Antichrist will be a supplanter; he will try to replace the true Messiah. The “*little horn*” on the fourth beast of Daniel 7:8 and “*the beast*” (*thērion* [2342]) of Revelation 11:7; 13:1–8 are then both Antichrist. Three-and-a-half years into Daniel’s seventieth week, this beast will attempt to replace Christ (Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:3–10; Rev. 13:5). This ultimate Antichrist surpasses the attempts of former antichrists to replace God as the object of worship (Rev. 13:12).

Satan will energize him (Rev. 13:2, 3) and aid his cause by performing miracles through him and deceiving the world into worshiping him through “*another beast*” (Rev. 13:11, 12). Elsewhere the Antichrist is called “*that lawless (ánomos [459]) one*” (2 Thess. 2:8 NASB), the “*man of sin,*” and the “*son of perdition*” (2 Thess. 2:1–12). He will be destroyed on and by the “*Day of Christ*” (2 Thess. 2:2). This final Antichrist may be the “*angel of the abyss,*” the “*king*” of Hades (Rev. 9:11), whose name in Hebrew is “*Abaddon*” and in Greek “*Apollyon*” (*apollūōn* [623]), both names signifying “the destroyer.”

This final Antichrist is so obnoxious (*bdelússō* or *bdēō* [n.f.], to stink) that Jerusalem and the temple will be desolated as prophesied by Christ (Matt. 23:38; Luke 21:20) and earlier by Jeremiah (Jer. 22:5). This is not so much a military conquest as moral abandonment, far worse than defeat. The amazing thing is that all this was predicted so long ago in Daniel 8:13 and 9:27. Daniel 11:31 says, “*And they shall pollute the sanctuary of strength, and shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate.*”

The activities of this supreme world leader are given in historical narrative in Daniel, chapters 7–12. Satan himself empowers him according to Revelation 13:2,

warring against the people of God (13:7). The conflict that ensues is unimaginable. At the end, the Messiah stops the transgression and the “*wicked one*” (2 Thess. 2:8; a.t.). All this centers in Jerusalem (cf. Dan. 9:26).

According to Daniel 11:36 (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4), this Antichrist magnifies himself above every god, including the almighty God, arousing His indignation. While two words in Greek (*orgē* [3709], wrath, in Matt. 3:7, Luke 3:7, Rom. 1:18, etc.; and *thlipsis* [2347], tribulation, in Mark 13:19, 24; 2 Thess. 1:6; Rev. 2:22; 7:14, etc.) are both characteristics of this time, Paul makes it clear that believers are not appointed to the wrath (from *orgē*; 1 Thess. 5:9) of God. The Lord, rather, “*rescues us from the coming wrath*” (1 Thess. 1:10 NIV).

Jesus now said parenthetically that understanding this prophecy is essential and should occupy our careful attention: “*Whoso readeth (from anaginōskō [314] from aná [303], again; and ginōskō [1097], to know by experience), let him understand (noeítō from noéō [3539], to comprehend, understand).*”

Each individual should read these Scriptures over and over again until he or she understands what is meant. Of course, this will take place in the middle of the Tribulation period. I believe that those who understand already will be raptured beforehand, but many will seek the truth in that day. These people must learn what Christ would have them do when the abomination of desolation approaches. This is impossible apart from a careful study of Daniel chapters 7–12 and other related portions of Scripture (2 Thess. 2:1–12; 1 John 2:18; Rev. 13).

As disciples, we all ought to read the biblical lessons given by God’s inspired prophets like Daniel. Accordingly, we should not read prophecy casually, but carefully interpret it and apply it to our own experiences.

[16] When believers recognize the identity of the Antichrist, Jesus continued, they should take certain measures. The adverb “*then*” (*tóte* [5119]) here agrees with the “*then’s*” of verses 9 and 10, referring to the second half of the seven-year, seventieth week of Daniel. Conditions in Jerusalem will be so bad that Jesus forewarned His disciples to leave the region of Judea and escape to the mountains. The verb “*let them flee*” is *pheugétōsan*, the present imperative of *pheúgō* (5343), to flee (cf. Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21).

[17, 18] Other specific instructions are worth noting. If anyone is on the roof of his house, Jesus warned, “*Let him...not come down (from katabainō [2597], to go down) to take (from airō [142], to take away) anything out of his house. Nor let him who is in the field return (from epistréphō [1994]) back (opísō [3694]) to take (also from airō) his clothes*” (a.t.). No material possession is worth a human life. As Judea will be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20), panic and anarchy will set in. People will no longer

find safety in status or possessions. Jesus' clear advice here is to flee from the land.

[19] A specific exhortation is given to expectant and nursing mothers: “*And woe unto them that are with child, and them that nurse (from *thēlázō* [2337], to breast feed a baby) in those days*” (a.t.). “*Those days*” may extend to the full forty-two months or 1,260 days noted in other places (Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:10–12; Rev. 11:2, 3; 13:5; see below for further discussion).

[20] Within this period, apparently, there will be favorable times to escape: “*But pray ye (from *proseúchomai* [4336], to pray to God) that your flight (*phugē* [5437]) be (from *gínomai* [1096], to become) not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.*” As Paul tells us generally, we should “*pray without ceasing*” (1 Thess. 5:17), but this prayer has a specific content. A desperate flight out of Judea would violate the command to rest on the Sabbath, and winter is generally a time of food scarcity, even apart from the threat of an invasion. But God will be tolerant throughout the Tribulation, His grace reaching down to save souls from “*all nations*” from the evil one. Among these will be great numbers of Israelites.

[21] The reason for praying that the escape out of Judea is not in the winter or on a Sabbath day follows: “*For then shall be great (from *mégas* [3173]) tribulation (*thlipsis* [2347]), such as was (from *gínomai* [1096], “to be”) not since (ap’ from *apó* [575], from) the beginning (from *archē* [746], commencement) of the world (*kósmos* [2889]) to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*”

The words “*great*” and “*tribulation,*” occurring without definite articles, should be taken generically, introducing us to a special kind of tribulation. “*Such*” translates a form of the relative pronoun *hoíos* ([3634], such a one). The contrast that follows is between this and every other tribulation. This will be the severest.

“*To this time*” translates *héōs* (2193), until this time. The last phrase, “*no, nor ever shall be,*” begins with the negative *oudé* (3761), “*but not.*” This is a contrasting compound conjunction of the two negatives *ou* (3756) and *mē* (3361) combined as an intensive combination, meaning absolutely not, never at any time. The intensive negative means that this tribulation will be absolutely unprecedented.

Though dreadful and unique, the Tribulation will be under God's full control. Satan and his demons are sometimes called world rulers (from *kosmokrátōr* [2888]; see Eph. 6:12), but God is the ruler of all, the *pantokrátōr* ([3841], the almighty, the ruler of all heaven and earth, the universe) (2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; etc.). Because Satan's time will be short, he will no doubt command his malevolent ranks to carry out their evil plans efficiently. But Revelation 17:14 assures us who will be victorious: “*These (the forces of evil including the Antichrist) shall make war with the Lamb (arníon [721] a living lamb), and*

the Lamb shall overcome them” (see also Rev. 5:6; 6:1; 7:9; etc.).

[22] The King James Version here translates the Greek conjunction *ei* (1487) *mē* (3361), “*if not,*” as a clause of exception: “*And except (ei mē) those days be shortened, no (literally, none [from *ou* {3756}] of any [from *pás* {3956}, all, any]) flesh (*sárx* [4561], the emphasis is on physical preservation, not spiritual salvation) would (*án* [302], “then” as a potential) be saved (from *sōzō* [4982], to save)” (a.t.).*

The contextual referent of “*those days*” is the Great Tribulation, the period when Gentile armies invade Jerusalem to quell the religious anarchy created by positioning the abomination of desolation in the holy place (Dan. 9:27). Such furious oppression will take place in those days that unless the time is shortened, everyone will die physically.

Will God shorten the days? Here, it would be better to think of the Greek verb translated in the King James Version as “*should be shortened (from *kolobōō* [2856])*” as “*to be cut short.*” Or, to put it another way, God has already determined shortened days. If He had not, the text says, the destruction would be total. Another way to translate the first part of the verse is: “*If (ei, on the supposition that) those days were not shortened (ekolobōthēsan, the aorist indicative of *kolobōō* [2856]; the indicative—in place of the subjunctive—implies that God already shortened), then surely (an [302]) no one will escape alive*” (a.t.).

Since God's foreknowledge is absolutely accurate, it already includes shortened days, but to what extent? No doubt the original three-and-a-half years prophesied in Daniel and marked out as a unique period of oppression also in Revelation (see Dan. 7:25; Rev. 11:2-3; 12:7; etc.) have already been shortened from a longer period that would have been (see, e.g., Matt. 11:21, 23 for events that “*would have been*” had God determined otherwise). It is not necessary for us to know what the reduction in time is in order to know that it is.

The balance of the verse tells us for whose sake God cut the days short: “*For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened*” (which means the shortening is included in God's eternal decree. There's no “*if*” about this here; they “*shall be*” shortened). The “*elect*” (from *eklektós* [1588], chosen one) are those saved from all nations during the Tribulation (Rev. 7:1–17; 12:17; 13:7; 15:2-3). The persecution by the Antichrist will stimulate believers of this period to pray fervently: “*The effectual fervent prayer (dēēsis [1162], prayer for what is needed) of a righteous man availeth much*” (James 5:16). Many will be saved through God's answer to these prayers.

This does not indicate a change of God's plan and mind but the exact execution of His will as planned. The time of the severe persecution by the Antichrist will be no longer than the length of time to which God has shortened

it. The time would be longer if God were not merciful, but since He is, He will shorten the period in which the Antichrist expends his fury.

Spiros Zodhiates (1922-2009) served as president of AMG International for over 40 years, was the founding editor of *Pulpit Helps Magazine* (*Disciple's* predecessor), and authored dozens of exegetical books.

Following God—by Wayne Barber

Counterfeit Love, False Worship

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Paul shows us in Galatians 5:19-21 what the garment of flesh looks like, if we, as believers, allow the flesh to dominate our lives. Paul shows that all the flesh offers us is a counterfeit way of living: “*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*” We need to see this! When we choose to live after our flesh, all the flesh can offer is fake!

First of all, the flesh can only offer a counterfeit **love**: “*Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality...*” Paul describes a counterfeit love life—one that brings only physical gratification. It’s amazing how the flesh makes us think that lust is the same thing as the wonderful purity of loving someone in the Spirit of God!

The first word to describe this fake love is “*immorality*.” It translates the word *porneía*, which comprehends all sexual sin, including incest, homosexuality, promiscuous sex, adultery, etc. In fact, some translations add the word adultery.

The next word is “*impurity*,” *akatharsía*, unclean. This has to do with unclean minds. It is what is hidden within. A man once told me that the best way to find someone to commit immorality with was at church. He said he would go to the singles department and in conversation with those of the opposite sex he would say something off-color and then watch for a response which told him that they had unclean minds like his. That was so sad to me!

The next word is “*sensuality*”—*asélgeia*, licentiousness. It means to think one has a license to do what he wants. One could reason he is under grace, so he is free to live as he chooses. But grace is never the right to do as we please but the power to do as we should. *Asélgeia* is really where it all starts. It is this attitude that breeds impurity and ends up in immorality. The flesh can never produce what we need, only what we want! All that it offers

is counterfeit. So, a counterfeit love life is what many a believer has bought into.

Next is a counterfeit **worship**. It’s incredible how many believers don’t have a clue as to what real worship is. Worship is never for us, but for Christ! Paul adds two words in Galatians 5:20 to our list of behavioral characteristics of those who walk after the flesh: “*idolatry*” and “*sorcery*.” Now, this may surprise you! The word for idolatry is *eidōlatrēía*. It comes from two Greek words: *eidōlon*, which means an idol, and *latreía*, which means to serve—hence, to serve an idol. *Latreía* is frequently translated “*worship*.”

Now, we must begin with a fundamental understanding of what an idol is. An idol is nothing more than what man makes it. A believer can be caught up in idolatry and not realize it. An idol can be anything. For a preacher it can even be his style of preaching. It can be one’s style of music. An idol can be a ministry one is attached to. Even one’s family can become an idol. It is anything that usurps the place Christ must hold in our lives.

The Law was what the deceived Galatians had attached themselves to. They substituted the Law for Christ. And when we get off track—when we foolishly choose to obey the desires of the flesh—our agendas become identified by what we are attached to. What we are worshipping is not Christ.

Now Paul adds another word that clearly describes this. He adds “*sorcery*,” *pharmakeía*. We get “*pharmacy*” from this word. It was the word for drugs. Whatever we attach ourselves to, becomes like a drug that we have to have.

“They are not using my style of music! I’m never coming back! I can’t worship without my music!” Ever heard that one? We must have the agenda that we worship and if we don’t get it, it literally affects our behavior! When we talk more about our pastor, or our church, or our choir, than we do about Jesus, look out! It is amazing how many people have adapted themselves to a form of religion and think that they are worshiping God—while they have completely denied His power in them.

The Galatians were acting like they were drugged. Paul had to say to them, “*Oh foolish Galatians, who has*

bewitched you?” “Who or what has put you under a spell? What is it that you are so addicted to?”

Your behavior is controlled by what you have attached yourself to. This is what religion did to the

Galatians. Again, what garment are you wearing: the garment of spirit and truth or the garment of law and flesh?

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Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

The Fruit of the Spirit Is: Peace

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27).

My young friend Josh Woo recently visited his parents’ homeland of Korea while on summer vacation from his studies at the University of Southern California. One day, I read the email he sends occasionally to friends and family. Over that weekend, he had visited the DMZ, that “demilitarized zone” marking the border between North and South Korea, part of the settlement which ended the Korean War in 1953. Josh sent several pictures, including one showing a sign with the number: 21,172.

“That’s the number of days since the Korean War ended,” he said. Then he surmised, “This probably means that in their minds that war is not really over.” I expect he’s right. What we have here is a truce, an agreement to disagree. For each of those thousands of days, relations between these two nations and its people have been strained. What we do not have is **peace**.

When I went off to my freshman year of college, that truce was five years old. I recall our history professor, Mae Parrish, lauding the agreement that ended that war, calling it a mark of maturity among nations. Rather than a fight to the death, rather than demanding “unconditional surrender” of one side or the other, the combatants agreed to disagree. That’s about the best we humans can do sometimes. And, let us be quick to say, it’s a far cry better than slaughtering our young men and women to make a point or have our way. But let us not call it peace. Peace is something else altogether.

Scripture knows three kinds of peace: with God, within ourselves, and between one another. The implications for Christ’s disciples are enormous.

I. Peace with God Is a Gift from the Lord Jesus Christ

Peace is something we receive by faith; this is salvation. *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). As a result of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross, the sins which divided us from a Holy God have been dealt with *“once and for all”* (Hebrews 7:27; 10:10-12). Our salvation is a done deal. When we

receive Jesus Christ into our lives as Lord and Savior, the enmity that had estranged us from the Father is no more.

Somewhere I read of a preacher asking Henry David Thoreau if he had “made his peace” with the Almighty. He answered something to the effect that, “We were never at cross purposes with each other.” In no way do I wish to put down Thoreau, but his statement reveals an unrealistic view of the sinful heart and the self-centeredness that characterizes every member of the human race. When scripture says, *“There is none righteous”* and *“All have sinned”* (Rom. 3), that includes distinguished New England writers also.

Peace with God is a wonderful thing. And to think, it’s a gift! *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom. 6:23).

Toward the conclusion to his best-selling 1953 book, *Peace With God*, Billy Graham wrote, “Peace can be experienced only when you have received divine pardon—when you have been reconciled to God and when you have harmony within, with your fellow man and especially with God. *‘There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.’* But through the blood of the cross, Christ has made peace with God for us and is Himself our peace. If by faith we accept Him, we are justified by God and can realize the inner serenity that can come to man through no other means. When Christ enters our heart, we are freed of that haunting sense of sin. Cleansed of all feeling of contamination and unfitness, we can lift up our heads secure in the knowledge that we can look with confidence into the face of our fellowmen. *‘When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.’* Even more important, we know that we can stand before God in the hour of our death with this same feeling of peace and security.”

II. Peace within Ourselves Is a Fruit of the Holy Spirit

Peace is something the Spirit grows within us; this is sanctification. There is a vertical peace—between God and man. There is a horizontal peace—between people. And there is an inner peace, which is a product of the indwelling Holy Spirit who sits in control of one’s life.

We see this in the story of a woman known in Scripture only as *“the Shunnamite woman.”* After this lady

had led her husband to extend hospitality to the Prophet Elisha, who was making his rounds throughout Israel, even to the extent of building onto the house a “prophet’s quarters” for him, the man of God decided to do something for her. He asked his servant to find out what she needed. “*He said to him, ‘Say now to her, ‘Behold, you have been careful for us with all this care; what can I do for you? Would you be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the army?’*” *And she answered, ‘I live among my own people’*” (2 Kings 4:13).

I love the self-sufficiency of that. There is nothing acquisitive about this woman. She is no opportunist, even when the man of God hands her a blank check. There is a beautiful peace within her. It’s this quality our Lord meant when He said, “*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you*” (John 14:27). It’s His peace. It’s unlike anything the world has. It is the rarest quality on earth, and one of the most precious.

John MacArthur says the verb form of the word for peace means “to have it all together.” God’s peace—which the Holy Spirit bears in our lives when He sits in control—is a wholeness or settled-ness. We lack for nothing. Paul expressed it like this (to paraphrase): “All of God is in Christ. Christ is in you. You are complete in Him” (Col. 2:9; 1:27; 2:10).

One of the best ways to see what this Holy Spirit peace is all about is to notice when it’s absent. The lack of this kind of completeness leaves the field free for anxiety, worry, fear, and angst to do their dirty work. Pastor Waylon Bailey and I were discussing a young minister with whom we were both impressed. Waylon observed, “There are two kinds of preachers: those who go into the ministry whole and those who enter it in order to get whole.” We agreed that our mutual friend was already whole. It’s a wonderful life. It’s a fruit of the Spirit.

III. Peace between People Is a Work of Righteousness

This kind of peace is something we do. “*And the work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of*

righteousness, quietness and confidence forever” (Isa. 32:17).

The first peace—with God (salvation)—is a gift from Jesus. You receive this all at once by repenting and believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior. The second peace—within oneself (sanctification)—is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It takes time to produce this fruit, and becomes more evident as we grow in Christ. The last peace—between people (obedience)—is a work of righteousness. It’s something we do, not a gift and not a fruit. It is a work. The presence of inner peace (with God, within ourselves) gives us the power, ability, desire, to work for peace between ourselves and other people.

“*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*” (Rom. 12:18). Let’s be very clear about this, Christian: Much of it depends on you. In Jesus Christ, you have been freed from anxiety, worry, and fear. You have been freed from overwhelming guilt and you are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit. If anyone is automatically able to go to someone who has offended you and forgive, it’s you. If anyone is able to go to someone who is angry at you and apologize, it’s you. If anyone is able to bring two warring parties together and assist them in reconciling, it’s you.

What you are not entitled to or empowered for is “*to be quick to take offense*” (1 Cor. 13:5). If there is a person on the earth who overlooks slights and offenses, it ought to be you, one of the most blessed of anyone anywhere.

The peace of God and the peace of Christ are not ends in themselves. God gives no gifts in order that His children may have nice warm feelings inside. The gift of God’s peace and the fruit of the Spirit which is peace are given in order to make us peacemakers. “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matt.5:9).

Joe McKeever is a retired Southern Baptist pastor from New Orleans, Louisiana. He blogs regularly at www.joemckeeper.com.

Jewels from Past Giants

Sin—Part 2 of 3

By Charles Hodge

Originally published in 1841 as a chapter in The Way of Life. Edited slightly for modern spellings.

The Sins of Men Are Numerous and Aggravated

The Bible not only teaches that all men are sinners and that the evil is deeply seated in their hearts, but moreover that their sinfulness is very great. The clearest

intimation which a law-giver can give of his estimate of the evil of transgression is the penalty which he attaches to the violation of his laws. If he is wise and good, the penalty will be a true index of the real demerit of transgression, and in the case of God, who is infinitely wise and good, the punishment which He denounces against sin must be an exact criterion of its ill-desert.

If we are unable to see that sin really deserves what God has declared to be its proper punishment, it only shows that our judgment differs from His, and that it should thus differ is no matter of surprise. We cannot know all the reasons which indicate the righteousness of the divine threatening. We can have no adequate conception of the greatness, goodness, and wisdom of the Being against whom we sin; nor of the evil which sin is suited to produce; nor of the perfect excellence of the law which we transgress. That sin therefore appears to us a lesser evil than God declares it to be is no evidence that it is really undeserving of his wrath and curse.

There is a still more operative cause of our low estimate of the evil of sin. The more depraved a man is, the less capable is he of estimating the heinousness of his transgressions. And the man who in one part of his career looked upon crimes with abhorrence comes at last to regard them with indifference. That we are sinners, therefore, is a sufficient explanation of the fact that we look upon sin in a very different light from that in which it is presented in the Word of God. Nothing then can be more reasonable than that we should bow before the judgment of God, that we should acknowledge that sin really deserves the punishment which he has declared to be its due. That punishment is so awful that nothing but a profound reverence for God, and some adequate conception of the evil of sin, can produce a sincere acquiescence in its justice. Yet nothing can be more certain than that this punishment is the proper measure of the ill-desert of sin.

The term commonly employed to designate this punishment is death; death not merely of the body, but of the soul, not merely temporal but eternal. It is a comprehensive term therefore to express all the evils in this world and the world to come, which are the penal consequences of sin. In this sense it is to be understood in the threatening made to our first parents: "*In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*" (Gen. 2:17). And when the prophet says, "*The soul that sinneth it shall die*" (Ezek. 18:4). And when the apostle says, "*The wages of sin is death*" (Rom. 6:23).

The same general idea is expressed by the word "curse": "*As many as are of the law are under the curse; for it is written cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them*" (Gal. 3:16). And also by the word "wrath": "*We were by nature the children of wrath*" (Eph. 2:3), "*The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*" (Rom. 1:18).

Those and similar passages teach that sinners are the objects of the divine displeasure, and that this displeasure will certainly be manifested. As God is infinitely good and the fountain of all blessedness, His displeasure must be the greatest of all evils.

The Scriptures, however, in order to impress this truth more deeply upon our minds, employ the strongest terms human language affords, to set forth the dreadful import of God's displeasure. Those who do not obey the Gospel, it is said, "*shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power*" (2 Thess. 1:9). Our Savior says, "*The wicked shall be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched*" (Mark 9:43-44). At the last great day, He tells us, "*the judge shall say to those upon His left hand, 'Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels'*" (Matt. 25:41). In the last day, "*all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation*" (John 5:28-29), or as it is expressed in Daniel, "*to shame and everlasting contempt*" (Dan. 12:2).

Whatever explanation may be given of the terms employed in these and many similar passages, there can be no doubt that they are intended to convey the idea of endless and hopeless misery. Whence this misery shall arise, or wherein it shall consist, are questions of minor importance. It is sufficient that the Scriptures teach that the sufferings here spoken of are, in degree, inconceivably great and, in duration, endless.

The most fearful exhibition given of the future state of the impenitent is that which presents them as reprobates, as abandoned to the unrestrained dominion of evil. The repressing influence of conscience, of a probationary state, of a regard to character, of good example, and above all of the Holy Spirit, will be withdrawn, and unmingled malignity, impurity, and violence constitute the character and condition of those who finally perish. The wicked are represented as constantly blaspheming God while they gnaw their tongues with pain (cf. Rev. 16:10). The God who pronounces this doom upon sinners is He who said, "*As I live I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked*" (Ezek. 33:11). The most fearful of these passages fell from the lips of the Lamb of God, who came to die that we might not perish but have eternal life.

It must be remembered that it is not against the chief of sinners that this dreadful punishment is denounced. It is against sin, one sin, any sin. "*Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written into the book of the law to do them*" (Gal. 3:19). "*Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10). As far as we know, the angels were punished for their first offense. Adam and his race fell by one transgression. Human governments act on the same principle. If a man commits murder, he suffers death for the one offence. If he is guilty of treason, he finds no defense in his freedom from other crimes. Sin is apostasy from God; it breaks our communion with Him, and is the ruin of the soul.

The displeasure of God against sin and His fixed determination to punish it are also manifested by the certain connection which He has established between sin and suffering. It is the undeniable tendency of sin to produce misery, and although in this world the good are not always more happy than the wicked, this only shows that the present is a state of trial and not of retribution. It affords no evidence to contradict the proof of the purpose of God to punish sin, derived from the obvious and necessary tendency of sin to produce misery. This tendency is as much a law of nature as any other law with which we are acquainted.

Men flatter themselves that they will escape the evil consequences of their transgressions by appealing to the mercy of God and obtaining a suspension of this law in their behalf. They might as reasonably expect the law of gravitation to be suspended for their convenience. *“He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption”* (Gal. 6:8), as certainly as he who sows tares shall reap tares. The only link which binds together causes and effects in nature is the will of God, and the same will, no less clearly revealed, connects suffering with sin. And this is a connection absolutely indissoluble save by the mystery of redemption.

To suspend the operation of a law of nature (as to stop the sun in his course) is merely an exercise of power. But to save sinners from the curse of the law required that Christ should be made a curse for us; that He should bear our sins in His own body on the tree; that He should be made sin for us and die, the just for the unjust. It would be a reflection on the wisdom of God to suppose that He would employ means to accomplish an end more costly than the end required. Could our redemption have been effected by corruptible things, as silver or gold, or could the blood of bulls or of goats have taken away sin, who can believe that Christ would have died? The apostle clearly teaches that it is to make the death of Christ vain to affirm that our salvation could have been otherwise secured (Gal. 2:21).

Since, then, in order to the pardon of sin the death of Christ was necessary, it is evident that the evil of sin in the sight of God must be estimated by the dignity of Him who died for our redemption. Here we approach the most mysterious and awful doctrine of the Bible. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by Him, and*

without Him was not any thing made that was made.... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 3, 14).

God therefore was manifested in the flesh. *“He who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Phil. 2:6-7).

He then—who is declared to be the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person, upholding all things by the Word of His power; whom all the angels are commanded to worship; of whom the Scriptures say, *“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, Thou Lord in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou remainest; they shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail”* (Heb. 1:8-12)—even He, who is God over all and blessed forever, inasmuch as the children were partakers of the flesh, Himself also took part of the same; that through death He might destroy Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) was Presbyterian theologian and leading proponent of historical Calvinism in America during the 19th Century. He taught for most of his career at Princeton Theological Seminary, serving as its principal from 1851-1878. He was the founder and first editor of *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, using the publication as a platform to address many controversial issues in his day. Among his best known books are numerous commentaries on New Testament books, his *Systematic Theology*, *The Way of Life*, and *What Is Darwinism*. He is remembered as a great defender of the faith who articulated the ageless doctrines of Christianity in an age when they were being called into question from many quarters. He argued strongly that the authority of the Bible as the Word of God had to be understood literally. His teaching and writings continue to be a significant influence on today’s evangelical believers.

Marks of the Master—by The Old Scot

Plants Have Hormones, Too

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, December 2005.

Ever wondered why plants grow upwards instead of sideways? How about why roots grow down instead of up? Plant scientists have discovered part of the answer, and it is

a plant hormone. Plant hormones are different from animal hormones, but work in the same way. Auxin is the hormone that controls plant growth, and the way it works is nothing short of miraculous.

Think of a sapling growing on a steep hillside. Many such baby trees bend out at first, but then turn straight up. This happens because more auxin goes to the underside of the branch tip than to its topside. The greater quantity of auxin underneath stimulates extra growth, and this unequal growth forces the branch to bend upward. When the branch tip is straight up, the amount of auxin on either side is equal, and all sides grow at the same rate.

Now, what makes roots grow down? Again, we find auxin. Scientists discovered that the same hormone invokes opposite reaction, depending on whether it is acting on above-ground or below-ground portions of the plant. How could this be? It turns out that when the concentration of auxin reaches a certain level, its effect is reversed. Instead of stimulating cell growth, it retards it. The hormone tends to pool on the lower side of the root tip, just as in branches, but growth of the affected cells slows down instead of speeding up—and the root turns down because of the pressure from growth of the cells on top

While research has solved some mysteries, it has only uncovered deeper ones. What causes the auxin to focus on one spot and not on another? Or what causes it to be dilute in one case and concentrated in another? Many believe the presence or absence of light is the answer—but if you sprout seeds in total darkness, the emerging shoot will still turn up, and the root will turn down. Why? Nobody knows for certain. What is known is that “something” makes sure that just the right amount of auxin goes to just the right place at the right time to make branches grow upright. “Something” causes root tissue to reverse its response completely when the concentration of auxin increases.

Somehow, every seed comes fully equipped with built-in instructions which will guide its development from first leaf to final form. Every seed is the marvelous creation of the vast intelligence of God, through which He quietly brings wonders to pass in our amazing everyday world.

The Old Scot (Ted Kyle) lives in Newberg, Oregon, with his wife, Marga.

Source: *Ingenious Kingdom*, Henry and Rebecca Northen, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970, pp. 136-137.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

What's So Amazing about Grace?

A Testimony

By AMG International Staff

This column highlights the ministries of Disciple's parent organization, Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International, a non-denominational missions agency.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Our mission as Christians is to be salt and light in the lives of others, bringing the light of Christ into their darkness—a smile, a pat on the back, a small piece of bread or just a little time for them. The Apostle Paul used a mirror to illustrate how we can be transformed to reflect the image of Christ to the world. If you've ever played with a small mirror in your hand, you know how you can catch the rays of the sun and angle the mirror just right to shine that light wherever you want it to go.

In the Philippines, the graduates of AMG Skilled Hands Technological College (ASHTEC) have the light shone on them by our staff. This is the testimony of one graduate, Bonifacio Manalili, who had previously claimed to be an atheist.

“I grew up in a not-too-religious family. My parents casually went to a Roman Catholic Church once a month, and every once in a while, they were lucky enough to make me go with them. I usually sat at the back to observe all the faces of church people and yawn every minute. Since childhood, I thought religion was just a manmade system to make someone feel good about their life. ‘Holier than thou’ people really pushed me to walk away. I was not comfortable with anything that was connected to any religion or ‘god’ thing. Even the man Jesus who they call ‘my Lord’ just didn't have a big impact on me. For me, he was just a great teacher who was crucified by the Romans 2,000 years ago.

“When I got to high school, I found myself interested in science classes, especially biology. Then one day, a lesson was discussed in the class that really got my soul hooked, and that was the theory of evolution. Interest in that subject never left me, and I spent a lot of time researching and reviewing that theory. What I didn't know was that my wretched soul was slowly walking toward a fatal belief—atheism.

“Also in high school, I was introduced to a new belief that these ‘born-again’ Christians always shared with me—they called it the Gospel. With imperfect lives, they told me I needed God. So what? So my life will be an imperfect mess too? ‘No, thanks.’ One thing that really made me to especially hate these Christians was that their life was so unequal to their message of salvation. Pride and anger filled my soul. I found a word for these Christians: ‘Hypocrites’ I called them.

“Without being aware of it, I became too conceited, trusting only my ability to reason against any belief with a string attached to any religion. I confirmed to myself that I was an atheist, and nothing could get me out of that belief. I was confident that my arsenal was indestructible as I entered a Christian institution named ASHTEC for my education. They said that all students who entered that institution would embrace Christianity. I silently laughed at that notion. Impossible, I whispered to myself.

“After a number of months of my stay in that school, my head was still big due to my faithfulness to atheism. Sunday services, evangelistic nights, sappy songs, and even theological class didn’t break my belief. I just felt that I was ‘smarter sinner’ with a lot of doctrine and Bible verses jammed in my head, but not in my heart. My brother taught me the habit of reading books, so I carried that habit even in that school, with a great advantage. The library was always open for me. Anyone who knows me can attest that I’m a book lover. Planning to find a hole in the life of these Christians (to find fault), I tried other kinds of reading. I read the life of every staff of that institution. My eyes carefully examined how they walked, talked, and the way they lived their ‘life in Christ.’ Even in the beginning, I was

quite impressed of how they lived, but still, my foot was set on the agnostic belief.

“Then one day, I heard the message of salvation once again, shouting not from any human larynx, but from their life. My arsenal was slowly falling apart. ‘Why?’ I wanted to ask them, ‘Why do I continue to live this way?’ until I found my soul crying and very ashamed of my condition. I couldn’t believe that I was even eating food that they served in the name of Jesus for a non-believer like me. The stream of grace reached even a person like me in the pit, drowning me in the love of this Lover. Gasping for mercy, I cried to the God I hated and whom I eventually came to love. I met my God, and He ran to me with open arms.

“Whenever I remember that day when I came home, I’m still amazed of how God can love me. Creator of everything I see, He didn’t hesitate to extend His arms to an atheist. ‘Impossible,’ I once thought. I’m now a Christian, a beloved child of God, continuing my journey in the ocean of His love until I reach the destination where I can see Him face to face and run to Him with eternal gratefulness.”

It is truly amazing how God can change a life. Bonifacio is now training as an assistant teacher. There are 400 students at ASHTEC. Please pray for them and that God will work in all their lives, using them for His glory.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG)

International is a non-denominational, international missions agency based in Chattanooga, Tenn. AMG’s distinctive has always been its reliance on national workers to carry the Gospel in their own cultures. Today, they operate ministries in over 40 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.

Book Review—10/10/2011

Welcome to the Story: Reading, Loving, & Living God’s Word, Stephen J. Nichols, 2011, Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., ISBN 9781433522307, 176 pages, \$15.99, softcover.

Scripture, particularly the New Testament, consists of what theologians like to call indicatives and imperatives. The indicatives are those truths about God’s character, works, and will that He reveals to us through His Word. The imperatives are the responsibilities that the knowledge of the indicatives place on us. These are both crucial elements of the Gospel message—indicatives without imperatives don’t articulate what obedience to God looks like; imperatives without indicatives amounts to works-based religion.

In *Welcome to the Story*, Stephen Nichols does an excellent job of painting a broad picture of the narrative of

Scripture (the indicatives) and tying a proper understanding of the big picture of God’s glory in the Bible to our behavior and calling as Christians (the imperatives). In his first chapter, Nichols frames his discussion of Scripture with a literary approach, showing the unified plotline of the whole Bible and explaining the narrative nature of our lives.

In chapters 2-5, he examines the story arc of the Bible through the main themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. In chapters 6-7, he takes a narrower look at the story through the cast of characters Scripture presents to us and then a broader look at the overarching theme of God’s glory that runs through every book. In chapters 8-9, Nichols describes the effect that God’s story should have on our story and how our lives should be conformed to His story and convey His Word and work. He closes the book with a chapter encouraging readers to find the tools and

time for deeper study so that they can know the Word intimately and apply it accurately.

Nichols, a college professor, writes with a sensibility toward popular culture and in a style that the students he interacts with on a daily basis would easily grasp. This does not detract in any way, however, from the soundness of his articulation of the Gospel message or the importance of his main point—that the Bible is neither a dead myth nor a collection of abstract truths, but a living story about a living God with power to transform lives.

Welcome to the Story is a welcome addition to the ranks of books about Scripture and would be an excellent resource for small group studies, Sunday school, or youth ministry.

Justin Lonas

Target: All/Students

Type: Scripture/Christian Living

Take: Recommended

News Update—10/10/2011

Increasing Violence, Persecution against Egyptian Christians

The Christian Newswire reports an escalation in hate speech and barbaric violence targeting the Coptic Christians of Egypt—who make up less than 15 percent of the majority-Muslim population—amidst government indifference.

Egyptian leaders have issued proclamations pressuring Christians to convert, accept second-class status, face death or leave the country, and Muslim mobs have burned Coptic churches, homes and businesses and kidnapped young girls.

Coptic Solidarity warns that the situation could eventually lead to ethnic cleansing against the Copts, and is urging the U.N. Human Rights Council and the international community to come to their aid.

Religion Today Summaries

Pregnancy Help Centers to Expand in Latin America

Heartbeat International, a pro-life pregnancy help center chain, is expanding in Latin America in response to a growing need, according to OneNewsNow.com.

Latin America has been one of the major targets of Planned Parenthood and the U.N. Population Fund in spreading the use of contraception and abortion on demand, and Heartbeat spokeswoman Peggy Hartshorn said the need for more pregnancy care centers was obvious. The city of Medellin, Colombia, for example, has three legal abortion clinics, 67 illegal abortion facilities and only one pregnancy help center.

Hartshorn said: “We are helping these startup pregnancy health centers to really have the best materials they can...and know how to market to abortion-minded and abortion-vulnerable women who are in their midst.”

Religion Today Summaries

Courageous Lights up Box Office on Opening Weekend

In its opening weekend, the Christian film *Courageous* was the No. 4 top money-grossing film in the country, selling an estimated \$8.8 million worth of tickets, OneNewsNow.com reports. For movies that opened this weekend, it was No. 2, trailing only “50/50,” which grossed approximately \$8.85 million.

Courageous, the police drama that stresses the importance of fatherhood, appeared in only 1,161 theaters nationwide while its competitors showed on two to three times as many screens. The strong debut was an answer to prayer for its filmmakers at Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga., which produced the previous box-office hits *Fireproof* and *Facing the Giants*.

Religion Today Summaries

Most Christians against Gender-Inclusive Bible Translations

A LifeWay study found 82 percent of Bible-reading Christians prefer literal translations of masculine words that describe people in general, rather than more gender-inclusive approaches, *Christian Today* reports.

The study also found that 61 percent prefer word-for-word translations of the original Greek and Hebrew instead of “thought-for-thought translations, where the translators attempt to reproduce the intent of the original thought rather than translating the exact words,” said Scott McConnell, director of LifeWay Research.

Additionally, 46 percent said they preferred traditional language, over 27 percent who favored contemporary language, and 75 percent said accuracy to the original words mattered more than easy readability.

Religion Today Summaries

Franklin Graham Joins Protest of Iranian Pastor’s Death Sentence

As Iranian pastor Yousef Nadarkhani awaits his impending execution for refusing to recant his Christian faith, Iranian officials appear to be trumping up his charges—including allegations of rape, extortion, national security crimes and accusations of Zionism—while

more and more leaders speak out against his sentence, *Newsmax* reports.

The Rev. Franklin Graham said: “Faith is the most basic, fundamental right of every human being.... [His] sentence [is] in clear violation of international law.” He added that international officials would be complicit in Nadarkhani’s death if they didn’t join House Speaker John Boehner, the White House, and others in demanding a reversal of the sentence.

Religion Today Summaries

India Missionary Attacked with Swords, Left for Dead

A group of anti-Christians attacked a Gospel for Asia-supported missionary in India as he was riding his bicycle down a narrow road to the house of a church

member the evening of September 23, ASSIST News Service reports.

Pastor Bashuda pulled over to the side of the road to let a car pass, but the car stopped and five men overtook him and attacked him with swords. Thinking he was dead, they left him on the side of the road and drove off. Thirty minutes later, Bashuda was discovered by a bicyclist, who rushed back to Bashuda’s village for help. Bashuda remains hospitalized in critical condition.

“Once again we see persecution on the uprise,” said K.P. Yohannan, president and founder of Gospel for Asia.

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—From SermonHall.com

Sermon Starters

The Glory That Follows the Cross

John 13:30-32

I. For Judas It Was Night (v.30)

II. For The Son Of Man It Was His Greatest Hour (vv.31-32; 2 Cor. 5:18–21)

A. He who knew no sin was about to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

B. He is now ready to reconcile all people unto God, not imputing their trespasses unto them.

C. On the basis of His sacrificial death, which Judas was going out to arrange, the church has received the ministry of reconciliation.

D. Will you go out like Judas into the blackness of darkness forever? Will you go out into that eternal night?

III. For God Himself It Meant Glory (v. 31)

A. “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps. 85:10).

B. God’s mercy finds expression.

C. God’s truth is exonerated.

D. God’s righteousness is satisfied.

E. God’s peace is offered to estranged sinners.

F. God has set Him forth as a propitiation (satisfaction), “*that He might be just and the Justifier of him who believes in Jesus*” (Rom. 3:25, 26).

IV. For Our Lord Jesus Christ It Meant Glory With God The Father (32)

Anonymous

Three “R’s” in the School of Christ

Intro.: The triumphant Christian learns and utilizes the “3 Rs”.

I. The Triumphant Christian Remembers Who He Was

A. Purged from old sins (2 Pet. 1:9).

B. Removed from Satan’s family (John 8:44; Col. 1:13).

C. Transformed from evil life-style (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

D. Saved from “no hope” destiny (Eph. 2:12).

II. The Triumphant Christian Recognizes Who He Is:

A. Member of God’s family (John 1:11,12).

B. Member of Christ’s Body (1 Cor. 12:13).

C. Made a temple of God (1 Cor. 3:13).

D. Made complete in Christ (Col. 2:9).

III. The Triumphant Christian Rejoices In Who He Will Be:

A. Be like Christ (1 John 3:2).

B. Be incorruptible and immortal (1 Cor. 15:53-56).

C. Be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:16,17).

D. Be Christ’s Bride (Eph. 5:27).

E. Be joint-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:16,17).

Conc.: Let tears of repentance change to tears of rejoicing. RGWitty@aol.com

Illustrations

Learn from the Birds

Let us learn from the birds. What is it that enables them to fly? Wings? Of course, but not wings alone. It is the resistance of the air that makes flight possible. A bird flies much as an oarsman rows his boat. As oars are used to push against the resistance of water, thus sending the craft ahead, the scooped-out shape of the underside of the bird’s wings helps it get a “grip” on the air.

The air resists and the bird pushes against the resistance with the downward stroke of its wings. By such

pushing movements, it succeeds in flying. Throughout life, progress is made only in the face of opposition. The bird flies through the resisting medium of air. The brook trout needs the resisting water if he is to swim. A democracy thrives through a system of opposing political parties and checks and balances in government. The spirit of a person grows stronger, not as life becomes easier, but as testings and temptations are met, struggled with, and beaten into submission.

Anonymous

Carrot, Egg and Cup of Coffee

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose.

Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Then she said, "Tell me, what do you see?"

"Carrots, eggs, and coffee," her daughter replied. Next, the mother asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard boiled egg. Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich flavor. "So, what does it mean, mother?" she asked.

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity: boiling water. Each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it became soft and weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water. "Which are you?" she asked her daughter.

When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Ask yourself: Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength? Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit, but after a death, a breakup, a financial hardship or some other trial, have I become hardened and stiff? Does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart? Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water—the situation around you. Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts

On Hope

God's promises have no expiration date.

Croft M. Pentz

It is important to remember that one's harvest is not always reaped in this life.

Paul Powell

Man's way leads to a hopeless end; God's way leads to an endless hope.

There is never a night or a problem that can defeat the sunrise or hope.

When life gets hectic and hard to cope, repeat these words—love and hope.

These three anonymous

Immortal Hope dispels the gloom! An angel sits beside the tomb.

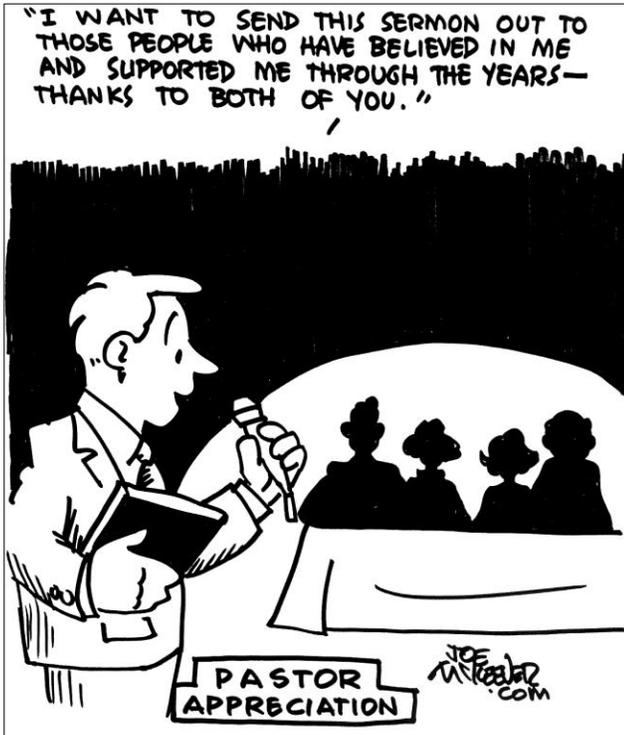
Sarah Flower Adams

Hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark.

Old Union Reminder

Puzzles and 'Toons

Church 'Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:

ANSWERS

1. Bethsaida (John 1:44)
2. Simon (Mark 3:16). He was also given the Aramaic name "Cephas" (John 1:42).
3. Andrew (John 1:40,41).
4. At Lydda (Acts 9:32-34).
5. When Peter was asked, "Doth not your master pay tribute?" (Matt. 17:24); inside the fish was a coin which would pay the tribute money for both Jesus and Peter.
6. During the days of unleavened bread (i.e., Passover) (Acts 12:1-3).
7. Malchus, who was the servant of the high priest (John 18:10).
8. Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:3-6).
9. At Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13-6).
10. "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee; In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Acts 3:6).

ACROSTIC #35: ANSWERS

ROMANS (10:12) — "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."

- A. THANKFUL
- B. HIRSUTE
- C. OTTER
- D. BRONTE
- E. REDEEMER
- F. OFFICER
- G. MELLOW
- H. ANTOTHIJAH
- I. NEERDOWELL
- J. SHEPHERD
- K. OATH
- L. SCEVA
- M. CALLING
- N. FINE

Father Abraham's Question Box

The Life & Ministry of Paul

1. Where was Paul's home city?
2. What was Paul's Hebrew name?
3. Who restored Paul's sight unto him?
4. Where was Paul when he received a vision of a man of Macedonia?
5. Where in the N.T. is Paul first encountered?
6. Who told Paul, "Much learning doth make thee mad?"
7. Where did Paul find disciples of John the Baptist?
8. What happened to Paul at Lystra?
9. Whom did Paul rebuke at Antioch?
10. Who asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

See answers on page 27.

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom
By Mark Oshman

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Hidden Wisdom on next page

HIDDEN WISDOM: BIBLE ACROSTIC # 36

BY MARK A. OSHMAN

Solve the acrostic by using the clues listed below to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, or instruction. Further, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. Happy hunting!

HAPPY SOLVING!!

	11	2G	3K		4J	5E	6E	7B			8C	9K	10J	11D	12N		
13I	14A	15F		16L	17H	18G	19K			20N	21J			22D	23L	24K	
25N	26A	27J		28C	29M			30E	31B	32F	33I	34L			35E	36K	37G
		38B	39D	40J	41L	42E	43C	44A	45H	46K			47G	48M	49J	50L	51E
	52B	53F			54D	55M	56G	57H			58I	59K	60E	61A	62N	63G	
64K	65H	66J	67E	68D	69L			70N	71B	72K			73J	74I	75D		
76G	77F	78M			79E	80I	81K	82J	83C			84B	85M	86A	87H	88E	89N

- A. Greetings! 14 26 61 44 86
- B. Descriptive of the judge in Luke 18 31 71 38 52 7 84
- C. A starchy foodstuff used in making puddings 8 43 83 28
- D. Number of silver pieces for which Joseph was sold 22 75 39 68 11 54
- E. Cherokee leader (d. 1858) 30 67 88 35 60 6 42 51 79
- F. This was worn by the high priest 15 53 5 77 32
- G. Massage 18 56 47 37 2 63 76
- H. "They ...ran greatly after the _____ of Balaam" 45 87 65 17 57
- I. Scottish missionary (1795-1883) 80 74 1 58 33 13
- J. Hard, white ceramic pottery 10 40 21 82 73 4 66 27 49
- K. A great battle will be fought here 59 3 46 9 64 24 72 19 81 36
- L. A Biblical propheticess 34 41 16 69 50 23
- M. Foam 29 48 55 78 85
- N. The doubting disciple 20 12 62 25 70 89