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Equipping believers for deeper life

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Christ Builds His Church, Not Ours

By Wayne Barber

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Christ said “...upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18). Christ told His disciples—those who would carry the torch after He had gone back to the Father, those who would receive His Spirit on the day of Pentecost—that Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God,” would be the truth that His Church would be built upon.

The term “Christ” is the word Greek *Christós*, which means the anointed one. This wasn’t Jesus’ “last name”, but His royal title—the term refers to the fact that He is the Son of the Living God. The definite article is used before the words “Christ,” “son,” “living,” and “God.” This is very significant. Jesus is **the** Christ, the **one and only** Son of the one and only living God the Father. When “God” is used in the same context as “Christ”, it refers to the Father.

Peter’s confession says that Jesus is not merely a man, but He is the God-man. It denotes His pre-existence before the foundation of the world. It is the term used to reference the resurrected Lord Jesus. It is the term in which we recognize His “finished work” as our Redeemer. It is equated with His Lordship. It refers to His absolute ownership and control of everything.

Who He is must always be the central focus of all truth. Truth that leads a person away from this focus is not truth. And Christ said that it will be Him, not us, that will build His Church, not our church. We are just vessels—conduits, if you please—through whom God chooses to do the work that is His and His alone.

In 1 Corinthians 12: 4-7 we have a powerful affirmation of this truth: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Gifts, ministries, and effects are all in God’s hands. Why? Because it is His work to build His Church.

Let’s review this context a bit: the doctrine of the Corinthian church had gotten off center. For this reason the Christians there became ignorant of spiritual matters. Paul said, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware” (12:1). The word “gifts” is in italics, meaning it was inserted by the translators. The word “spiritual” is *pneumatikós* in the Greek. It refers to “spiritual matters” or “spiritual things.”

An imbalance had occurred. Any time you focus on anything other than Christ, not only do you stunt your growth, but you also become imbalanced when it comes to spiritual matters. Paul is trying to straighten them out. It puzzles me when we would rather focus on gifts when we could focus on the Giver of those gifts instead!

In verses 4-7, he reminds them of this all-important truth. Notice the comparison he makes in verses 4-6. He uses the word “varieties” and the word “same” in connection with the gift, the ministry and the effect. “Varieties” is the word most of us have thought was referring to the differences of the gifts, ministries and effects. While all these are definitely different, that is not what the word is referring to. It is only used in this chapter. Look down at verse 11 and see what it is referencing: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” The word “distributing” does not refer to the gifts, ministries, and effects being different, but to the different way in which they are distributed. The gifts given by the Spirit, the ministries given by the Lord Jesus, and the effects given by the Father are all distributed differently.

That’s why it is so important to focus on the Giver. He is good, just, and righteous, so if He chooses to give one a particular gift, then so be it. If He wants to give a particular ministry to another, then so be it. If He wants to give certain effects, then so be it. He is God. He is in control. This is all about Him. It is not about us.

But how we have made it about us, about what we can **do** for God. What we can do indeed—signs on billboards that simply say to others “We do church better than you do.” We have our programs, our methods, and our educated input. It has become more about us than it is about

God. No wonder Paul said in Romans 12:3: “*For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.*”

We take what God has done in one church, and we package it and sell it as a formula for what He can do in other churches. How simple we make it seem. Church growth seminars, methods, books, and videos abound. Man in his own wisdom forms a committee that works to come up with what they believe that God would be proud of and, in the process, they completely miss what God is up to.

God gives the gifts, the ministries, and the effects the way He chooses to give them, and man has no input in

the matter. We only get the privilege of being a part of what God is up to. What is it in us that makes us feel that we can do it? It is that old tendency of the flesh that Paul had to deal with in Romans 2:1-3:20: religious flesh. Our flesh wants to shout, “We can do it; we can do it; we can do it; we can!” Christ calls us instead to recognize that we can’t, but that He can and did, and now He offers His gifts freely to us for the building up of His Church—how amazing!

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Giving Place to the Devil

By Alan Stewart

Several years ago, I recall reading a storyline about a young couple who had fulfilled their dream of purchasing a Victorian home in an exclusive neighborhood. Their plan was to remodel the large, older home and to rent the two apartments on the first floor to help cover the cost of the monthly mortgage.

One of the tenants was a very quiet and unassuming man, and it looked to be the making of a perfect arrangement. However, over time, he ran the other renters out of the house by making loud noises all night and releasing a barrage of cockroaches into their apartment. He gave the appearance of being a wonderful tenant, until he was asked to leave. At that point, the psychotic man became a frightening presence refusing to pay the rent, changing the locks on the doors, and harassing the young couple with scare tactics. It was all part of an elaborate scheme to use the tenant laws against the couple and to drive them into foreclosure proceedings so he could obtain the property cheaply himself. The young couple had given this man a place in their home, and he took advantage of them and tried to ruin their lives.

Each of us has faced times that I affectionately refer to as “stupid moments” in life. It may be actions that are out of character for who we really are in Christ. It may be public judgments made before we have heard all of the facts. It may be failed decisions that were not given deep enough thought. Regardless of what our moment may have been, the resulting outcome is typically the same, and we bear a deep sense of embarrassment, estrangement, and emptiness.

Perhaps that is why Paul gave such a strong warning in Ephesians 4:27, “*Neither give place to the devil.*” The word “*place*” carries meaning of “a spot, power, or an opportunity.” It is the idea of giving someone a secure foothold from which further progress can be made. J. Wilbur Chapman said, “Temptation is the tempter looking through the keyhole into the room where you are living; sin

is your drawing back the bolt and making it possible for him to enter.” We are never more vulnerable than when the devil has his foot in a door we have left open.

Eli left a door of evil open to his sons, and sorrow moved in. Gehazi left the door of greed open, and the shame of leprosy moved in. Demas left the door of worldliness open, and temptation too great to resist moved in. You can never give the devil a foot that he doesn’t end up taking a mile! Consider the consequences of giving place to the devil.

It Gives Satan an Angle for Ridicule

In 1 Timothy 5:14, Paul is addressing the vulnerabilities of young widows in the church, and he encourages them to live with such purity and character that they “...*give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.*” Paul was aware that, like tossing a pebble into a pond, one small action can set off a ripple effect of consequences in your life. When it comes to looking for wrong-doing in our life, our enemy does not have to search long nor hard. But, it is what he does with that knowledge that is so troubling.

He not only gains great pleasure from legitimately accusing us “...*before our God day and night,*” but he illegitimately torments our minds long after the Lord has granted forgiveness of the wrong. David was forgiven of adultery, but he still said, “...*my sin is ever before me.*” Miriam was forgiven of her rebellion, but how many scars of reminder did her leprosy leave behind? Peter was forgiven for denying the Lord, but did the sound of every crowing rooster cause his heart to skip a beat? Seventeenth-century British clergyman Thomas Fuller wrote, “Even doubtful accusations leave a stain behind them.” The only way to win a match against a daring mud-slinger is to make sure you live in such a manner that nothing can ever stick!

It Gives Satan an Avenue in which to Rob Us

In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter writes, “...*your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*” The word “*seeking*” carries the idea of “inquiring into the availability.” During our homecoming service a few years ago, a man was seen in our parking lot looking for a car with unlocked doors. His discovery of an open vehicle was the making of a victim. The moment we find ourselves “open” to any sin, it will not be long before our enemy has stolen our happiness, our holiness, our honor, and our horizons away from us.

Our enemy never delivers as much as he promised in the sales pitch. Cain was so open to the removal of Abel that he could not see it would bring his own isolation from God. Lot was so open to the lifestyles of Sodom that he could not see the disgrace his family would have to bear. Solomon was so open to the beauty of idolatrous women that he could not see the ugly division his kingdom would face. In John 10:10, Jesus warned, “*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy...*” Any time our enemy is given time and place to reign, ruin is sure to follow.

It Gives Satan an Achievement in which to Rejoice

As if David’s infamous sin of adultery was not enough of a burden to bear, when Nathan confronted him, he said in 2 Samuel 12:14, “...*by this deed thou has given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme...*” As a Christian, our greatest concern with sin should never be what the Lord will do to us, but rather what we have done to the Lord. Our enemy is always patiently waiting for any chance to exploit us, ruin our testimony, and ultimately bring dishonor to the Lord’s name.

After Israel missed the Promise Land through unbelief, Moses feared the Egyptians would say, “...*the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land...*” After Samson was bound and broken, the enemy boasted, “...*our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.*” After Saul was conquered on the battlefield, the enemy took his armor “...*to publish it in the house of their idols.*” While God may have a hall-of-fame of faith, the devil is ever searching for another candidate to add to his wall-of-shame. Puritan preacher Thomas Watson wrote, “The sins of the godly are worse than others, because they bring a greater reproach upon religion.” The devil’s bow may be aimed in our direction, but the heart of God is always the target for his arrow.

I can still feel the fear and curiosity that ran through my body when I watched my grandmother wring the necks of chickens as a little boy. Like those chickens, we know our enemy is a defeated foe, but boy, he sure has a lot of kick left in him! In James 4:7, James wrote, “*Submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” Resistance is the idea of standing firmly against rather than giving in. A man can never surrender ground and simultaneously hold the rights of ownership. You will never have to worry about giving an eviction to someone you never grant an entrance!

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Still Our Father’s World

By Shea Oakley

Despite the sentiment once expressed by the polymath and theologian, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, we most certainly do not currently live in the “best of all possible worlds.” Christians surely know this to be true, but so, for that matter, do most unbelieving people.

Even among secular humanists and nominally religious people, only the most Pollyanna optimists, deliberately looking through rose-tinted glasses, have managed to convince themselves that all things are “as they should be” on this planet. Such apparently self-deceived individuals are rare and getting rarer, and for good reason. The realities of these times ensure that, sooner or later, those glasses have to shatter.

For believers the knowledge that things are bad on earth and getting worse can be a formidable challenge to spiritual formation. While joy and peace are both birthrights of the children of God, and are not supposed to be

dependent on either personal or societal circumstances, deep discouragement over our living in such a deeply flawed world does sometimes clutch at us. When it does, such discouragement can and often does rob us of the real-time experience of those birthrights, if we let it.

How, you may ask, do we not let it? Things are bad here, you say; and you are right, they are. We live in a place and time when the Enemy of our souls often does seem to be the primary ruler of this particular plane of existence. At our worst moments we can find it all too easy to assume that, if the perfect God of the universe is even present in this profoundly imperfect world, He is not really running it. We feel at times that He has ceded most, if not all, power over planet earth to the Evil One.

This, however, is not the case and only the Devil wants us to continue to believe that it is. There is a wonderful old hymn, “This Is My Father’s World”; it is in

reckoning with the truth of these five words that we can escape from the lie that wickedness has somehow completely taken over, even in these dark times. The truth is that it hasn't and it can't; not with our Sovereign God on the throne.

Whatever power the creature Satan wields on earth is limited by the overarching power of his Creator. We are often told in our churches today that we live in “enemy territory”. On one hand this is true. When Lucifer fell from Heaven, he apparently was allowed to “set up shop” here, but only for a limited time with limited power. Moreover, our Enemy was given this time and power only to serve the perfect redemptive plan of God in Christ. The Devil, in his self-delusion, will not admit this, but we know it to be true, primarily because we have become personally acquainted with the cross and what transpired there.

God has always held ultimate dominion over all things everywhere. He can no more have the world wrested from His ultimate rule than he can cease to exist. God is Lord even over Satan, and God has given Satan whatever influence he has today only to work out God's perfect plan to ultimately reveal His glory and save us. As for the Devil's “rule” on earth, that kingdom began to die with the resurrection of the One we call Savior and the beginning of His Church. Someday both the Devil and his realm will be gone altogether.

Moreover, while this may not be the best of all possible worlds at the moment, it is still a place of great beauty and meaning. Since our Father created it, it could not be otherwise. It is difficult, for instance, to look at a dazzling sunset or an azure sea and not realize that God is still very much present here. Our lives this side of Heaven are difficult, but they can also be abundant, because our Savior promised abundance to those He loves and who love Him. We can know His love and the love of others right now and right here, and we can love in return. Earth is not Heaven to be sure, but it is not Hell either.

And it must also be remembered that the new heavens and earth are not that far off in our future. Then we will finally know the best of all possible worlds...and world without end.

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

The Parable of the Talents: Part One

Matthew 25:14-23

From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers.

Jesus gave this parable and the related parable of the minas (pounds) in Luke 19:11–27 during His last trip to Jerusalem and the last week of His earthly life. They both teach another aspect of God's servants: faithfulness. Those who love God will do what God tells them to do.

[14] As the King James Version notes in italics, the phrase, “*the kingdom of heaven is,*” is not in the Greek text. The phrase is, however, found in verse 1, and this parable offers another instance of similarity to the kingdom of God: “*For the kingdom of heaven is as (hōsper [5618] from hōs [5613], as; and per [4007], surely) a man travelling into a far country (from apodēmēō [589], to travel abroad), who called his own (from ídios [2398], own, personal) servants (from doúlos [1401], bond-slave), and delivered (from paradídōmi [3860] from pará [3844], close proximity; and didōmi [1325], to give voluntarily) unto them his goods (hupárchonta [5224], possessions, the participle of hupárchō [5225], to be at one's disposal).”*

As with the parable of the ten virgins, we in this present church age can learn many lessons from this parable as we face the second coming of Christ. However, the primary context is at the end of the Tribulation period. Christ has given a charge to us as His people to supervise His “goods.” The “goods” are the Gospel, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the talents He has given us to work with and produce while He is away.

[15] The talent was the largest monetary value used in the Greek world, equivalent to 240 pounds of silver, worth between \$140,000 and \$175,000 today. The Lord imparts these to His servants individually: “*And unto one he gave five talents (from tálanton [5007]), to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his own (from ídios [2398], personal) ability (from dúnamis [1411], strength); and straightway took his journey” (a.t.)*

When He made us, God gave each of us a special ability. He augments those abilities with various quantities of talents. In Modern Greek, the word *tálanton* retains the general meaning of aptitude or money. In Koine Greek, the language of the New Testament, the word “*talent*” meant a

certain weight. In Greek mythology, the chief god, Zeus, placed “talents” on scales to weigh the copper, gold, and silver used to make coins. In the parallel parable of the pounds, the Lord called ten servants and gave each of them one pound saying, “*Occupy* (from *pragmateúomai* [4231], to trade, to put into *prágma* [4229], practice, from which we get our English words ‘pragmatic’ and ‘practical’) *till I come*” (Luke 19:13).

[16-17] The one who received five talents did not waste any time. “*Then he that had received the five talents went* (from *poreúomai* [4198], to go out publicly in contrast to *hupágō* [5217], to depart stealthily) *and traded* (from *ergázomai* [2038], to work) *with the same, and made* ([MT, TR] *epoiēsen*, the aorist indicative of *poiēō* [4160], to make; [NES, UBS] *ekérdēsen*, the aorist indicative of *kerdaínō* [2770], to gain) *them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained* (*ekérdēsen*) *other two.*”

The work here is clearly investment, *ergázomai* defined in the context as *kerdaínō*, to gain. Profit is indicated in *kerdaínō*, a verb used for the first time in Matthew 16:26 where Jesus said, “*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain* (from *kerdaínō*) *the whole world, and lose his own soul?*” The successful servants in this parable gained the world to come by putting the Lord’s talents to use in ways that extended His kingdom. The aorist tense of *kerdaínō* sums up a lifetime of ministry. Here in verses 16 and 17, each servant produced 100 percent return on his lord’s investment.

[18] The third servant produced nothing: “*But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.*” He was both lazy and indifferent. As noted above, successful investment (*kerdaínō*) is work (*ergázomai*). Unlike the other two servants, this servant did not want to work at all and had no excuse for not working.

[19] Inevitably, their lord returned to account for the talents he gave his servants: “*After a long* (from *polús* [4183], much) *time* (from *chrónos* [5550], space of time, interval), *the lord of those servants comes* (from *érchomai* [2064], to come), *and settles* (from *sunairō* [4868] from *sún* [4862], together; and *airō* [142], to lift up and take away, to resolve) *accounts* (from *lógos* [3056]) *with them*” (a.t.).

Although the interval in which the servants were expected to invest seemed long, the lord did return within their lifetimes. In our own period, the rapture for us is just as imminent. But should the Lord tarry in His physical return to earth, a temporary and limited judgment will take place immediately at death (see Luke 16:22-23).

The accounting that follows was rather simple. The master wanted to know what his investors did with the initial capital he gave them.

[20-23] The accounting scenario unfolds: “*And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, ‘Lord, you gave me five talents: behold* (*ide*, the imperative of *eidon*, the aorist of *horáō* [3708], to

see and perceive with emphasis on perception, the personalization of the impersonal *idou*), *I have gained beside* (*ep’* from *epí* [1909], upon) *them five talents more*” (a.t.).

“*His lord said unto him, ‘Well done, thou good* (from *agathós* [18], benevolent) *and faithful* (from *pistós* [4103], trustworthy) *servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things* (from *olígos* [3641]), *I will make thee ruler* (from *kathístēmi* [2525] from *katá* [2596], down; and *hístēmi* [2476], to set or place, to constitute, appoint) *over* (*epí* [1909], upon) *many things* (from *polús* [4183], much): *enter thou* (*eíselthe*, the aorist imperative of *eisérchomai* [1525], to come into) *into the joy* (from *chará* [5479]) *of thy lord.*”

“*He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: ‘behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.’ His lord said unto him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.’*”

An interesting switch—servants telling their lord to “*behold!*” Normally, God, speaking through His prophets, commanded His people to take notice of some upcoming miracle. “*Behold!*” here dramatizes the servants’ enthusiasm over what they did. They know that by God’s grace they were successful, and so they were excited to display the results to the one they deemed their human lord (Matt. 12:8; John 16:30; 21:17). They wanted to hear his “*well done!*”—the “*praise of God!*” (John 12:43; 1 Cor. 4:5), and rightly so, since the returns on the lord’s investments were 100 percent.

Yet since grace is never outperformed, the rewards far outweighed the work: “*many things!*” for “*few things.*” Also, in this parable the lord delegates rulership in the spiritual kingdom: “*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne*” (Rev. 3:21; cf. John 16:33).

The lord commended these servants with the adjectives “*good!*” (from *agathós* [18], benevolent), and “*faithful!*” (from *pistós* [4103], trustworthy, which includes the meanings of keeping the faith [Col. 4:9; 1 Pet. 5:12; Rev. 2:10] and dependability [1 Cor. 1:9]). Since “*there is none good but one... God!*” (Matt. 19:17), any benevolence in a believer is part of God’s new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 2:10) and is, therefore, the work of the benevolent God. The greatest benevolence, of course, was God’s sacrifice of His Son for the sins of the world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9).

There is an objective joy to “*enter,*” which shows that heaven has its own space and time. Space is implicit in the imperative “*enter.*” Time is implicit not only in the aorist—once-for-all—tense of the verb “*enter!*” but also in the subsequent, ongoing action implied in “*ru[ling] over many things.*” But heaven is not just space, time, and work;

it is “*the joy of [our] [L]ord*,” and therefore joyful space, time, and work with no more “*thorns and thistles*” and “*sweat of [the] brow*” (Gen. 3:18-19 NIV). For such joy set before Him, the Lord Jesus endured the cross and despised its shame (Heb. 12:2).

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.

Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

Men, Women, and the Church

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Perhaps no passage stirs frustration and controversy inside and outside the Church today as does 1 Timothy 2. In the wake of the feminist revolution of the 20th century, anything in Scripture that seems to differentiate between men and women (particularly if it places women under the leadership of men) is under constant assault from our culture. As we come to the second half of chapter 2, it is incumbent upon us to remember a few key principles in interpreting difficult or controversial passages.

In an article from an earlier series in this column on 1 Peter 3:18-22, I wrote: “When wading into the most difficult part of [a] passage, we need to bear in mind the context we’ve just discussed. In order to rightly interpret [these verses] we have to assume that their message follows from what [the author] has been saying throughout the book...the ‘difficult passages’ are often revealed to be more straightforward than we think once we have dug deeper into them and endeavored to keep them in context.

“We have to remember that every word of Scripture is where it is for a reason, and that none should be overlooked just because we don’t understand it at first. [Also], we tend to make more of such passages than the Spirit and the human writer intended. We have to apply Occam’s Razor (the principle that the simplest solution to a problem is usually the correct one) in reading these verses.” Also, we would do well to “let Scripture interpret Scripture,” and avoid trying to make specific passages say things that contradict the rest of the biblical record.”

With that in mind, let us remember what Paul’s theme has been throughout his letter to Timothy. He is urging and equipping Timothy to refute the message and overturn the influence of certain false teachers who have been wreaking havoc on the church at Ephesus since Paul left. He has just finished making the point that salvation, contrary to what the false teachers have been promulgating, is a free gift of God through Christ Jesus to **all** who believe.

If we read a shift in tone and focus (from the false teachers to the ordering of the church) at the beginning of chapter two without seeing how Paul’s overarching message carries through, we will be prone to see his statements here as apostolic pronouncements about church polity and behavior, completely dissociated from the

specific context. That is the fast-track to proof-texting and lazy exposition that leads to misunderstanding and division. Because we see Paul’s “big picture”, we know that his command to pray for all men isn’t just a command (though it is one) but a statement of the true path of the faith against the false teachers’ message.

Men and Women at Worship

After his declaration on salvation in 2:1-7, Paul addresses the attitudes and behaviors specific to men and women in regards to their public witness and worship. “*Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness*” (2:8-10).

It is easy, when we read the Bible, to see references to “*man*” or “*men*” as general words for humanity, particularly when it comes to commands, but this is not the case here, as Paul uses the word *andras* (“males”) rather than *anthropos* (“mankind”). Paul has specific commands for the men and different ones for the women in the congregation. N.T. Wright offers a helpful insight here in suggesting that Paul wanted Christian men and women to be markedly different from their cultural gender stereotypes—the men needed to trade machismo, anger, and lust for peace and righteousness, and the women were to put away pettiness, immodesty, and vanity in favor of the beauty of the heart manifested in good works.

He urges the men to pray with “*holy hands*”, indicating pure hearts. Their worship is marred if they have been living sinfully, using their strength and energy for their own selfish desires or other evil purposes rather than for God’s work. He also commands them to come without “*wrath and dissension*”, putting aside the divisions wrought by the false teachers in favor of the unity that submission to God’s true authority brings. This is a prescription that touches men’s hearts today as it did then—for men to avoid posturing and “trash talk” in order to live in peace and unity with one another requires the patient work of the Spirit in our hearts.

For the women, Paul desires them to stand apart from the culture in how they look and act. The Roman world of the first century was marked by sexual immorality, and women of means tended to dress seductively and adorn themselves with all manner of jewelry to increase their attractiveness to men. Paul urged Christian women to reflect their submission to God by dressing modestly to avoid “advertising” for men’s sinful desires. His appeal that they adorn themselves with good works echoes Peter’s statement in 1 Peter 3:3-4: “*Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*” He is not urging dowdiness as a virtue, but rather reminding women that true beauty flows from the heart. This, likewise, still applies poignantly today.

For both men and women, Paul’s focus is on their inner being and how the Spirit within them is reflected by their actions and appearance. Both are changed by their submission to God, and it shows in contrast with cultural expectations.

Women as Learners, not Teachers

Few would quibble with Paul’s instructions to men and women in verse 8-10, but he continues on with more commands for women that seem untethered from any corresponding directions given to men. Paul writes: “*A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet*” (2:11-12). In today’s hypersensitive culture, Christians are accused of misogyny on the basis of these two verses more than any other. As such, we are under constant pressure to define them down or avoid any attempt to exposit and apply them.

Again textual and cultural context go a long way toward helping us interpret this passage rightly. First, women of the first century were often restricted to home and social life, and were seldom educated in any formal way. Paul’s statement here assumes that Christian women were receiving instruction in the Word through the church—that in itself was a radical departure from the culture, elevating women as God’s image-bearers and teaching them the truths of the Word. His instruction here is not to squelch women, but to guide them in holiness as they learn.

The word for “*quietly*” here refers to a quiet spirit or uncluttered heart rather than the absence of sound, and “*all submission*” (*pasi hypotasi*) in this verse lacks an object, which is why many translators render it as a general demeanor of “*submissiveness*”. In this light, Paul is not saying that women can never speak in church (though he does appear to prescribe that in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35) or must not do anything without the say-so of the nearest male

leader, but rather urging them to worship and learn with a quiet spirit and an attitude of submission to God. Paul did not want Christian women to use their newfound learning to become busybodies or to lord their knowledge over others.

Second, we have to remember that much of the culture and economy of the city of Ephesus was based around the worship of Artemis, the goddess of virginity and fertility. The Temple of Artemis there was among the seven wonders of the ancient world. The significance of this cult to the city life there is evidenced by the riot recorded in Acts 19 (in which the mob chanted “*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!*” for two hours) caused by the disruption to idol trade as people forsook Artemis for the Gospel of Christ. The worship of Artemis, as best we can tell from historical records, was directed by women priests and heavily involved temple prostitutes.

Paul’s firm prohibition of women from teaching and leading in the church could very well have been to make a clear distinction between the worship of the One True God and the prevailing religion of the city. The female leadership of the cult of Artemis stood in contrast to the larger culture in which men held power in all institutions, and Paul likely wanted to avoid being linked to the cult in any way because of a similarly counter-cultural leadership structure.

Third, Paul was keenly aware that some of the women in the church had been among those who were led astray by the false teachers and had been spreading their gossip and untruth throughout the body. He writes in 5:13 and 15: “*At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention...for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.*” In 2 Timothy 3:6-7, he writes: “*For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*”

In effort to protect the church from the influence of easily swayed women, Paul issued a blanket ban on women in leadership and teaching roles at Ephesus. Going around from “*house to house*” might also have meant from house church to house church, thus spreading the false teaching of straying leaders through the whole Christian community in Ephesus.

Adam, Eve, and Childbirth

This is the reason that Paul brings up Adam and Eve: “*For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression*” (2:13-14). He is appealing to Scripture to bolster his case—namely that God, through the created order, established male leadership and that women, because of their God-given relational and

emotional nature, can be more susceptible to deceit in some ways than men.

Paul is not attaching some special blame to all women for bringing sin into the world. If we look at the Genesis 3 account of the Fall, Adam is clearly culpable as well, giving Eve instructions that did not come from God (“*or touch it*” in verse 3) and blindly following her into sin. However, much as he uses Adam elsewhere in his epistles as a representative of all mankind, Paul here seems to be using Eve as a representative for all women, showing the need for Christian women to be aware of their vulnerability.

Paul closes the chapter with a puzzling statement that sets some modern women’s blood boiling: “*But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint*” (2:15). The difficulty of this verse (which actually reads closer to “a woman will be saved...”) however, is easily diffused by recognizing that Paul clearly did not intend to contradict his dozens of statements of the nature of salvation (justification by faith alone through the grace of Christ alone) in other places (even in this chapter) by adding some sort of works requirement for women. Therefore it must mean something else.

Many theologians have attempted to make this verse more palatable by saying either, 1) that this is a reference to the incarnation of Christ (i.e., women are saved through **the** childbirth of the Son of God), or 2) that it is a promise that faithful Christian women will be protected physically when they have children. Both of these are expositional nightmares: the first doesn’t follow from the context at all and would be the only reference to salvation coming through Christ’s incarnation (rather than His death and resurrection) anywhere in Scripture; the second ignores the thousands upon thousands of Christian women through the centuries who have died in childbirth.

A sensible reading of this verse fits it into the context of protecting the church at Ephesus from the false teachings being spread by women with time on their hands. This verse parallels what he says in 5:14. “*Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach.*” In that culture, the only respectable career for a woman was as a wife and mother; and Paul is, in essence, telling the church

to encourage women to ground themselves with good work to avoid the temptation to be busybodies spreading falsehood.

Application

In our day, when the Church is under pressure from within and without to forgo “old-fashioned” notions of gender roles and allow women to serve as pastors, how are we to bring Paul’s words here to bear on our context? Often we rely on 2:12 as our chief proof-text for affirming a biblical model of male leadership, but the multiple cultural and contextual factors surrounding this passage leave us open to dangerously convincing hermeneutical attacks if this is the only verse we can point to in order to make our case.

When we look at Paul’s own words here, though, we see that even he was not relying merely on his apostolic authority, but he makes an appeal to Scripture to show grounds for his decision. Following his example, we have to answer our cultural critics with a comprehensive biblical approach. Paul stakes his case on the fact that God created men and women to be different and has given different roles and responsibilities to each of us. This pattern is repeated in all the passages related to church leadership in the New Testament. Women are not demeaned by being prevented from leadership any more than men are demeaned by being prevented from motherhood—God created us and equipped us, and called His work “good”.

To the extent this truth makes us uncomfortable, we should examine the motivations of our hearts. Just as Paul was concerned that the Church be markedly different from the surrounding culture in his day, so should we strive to march to the drum of Scripture instead of the world. A faithful church led by godly men cuts a sharp distinction with a world system in which maleness, femaleness, and all concrete gender identities and sexual behaviors are being flattened into a morass of “whatever works”. When Scripture and culture come into conflict, we side with the culture at our own peril.

Justin Lonas is editor of *Disciple Magazine* for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

Pursuing True Love

Text: “*And now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Follow after love...*” (1 Cor. 13:13-14:1a).

Thought: The “love” chapter, often read at wedding ceremonies, was not written originally for such an occasion, although it is certainly appropriate on a wedding day. The Apostle Paul is writing to a gifted church struggling with

immaturity, self-centeredness, and other issues causing divisions and spiritual trouble.

As the Apostle addresses issues related to the use of gifts in corporate gatherings, he gets to the heart of the matter when he calls the church to “a more excellent way,” the way of true love. Instead of pursuing the use of one’s gifts for self-promotion or pleasure, the Christian is to be motivated by true love that is selfless and others-oriented. In short, the need is to pursue true love.

In the specific Corinthian context this meant to pursue gifts, ministries, and practices that would edify others in the church the most. But, on the way to applying this “love dare” to corporate gatherings, Paul describes love meaningfully and beautifully in the preceding verses. In verse 1-3, Paul expresses that love is indispensable and essential. In verses 8-13, the Apostle teaches that love is ultimate and eternal. In verses 4-7, we see that love is definable and practical, both negatively and positively. Let’s briefly consider Paul’s description of love in these verses, and look at his explanation in terms of a “love commitment” that we need to make.

I. Say “No” to a Self-Centered Life

“...love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity...” (1 Cor. 13:4-6).

Each one of these phrases challenges us to the core. Telling us what love isn’t makes us very aware of how easy it is to be unloving, and to be self-centered. The Christian is to say “no” to a self-centered life. Envy, pride, rudeness, selfishness, over-sensitivity, and evil thinking, feeling, and speaking are to have no place in the mature believer’s life.

At the heart of the matter is a self-centeredness that tends to see everything in terms of how it affects **me**. Despite all appearances to the contrary, we really are more concerned about ourselves, our reputation, and our prominence, and these concerns will inevitably lead to not

treating others with the degree of love that is Christ-like. Practically speaking, the life of love calls us to the daily denying of self and self-centered attitudes and actions. As Paul states simply, but powerfully, elsewhere, “*For even Christ did not please Himself...*” (Rom. 15:3).

II. Say “Yes” to a Love-Directed Life

“*Love suffers long and kind; ...rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Cor. 13:4, 6-7).

It is not hard to see the close connection between the description of love here and Paul’s description of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). When we speak of a “love-directed life,” this really means practically that we must live a life dependent on and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a Spirit-filled life that will display true love that is Christ-like and others-oriented.

The Corinthians may have thought that the primary evidence of the Spirit was seen in the display of gifts, especially the gift of tongues. The Apostle’s instruction (which takes three chapters) reveals that the heart of the matter is love, and Paul’s exhortation is to pursue a love that is true, edifying and others oriented. In another context the Apostle says, “*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma*” (Eph. 5:1-2).

Thrust: Pursue true love. This does not mean that we don’t have appropriate desires, like to use our gifts, but it means that these desires must be shaped, guided and infused with a love that denies self and seeks to edify others in a Christ-like manner empowered by the Holy Spirit.

David L. Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University’s Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

“May I Play My Song for You?”

Song: “We Fall Down”

“*The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created’*” (Rev. 4:10-11).

Chris Tomlin has a distinction that no other songwriter has ever had. At the time of this writing, four of his songs appear on the CCLI’s Top 25 List in the United

States. Millions of people in many lands are now singing his songs.

Chris was born to Connie and Donna Tomlin in Tyler, Texas, in 1972. He is the oldest of their three children. In an interview some years ago, Chris told me of his conversion experience.

“I was saved at age nine as a result of a Southern Gospel music concert that I attended with my dad. It was just down the road from our church. That night I understood

what it means to give your life to Christ. Later that evening I talked with my pastor about my decision, and I was baptized the following Sunday at the Main Street Baptist Church in Grand Saline, Texas.”

Tomlin began writing songs in his early teen years and became involved with the music of the church. To date he has written some two hundred songs with approximately thirty-five of them being recorded or published. Following is his account of how he wrote “We Fall Down”:

“I was at a youth camp where Louie Giglio was speaking. I had only recently met Louie, who is the leader of Compassion, a student ministry that attracts thousands of young people to their conferences. He was teaching on Revelation chapter 4, which pictures the throne room of God with the angels and the living creatures around the throne. The twenty-four elders fall down before him and say, ‘*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power...*’ I was really taken by it. Our worship should be a response to God when He has revealed something to us. I felt that I had just seen a bit of the picture of the throne room of God. As I wrote the song, I was responding to that scene.

“Later, in my hotel room, I took my guitar and my open Bible and began to sing, ‘We fall down, we lay our crowns at the feet of Jesus.’ As I sang I didn’t know where the melody was coming from. I was blown away by the experience.

“I went to Louie’s room and knocked on the door. As he answered the door, I said, ‘Tonight you spoke on Revelation chapter 4, and I have just written a song based on that Scripture passage. May I sing it for you?’ He politely listened as I sang. When I had finished the song, he just looked at me. That was not at all the response I was hoping for. Then, as he spoke—and I’ll never forget his

words—he said, ‘I think the whole world is going to sing that song.’ I had never had anything like that said to me before. My response was, ‘I don’t know about the whole world singing it; I was just wondering if we could sing it tomorrow night.’ Louie then said, ‘Why don’t you make a tape of it?’

“I made a tape of it and he passed it along to Sam Perry. About six months later, in 1997, as I was attending a Passion Conference in Austin, Texas, with about two thousand people present, I suddenly heard a familiar melody being played on the piano; it was ‘We Fall Down.’ Sam Perry began to sing the song and lead the congregation of young people as they sang it. I had never heard someone lead one of my songs. As I saw the response of the students, the Lord seemed to say to me, ‘I’ve given you the gift of writing songs; now go do it!’

“Not long afterward I heard from BMI records, who informed me that they wanted to publish the song. The song has since been translated into many languages of the world.”

Chris is very active in the worship ministry of the Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas, a church he helped plant, along with Pastor Matt Carter.

When we see God in His holiness, we too will fall prostrate before Him in worship and adoration.

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Lindsay Terry has been a song historian for more than 40 years, and has written widely on the background of great hymns and worship songs including the books *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever* (2008), from which this piece is excerpted, and *The Sacrifice of Praise* (2002).

Church Builders—by Bernard R. DeRemer

William Wilberforce: The Conscience of England

William Wilberforce (1759-1833), statesman, philanthropist, and abolitionist, was born in Hull, Yorkshire, England. The son and grandson of wealthy merchants, he was brought up as a traditional Anglican. He was rather sickly as a child and suffered from poor eyesight.

Young William first encountered evangelical faith when he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle in London after the death of his father in 1868. His mother and grandparents brought him back to Hull in 1771, to rid him of his growing “nonconformist tendencies” and bring him back into the Anglican fold. His young faith was slowly squelched by the social atmosphere of his hometown

Wilberforce entered St. John’s College, Cambridge, in 1776, and the deaths of his grandfather and uncle in 1776

and 1777 left him independently wealthy. He was a fairly lackadaisical student who seemed to enjoy playing cards and socializing more than his studies. Still, he made numerous friends during his time there, including future Prime Minister William Pitt. He received his B. A. in 1781 and his M. A. in 1788.

While still a student, Wilberforce stood for election in 1780, and won a seat as the Member of Parliament (MP) for Kingston upon Hull in the House of Commons. His political career would span 45 years.

Sometime in 1784 or 1785, Wilberforce was drawn back to his evangelical roots, and began to daily read the Bible and grow deeper into Christ. He briefly considered leaving politics, but was convinced by his mentors (among

them John Newton, the writer of “Amazing Grace”) to use his position and his skills for God’s purposes.

In his newfound faith, Wilberforce became convinced of the immorality of the slave trade, and began working with the abolitionist movement to eradicate it. He first introduced a bill to Parliament to ban the trade in 1787, but he soon found himself in an extended fight against the entrenched economic interests of the shipping industry.

He also became a strong advocate of biblical Christianity in general, and in 1797 wrote an eloquent call for revival in England, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country Contrasted With Real Christianity* (usually shortened to *A Practical View of Christianity*), which is still reprinted and read to this day.

Also in 1797 he met and married Barbara Ann Spooner. The couple had six children, and family life was always very important to William. The stresses of his abolitionist struggle left Wilberforce in poor health for much of his life, and his wife was a faithful caregiver.

Alongside his political efforts, Wilberforce worked tirelessly for the rights of enslaved Africans, and was one of the founders of the Sierra Leone Colony in West Africa as a home for liberated slaves and a bulwark against the forced enslavement of natives. He was involved in more than 60

groups working at home and abroad, including the Anti-Slavery Society.

In addition to fighting slavery, Wilberforce was involved in many other areas of Christian ministry. He helped found and support the Bible Society, the Church Missionary Society, the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, and the *Christian Observer*, an evangelical Anglican periodical. Wilberforce came to be regarded as the “authorized interpreter of the national conscience” of England.

Wilberforce lived just long enough to hear that Parliament voted to emancipate all slaves in the British dominions in 1833, finally eradicating that horrible institution in the Empire. After his long and distinguished life, he died in 1833 and was buried in famed Westminster Abbey. His legacy remains as strong today as ever.

Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing for *Pulpit Helps Magazine*. He continues to serve in this capacity as a volunteer contributor to *Disciple*. He lives in West Liberty, Ohio.

References: *Who Was Who in Church History*, by Elgin S. Moyer; 1962; Wikipedia, “William Wilberforce”.

Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Sometimes People Just Need to Talk

Quite often people who are experiencing emotional distress simply need to talk to someone who will actively listen to them. A solution to their depressive or anxious feelings may not be achievable, but a connection to their pain and emotional discomfort may be exactly what is needed.

It is true that when a person feels they have been understood, you can even disagree with them about something and the disagreement will not feel as bad. Sometimes, I am afraid, those of us who counsel people are looking for something that does not exist. In fact, our label or diagnosis of a person may at times be more hurtful than helpful to the process of counseling.

Recently, a man came to me with an emotional hurt that had led him to a nervous, tearful, and generally uneasy confusion. The more I determined to simply hear him out, the more convinced I became that he needed to vocalize his feelings in a protected and safe environment. We talked about some basic principles involved in interpreting things in life. We talked about emotions. We even looked at some Scripture passages that dealt with attitude and commitment.

He came in to my office sounding like he was going to leave his wife. However, the more I listened and he

talked, it was made clear by this man himself that he really had no intention of doing this. When he left, I suggested he look at how he was relating to his wife and how he was interpreting her actions and his feelings about those actions. This couple was about to celebrate their 50th anniversary! He left my office feeling better and ready to work on something to help his relationship. Most of the time was spent in nothing more than my actively listening to him.

There are other times when a couple or an individual may need to “vent” or speak out their inner feelings in order to get to the place where they can look at their situation from a different perspective.

With so many people, I try to remind them that it is not so much what we do but how we do it—not so much what we say but how we say it. When I have listened long enough and made sure I understood what they were saying, they were more open to hear me and try a new approach to a prevailing difficulty in their life or relationship.

We cannot overrate the importance of understanding someone. It takes time to do that. It takes active and empathic listening. It involves asking questions in order to clarify their statements, feelings, and even beliefs.

The book of James is such a practical book. It underscores the importance of behaving in accordance with our faith. James 1:19 says that “*everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.*” When we, as counselors, take the time to really listen to a person we are counseling, we will help them to one degree or another. One thing is for sure, we will never really help a person by simply offering advice without first listening to them. Sometimes, a person just needs to talk. When we can listen

to what they have to say, we might just be a blessing God sends into their lives.

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

Book Review—2/27/12

The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion, Tim Challies, 2011, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Mich., ISBN 9780310329039, 208 pages, \$19.99, hardcover.

Canadian pastor, author, and blogger Tim Challies has long been recognized as an insightful voice on cultural and technological issues facing the Church. His website (Challies.com) often features product reviews of new devices and he frequently wrestles with the theological implications of new technologies in his blog posts.

In *The Next Story: Life and Faith after the Digital Explosion*, Challies attempts to make a more comprehensive statement about the relationship between technology and the Christian life, and the result is excellent. Through this short book, he takes readers on a journey from the creation mandate to the iPhone, developing a biblical understanding of technology and examining the many challenges that rapid innovation brings to Christians.

In the first part of the book, Challies makes a compelling case for the good of technology, demonstrating that human ingenuity in creating technology reflects the character of God as Creator and is part and parcel of how He designed us to “*fill the earth and subdue it*” (Gen. 1:28). He shows readers how, from the plow to the printing press to the airplane, technology has had tremendous positive effects on man’s quality of life and His ability to serve the Lord.

Challies recognizes, also that all technology carries certain risks, many of which we may not see until we have fully adopted a new device. He points out that though we try to make technology in our image, it often returns the favor, remaking our lives in ways we never could have imagined. He draws from great secular theorists like Neil Postman and Marshal McLuhan to show that the devices and systems we create, especially for communication,

implicitly change the meaning of the messages we use them to send.

The second part of *The Next Story* addresses six areas in which technological advances have brought significant changes (both for good and bad) and tries to help Christians make informed decisions about how they interact with these new realities.

In particular, Challies discusses the multiplying and cheapening of communication through the internet and mobile devices; the effect of media on our relationships and how mediated distance hinders love and fosters negative behaviors; the distraction that comes from sensory overload and the need to recapture focus in order to pray and worship well; the cult of information for information’s sake and the need to sort and process what we know to develop true wisdom; the redefining of truth by user-generated content and the need for grounding in God’s truth; and the two-edged sword of heightened visibility of our lives through social media and increased anonymity in hiding behind a screen and the need for a consistent witness.

In all, Challies provides a very thorough yet very accessible manual for Christians to make sense of their digital world through a biblical lens. He does not critique the digital revolution as a Luddite, but rather urges Christians to think critically about the ways they interact with the technologies that have come to define today’s world and, as always, to allow God’s standards to be our standards as we evaluate our devices and media choices. In the end, he reminds us that God is in control, and that the new world we find ourselves in today is His world as much as ever.

Justin Lonas

Target: All
Type: Practical Theology
Take: Must Read

News Update—2/27/12

Islamic Extremists Storm Pakistan Church, Wound Two Christians

A dozen armed Muslims stormed Grace Ministry Church in Faisalabad, Pakistan, seriously wounding two Christians, AsiaNews reports.

One man was hit by bullets and is in critical condition in the hospital, possibly requiring the amputation of his arm. Another man was pushed from the roof after being struck repeatedly with a rifle butt. The extremist raid was sparked by charges that the church was trying to evangelize Muslims in an attempt to convert them to Christianity. It has been assaulted several times, and the pastor and his family have received repeated death threats.

The police, instead of pursuing the perpetrators, have opened an investigation against the pastor and 20 other church members on allegations of “proselytizing.”

Religion Today Summaries

Jeremy Lin’s Christian Faith Inspires Persecuted Christians in China

The sudden rise to fame of Taiwanese Christian NBA player Jeremy Lin has received the attention of many Chinese Christians, and has inspired many who face persecution in their Communist homeland, the *Christian Post* reports.

Chinese media has largely stifled any mentions of Lin’s Christianity in covering his basketball play, typical of the government’s attempts to control religious practices, but Lin’s story has nonetheless caught the attention of Christians throughout the country.

One Chinese Internet wrote, “physical agility has shown me the glory and omnipotence of God.” Another wrote: “How should young Christians live the life of the Lord? We have a good example in Lin Shuhao’s miraculous performance and we should cheer him on.”

Hu Shubang, a seminary student at Zhejiang Theological Seminary in Hangzhou, said Lin could become a symbol for Christians in China to use in seeking converts. “Just by his being a Christian, it is a fantastic way to broadcast the ways of Christ,” Hu said.

Religion Today Summaries

Most U.S. Children Born Out of Wedlock

New research shows more than half of births to American women younger than 30 are outside of marriage, the *Daily Mail* reports. With two-thirds of children in the U.S. born to mothers under age 30, it appears the majority of births are out of wedlock. Across all ages, four in 10 women are not married when they have children.

Data shows the fastest growth in the past 20 years is among white women in their 20s with some college education but no four-year degree; most college graduates, however, marry before having children, suggesting family structure is becoming a new class divide. “Marriage has become a luxury good,” said Frank Furstenberg, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania. But studies consistently show that children born to married couples do better in school and develop fewer social, cognitive, behavioral and emotional problems.

Religion Today Summaries

Churches Forced to Stop Farsi Worship in Tehran

Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence has ordered the last two officially registered churches holding Friday Farsi-language services in Tehran to discontinue them, Compass Direct News reports.

Friday services in Tehran attracted the city’s converts to Christianity as well as Muslims interested in Christianity, because Friday is most Iranians’ day off during the week. Officials told Emmanuel Protestant Church and St. Peter’s Evangelical Church Feb. 10 that they could no longer hold Friday services, but could hold services on Sunday—a working day when most Iranians are not able to attend.

“This decision means there are now no Farsi-language services on Fridays in any officially registered church in Tehran,” a report from Middle East Concern said. The restrictions have cut the two churches’ memberships by half, sources said.

Religion Today Summaries

Burma: Continuing Human Rights Violations Against Christian Civilians

Christian Solidarity Worldwide reports ongoing and continuous grave human rights violations being committed by the Burma Army against Christian civilians in Kachin State and other ethnic states.

The Burma Army has been waging an offensive against ethnic civilians since breaking a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independent Organization/Army in June. In a recent three-week fact-finding visit to the area, CSW heard first-hand testimonies from internally displaced people from Kachin and Shan states of killings, torture, rape and the destruction of churches, homes and villages by the Burma Army.

“These were unarmed civilians, in their paddy fields or homes, who were not engaged in armed combat in any form,” said Benedict Rogers, CSW’s East Asia team leader. “The accounts of torture and other abuses are a

cause for very grave concern and ... require an urgent and sustained response from the international community.”

Religion Today Summaries

NYC Church Evictions Temporarily Lifted

Churches facing eviction from New York City public schools won a brief reprieve last week as a federal judge granted a temporary restraining order to allow congregations to meet in school buildings for 10 more days, OneNewsNow.com reports.

“The court’s order is a message of hope for fundamental freedoms in New York City because it means that, for the time being, the city must welcome churches as

it does other groups,” said Jordan Lorence of the Alliance Defense Fund.

The ruling gives the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York more time to consider arguments about the constitutionality of the city’s ban on religious groups to rent vacant public school space on weekends—the only such ban in the nation. State lawmakers now also have the opportunity to pass a bill to overturn the ban; a bill that would compel the city’s education department to allow the worship services passed the state senate earlier this month and awaits action by the state assembly.

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines

Pure Conscience

1 Peter 3:16

I. Your Conscience

“*Having a good conscience*”

- A. Proper conscience (1 Tim. 1:19).
- B. Purged conscience (Heb. 9:14).
- C. Pure conscience (Acts 24:16).

II. Your Critics

“*That, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers*”

- A. Because of salvation (John 15:18-19).
- B. Because of sanctification (1 Tim. 3:12).
- C. Because of surrender (1 Cor. 14:23).

III. Your Confirmation

“*They may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ*”

- A. Promise (Is. 54:17).
- B. Protection (Ps. 63:11).
- C. Provision (Rom. 8:31).

Croft M. Pentz

What Christ Has Made Possible

Romans 5:1-11

Prop.: To fully appreciate what Christ has made possible for us, we need to:

I. Remember What We Were

- A. “*Without strength*,” (v. 6; John 15:5; Phil. 4:13).
- B. “*Ungodly*,” (v. 6).
- C. “*Sinners*,” (v. 8; 3:10, 23; Is. 64:6).
- D. “*Enemies*,” (v. 10; James 4:4).

II. Remember What Christ Did for Us

- A. Died for us, (vv. 6,8).
 - 1. He didn’t have to; He wanted to (John 10:11,18).
 - 2. He gave His life (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

B. Justified us, (“To declare or pronounce to be righteous.”)

- 1. This we could never do (Titus 3:5).
- 2. Justified by faith, (v. 1).
- 3. Justified by His blood, (v. 9).

C. Reconciled us, (vv. 10,11).

III. Remember What We Now Have (or Can Have) in Him

- A. “*Peace*,” (v. 1).
- B. “*Access to grace*,” (v. 2).
- C. “*Hope*,” (v. 2b).
- D. “*Holy Spirit*,” (v. 5).

IV. Think on What We Will Have

- A. Salvation from the wrath to come (v. 9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9).
- B. Eternal salvation through His life (6:23).

Victor Knowles

Illustrations

Eureka!

The era of gold rushes in this country heard the cry: “GOLD! GOLD!” Search, search, search; traces, traces, traces; signs, signs, signs! They found traces (flakes and nuggets), they discovered small veins, and they heard rumors. And, of course, there was “fool’s gold,” and they bought into “salted” mines (fakes), they re-mined old mines that had been mined many times before, and they followed every rumor ever spoken by the lips of man. But, search as they might, they almost never found the mother lode, the source of all the gold.

Likewise, men from all over the world rush to and fro, here and there, to this very day, seeking the truth. What they don’t know is that it’s staring them directly in the face in God’s Word written for us.

J. A. Gillmartin

Deceptive Packaging

Through its laws, the United States declares it a crime to lie about the contents in a box of cereal. These laws demand that the outside of the package tell the truth about what is on the inside. Deceptive packaging is illegal.

“Truth in advertising” regulations are another way to protect the public. A good example of this is the warning on a pack of cigarettes: “Smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, and may complicate pregnancy.”

Unfortunately, there are no such laws about people. We require no one to tell what really lies behind the packaging—the clothes, facial expressions, mannerisms, speech patterns, or affected behavior. No one is forced to tell you what he or she is really feeling, thinking, or planning to do. Our deceptive packaging—the way we appear to others—is an accepted, even an expected part of our way of life. We have become experts in this type of trickery. Before we are going to get the help we need, we need to confess this sin of hypocrisy. Only then can we go on the path of discovering and knowing our real selves.

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts Wisdom on Life

Stand up to be seen, speak up to be heard, and shut up to be

appreciated.

A brook would lose its song if God removed the rocks.

Going to church does not make you a Christian any more than going to McDonald’s makes you a hamburger.

These three Anonymous

The best antiques to collect are old friends.

We learn more from adversity than from prosperity.

Only God is in a position to look down on people.

If we ask “why” when things go bad, why don’t we ask “why” when things go well?

These four from Croft M. Pentz

Experience is something you don’t get until just after you need it.

The Old Union Reminder

The man who walks with God always knows in what direction he is going.

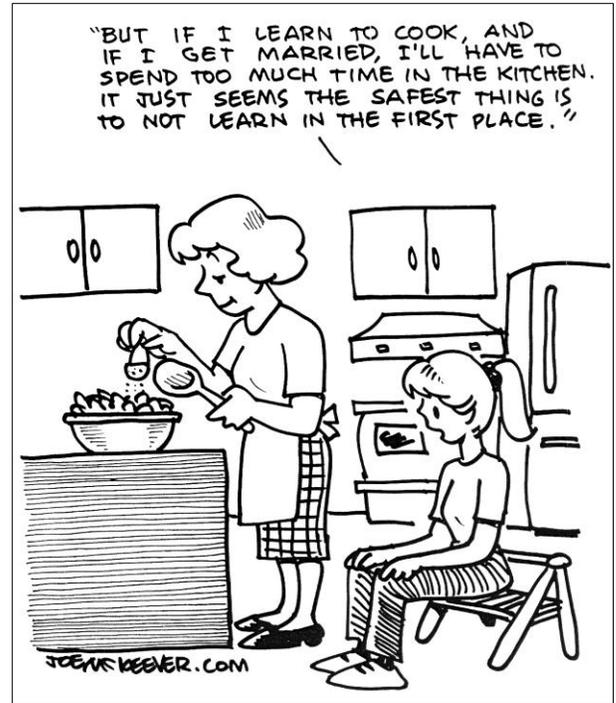
Bernard of Clairvaux

Life is not a problem to be solved, but a gift to be enjoyed.

Joseph P. Dooley

Puzzles and 'Toons

Church 'Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:

ANSWERS

1. Ten curtains (Ex. 26:1).
2. Goat's hair (Ex. 26:7).
3. Shittim wood (Ex. 26:15).
4. Blue, purple, and scarlet (Ex. 26:31).
5. Five cubits (Ex. 27:1).
6. One hundred cubits (Ex. 27:16).
7. Olive oil (Ex. 27:20).
8. Pure gold (Ex. 30:3).
9. Pure myrrh, sweet cinnamon, sweet calamus, cassia, and olive oil (Ex. 30:23, 24).
10. Stacte, onycha, galbanum, and frankincense (Ex. 30:34).

ACROSTIC #44: ANSWERS

PHILIPPIANS (4:6) — "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"

- A. KNAVE
- B. PREFERRING
- C. HEWERSOFWOOD
- D. INNER
- E. LOGARITHM
- F. ICHABOD
- G. PYGARG
- H. PATHETIC
- I. INKBLOT
- J. AUGUSTUS
- K. NINETY
- L. SQUINT
- M. DEVOUTLY
- N. BENNY
- O. BUNT

Father Abraham's Question Box

"THE TABERNACLE AND ITS CONTENTS"

1. How many curtains covered the inside of the tabernacle?
2. Of what material was the outside covering of the tabernacle made?
3. What kind of wood was used for the boards of the tabernacle?
4. What were the colors of the tabernacle's veil?
5. What was the length of the altar of the tabernacle?
6. What was the length of the court of the tabernacle?
7. What type of oil was to be burned in the tabernacle's lamp?
8. What was used to overlay the altar of incense?
9. What ingredients went into the making of the anointing oil?
10. What ingredients went into the making of the incense placed before the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle?

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 # 45

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!!

1G		2F	3B	4A	5L		6D	7J	8N	9E	10B	11A		12I	13J	14H	15C
		16M	17B	18K		19J		20L	21N		22F	23K	24J	25B	26I	27M	28D
29N	30H		31G	32E	33L		34A	35N	36G	37J	38D	39H	40K	41C	42E	43F	44M
	45L	46B	47A	48D			49H	50L	51M	52G	53J	54E	55A	56B	57F	58I	
59C	60N	61A		62J	63D	64C		65E	66N	67M	68B	69H		70F	71A	72L	
	73H	74B	75I	76G		77J	78H		79E	80L	81I	82C		83B	84N	85A	86K
87E	88J	89G			90B	91N	92E	93J	94D			95B	96K	97M	98G		

- A. Commendation given by the master in the parable of the talents (2 words.) 34 11 4 55 47 85 71 61
- B. Disease caused by a severe protein and vitamin deficiency 83 95 46 10 74 3 56 90 68 17 25
- C. The late Mr. Brynner 64 41 82
- D. His son rebelled against Moses and Aaron 6 38 28 48 94 63
- E. "How wilt thou do in the _____ of Jordan?" 79 65 87 54 42 9 32 92
- F. Extremely bad 70 2 22 57 43
- G. His scales are his pride (Job 41) 98 15 52 1 59 76 89 31 36
- H. Literary genre of Simenon, et al. 49 30 69 73 14 39 78
- I. Mephistopheles' erstwhile protégé 26 75 81 58 12
- J. Treasurer under Cyrus of Persia. 77 19 62 13 7 53 37 24 88 93
- K. Smaller number than 40 96 86 23 18
- L. Joktan's son (Gen. 10) 50 5 45 80 72 20 33
- M. Sudden commotion 16 97 27 51 67 44
- N. One way to get to Epcot Center from Disney World 21 66 84 35 60 8 91 29