

Disciple Magazine



Equipping believers for deeper life

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Redeeming the Time

By Justin Lonas

Editor’s note: This is an attempt to refocus the Church on our call in the midst of a changing cultural landscape, not an “us versus them” statement, but a reminder that we are called to be “us” to reach “them”. There are many more facets to this subject that cannot all fit in one article. See this issue’s book review for more.

Last month the Supreme Court of the United States heard oral arguments in *Obergefell v. Hodges* on the question of whether same-sex marriage (currently legal in some states and illegal in others) must be allowed in all U.S. states and territories (per the 14th Amendment). A ruling is expected later this summer. This is only the latest squeeze of cultural pressure for sweeping change now coming to a head after 50 years of sexual revolution. Christians in America are quickly recognizing that we are on a very different path from the majority of our countrymen.

The conversation among believers has, accordingly, shifted from the question of how to protect the traditional view of marriage (a lifelong covenant between a man and a woman) in law and culture, to the ways we can preserve any meaningful freedom to dissent in a society that has largely rejected our beliefs as immoral and cruel. If we learned anything from recent flare-ups (the Indiana and Arkansas Religious Freedom Restoration Acts, in particular), it is that the new morality (rooted in unfettered individualism) hates any public rebuttal.

Christian leaders and writers across denominations have been wrestling with what that means for our daily practice and identity as members of the Body of Christ. Few expect an impending trip to the lions, but the consensus takeaway is that things will be different. Russell Moore (a Southern Baptist) speaks of becoming “a prophetic minority” (playing on the 1980s “Moral Majority”) willing to be reviled while lovingly and unflinchingly speaking truth to the world. Rod Dreher (a convert to Eastern Orthodoxy) has been most vocal about what he calls “The Benedict Option”—not a wholesale return to monasticism, but the intentional withdrawal from mainstream culture and

cultivation of Christian community to preserve the truth and shine the light of Christ in a new dark age. This is beyond the “culture wars” of decades past. These are not discussions within a nominally Christian population about public morality, but serious questions about how the Church as an institution will weather the coming storm.

There is a real sense of fear today—fear of what we stand to lose, fear for the world our children and grandchildren will inherit. Beyond its value as a healthy motivator (more on that to come), though, this is not the time for fear. Whatever comes (though we seek to understand the times, we cannot know all that God’s plan holds), we ought to be concerned with how the Church will survive and thrive, because we have been given roles and responsibilities in the Lord’s kingdom. We strive to protect the Church, not because we want to preserve our comfort and influence, but because we have a job to do.

I. The Times Require the Gospel

Compared to the New Testament context, the modern West is a land of unparalleled peace, tolerance, and freedom. But Christ came into that world; into that world that He commissioned His followers to make disciples and be His witnesses to the uttermost parts. The Lord knew the opposition they would face. He knew that the Jewish leaders would not tolerate His Gospel, and that the Roman authorities would seek to crush it too, once they realized that Jesus’ lordship meant denying Caesar’s. Proclaiming the Gospel, historically, has always been done from a position of cultural weakness, ostracism, and danger. Our message is literally from “out of this world,” and we are told repeatedly that the world will not understand it unless the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to the truth (see 1 Cor. 1 and 2, for starters).

No matter the circumstances we face, our mission remains to be fulfilled. Until the Lord returns, the Gospel must be preached. There is salvation in no one but Christ, and we should see that all the better when the false assurances of peace and prosperity give way. When we

grow more concerned about safety than faithfulness, our eyes are off the ball indeed.

Jesus had a few choice words for us in this regard: *“If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matt. 10:25b-28). Our fear is misplaced when we worry about ourselves. God is the judge; evil will be shown for what it is, and the truth will be plain. God’s plan to lead the lost to the light does not involve hiding the truth from public view.

II. The Times Require Holiness

When we see the world turning its back on Christianity, it is easy to forget God’s concern with our own sin and conduct. It is often for our own purification that the Lord allows oppression and opposition: *“though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Peter’s entire letter focuses on challenging the church to holiness in the midst of suffering. Why? Because this follows the example of Christ (2:21-25), speaks truth to a watching world (2:11-20), and prepares us for glory in God’s presence (5:6-11). Suffering for the sake of Christ strengthens the Church by making it impossible to be both of the world and in the Church.

It has been well observed that the shift toward celebration of same-sex marriage is little more than a logical progression from two antecedents: no-fault divorce and chemical birth control. That is, when we as a culture began to separate sexual activity from the possibility of producing children and turned marriage into a simple and easily dissolved contract between two people who (at least at the moment) love one another, we evicted the family as the foundational unit of society in favor of the individual. In that context there is no longer a culturally legitimate reason to limit that contract to one man and one woman.

Sadly, the Church has not always been faithful to uphold the Bible’s teaching on the primacy, permanence, and procreative purpose of marriage (which all picture Christ and the Church). Though the notion that the divorce and cohabitation rates are the same in the church as in the world has been repeatedly debunked, it is still much higher than it ought to be for a people committed to Christ and His Word. Moreover, many churches and denominations (mostly within the Mainline) have answered the question of

same-sex marriage by changing right along with the culture. If we are going to be distinct from the world, it has to be bigger than our stance on one issue. Doctrine and practice matter, both in terms of what we are able to protect in terms of religious freedom and in the witness we present to new believers in other cultures as we fulfill the Great Commission.

III. The Times Require Boldness

As mentioned above we ought not be afraid, but share the Gospel in boldness. Jesus told His disciples: *“Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets”* (Luke 6:22-23). *“Thus says the Lord”* has never been well-received by men, so we should not expect anything different now. Being opposed and persecuted by the systems of men is often a sign that we are working hard within God’s perfect plan. Again, in the passage from Matthew mentioned above, Jesus said, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows”* (Matt. 10:29-31). These are not platitudes, but powerful assurances given to those on mission for Christ. It is fair to take danger into consideration in how we fulfill our calling, but the proper stance for believers is boldly following Christ in obedience, not cowering in fear.

On a more practical level, as cultural and legal changes push us ever further from the American mainstream, the Church should not be surprised, but neither should we give up the exercise of what rights we do enjoy. Notably, Paul played up his Roman citizenship in Acts 16 for the benefit of the fledgling Philippian church, in Acts 22 to extract himself from the mob in Jerusalem, and in Acts 25 to appeal to Caesar so that he could continue proclaiming the truth. Churches and Christian institutions still enjoy tremendous protection under the law for the time being (including tax exemption and allowance for belief-based discretion in hiring), and we should not sit idly by as those protections are assaulted. Like Paul, we have a Gospel to proclaim, and we should use every available means to ensure that it reaches as far and wide as possible.

IV. The Times Require Love

In what is often a heated debate, it is critical to remember that none of us are righteous apart from Christ. Some of the vitriol on the part of those who practice or affirm homosexual behavior no doubt stems from unbiblical attitudes shown toward them by some Christians. If Christ would die for us “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8), should we not also show sacrificial love for those who do

not yet know Him that they might see His love in us? In Christ, we have no cause to refuse love, concern, care, and friendship to others broken by sin.

Paul wrote, “*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God*” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). No one in this life is beyond the possibility of repentance and redemption. As Paul himself could attest, even the “*chief of sinners*” could in a moment be transformed by the power of God.

In a grand sense, sexual identity has never been the real issue, but is one more tool for Satan to use in his ongoing war against God, His Word, His world, and His people. Individuals in unbiblical lifestyles are not themselves the enemy, but they are being used and abused by him. This means that standing firm on Scripture at this point is part of our love for those enslaved to sin in these particular areas—if we deny that their actions are sinful, we deny them the opportunity to be broken by the Spirit and repent.

V. The Times Require Strategy

To return to points made above, how we negotiate this changing landscape has tremendous implications for our ability to fulfill our responsibility before God to proclaim the Gospel at home and abroad. Religious freedom matters, but even if that is taken from us, we cannot stop obeying Christ. Christian generosity, service, and mercy ministry go hand in hand with that call (James 2:14-26, etc.), so we ought to labor to preserve our ability to continue the work.

Practically, the era of evangelical entrepreneurialism in which non-denominational churches and parachurch organizations (like my own) of all shapes and sizes have flourished may be at an end. Organized church denominations with official worship functions and established confessions of belief are better positioned in the emerging legal framework to a) maintain orthodox theology and practice among their members and employees, and b) hang onto their rights to serve others openly and fully through hospitals, schools, universities, and other charitable functions.

Unaffiliated churches and organizations will make easier targets when legal battles arise. When challenged on the

basis for our actions, we can point to Scripture, but not always to established confessional framework and patently religious functions. It may be necessary for the American Church to undergo a contraction of Christian mission and mercy work, with organizations consolidating into established denominational groups to protect their ability to fulfill Christ’s call. Again, we are not to give up, but to “*be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves*” (Matt. 10:16).

Conclusion: The Times Require Rejoicing and Rest

“*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name*” (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

“*Rejoicing*” may not be the first (or the tenth) thing that comes to mind as you read one more news story about same-sex marriage or experience struggles in business (or more brutal persecution, for our overseas readers) because of your faith. Yet that is what Peter commands, as do Jesus (Luke 6:22-23, quoted above), James (James 1:2-4), and Paul (Rom. 5:3-6). We rejoice because we know the end of the story, or rather, we know the One who is the beginning and the end. Whatever He allows is for our ultimate good and His glory (Rom. 8, etc.). These commands to rejoice aren’t saying so much that suffering produces joy, but reminding us that the joy of the Lord that should characterize all of our lives ought not be disrupted by persecution.

In all this, we do need to understand what we face, we must know what is at stake, and we cannot lose hope. Even so, beware the temptation to believe that you know better than God what is going on. Things that seem straightforward are often borne along by undercurrents we’ve missed. History is an exercise in sifting out why the obvious is not always accurate, and the real issue is seldom obvious, but nothing that happens is outside of God’s sovereign plan. Despair is never on the table.

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The Seven Churches of Revelation—Part 7

Philadelphia: The Missionary Church

By Ray P. Burriss

The city of Philadelphia was different in several respects from the other cities that the Apostle John was instructed to write to in Revelation.

For one, it was the youngest of the cities in the region, founded in the second century B.C. King Eumnes of Pergamum gave this city its name in honor of his love of his brother (Greek, *philadelphos*), Attalus. For another, it is not known who founded the church. My research indicated that Christians from the city of Ephesus might have shared the Gospel there, starting this church.

Philadelphia's location also set it apart from the other cities in that region. The road system of the Roman Empire was well known for its engineering prowess and efficiency. Philadelphia sat on what was referred to as the Imperial Post Road, used to deliver important messages to various locations and to move military personnel quickly. Having a good road system had lots of advantages (safer travel, trade, etc.).

This city's location in a fertile valley floor also made it famous for its wine. Volcanic ash that settled in this valley left a rich soil. One of the city's major pagan gods was Bacchus, the god of wine and fertility. Philadelphia, as well as other places, often held Bacchanalias in honor of Bacchus—drunken parties where wine was consumed excessively, and illicit sex was the “worship service.”

One last item distinguished Philadelphia; the way they constructed the foundations of their pagan temples. Since this area was known for its many earthquakes, they made the foundations with charcoal that was covered with fleece (fresh, untreated wool). This architectural innovation allowed the temple to sway with the movement of the earthquake keeping the structure intact. Each temple had many pillars, which gave added strength and made it more secure. While effective in most cases, an earthquake in A.D. 17 destroyed Philadelphia along with nearby Sardis.

Philadelphia also had a large Jewish population with much influence in the city and a synagogue for Jewish worshippers. Christ referred to it as the “*synagogue of Satan*.” Christ uses this title for a synagogue only twice: once for the synagogue in Sardis and now for the synagogue in Philadelphia. His reasoning for this is not really known. Maybe the Jews that made up the congregation had become liberal, or may they may have been Hellenistic Jews that brought too much of the surrounding culture into worship. Another reason is that Jews would denounce Christian converts to the Roman officials.

While new Christians were persecuted by this pagan society, the main source of persecution of these new Christians was from the synagogue. In addition to physical persecution, those Jews who believed Christ were also psychologically persecuted because they were excommunicated from the synagogue. This meant these new Jewish Christians did not have the same protection from Rome their former community enjoyed. Along with this, they were considered dead to the community, shunned. They could not be a member of any synagogue, anywhere in the world, and relatives would not talk to them or help them in any way.

Into this context Christ told John to address this church: “*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.’ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’*” (Rev. 3:7-13).

Christ presents Himself in three ways, all of which have very significant meaning to the new Jewish Christians in Philadelphia.

First, He presents himself as one who is holy and true. To the Jews, this was very important, and this phrase is used in many locations in the Old Testament. It meant Christ was faithful, trustworthy and one who keeps His promise.

Second, Christ claims He has the key of David, symbolizing authority and control. Christ told them, through this letter, that **they** (in Him) now had the key of David, not those in the synagogue, even though those leaders did not know it had been taken from them.

Third, Christ presents Himself as the one who would open the door. Christ had the ability to open the correct door, and that this door would not be closed to them. Even though these new Christians had the door of the synagogue closed to them, the door to fellowship with God was open. This phrase of the “closed” and “open” doors is often lifted out of context. It means that all of synagogues had excommunicated these new Jewish Christians in the city of Philadelphia, but Christ was stating that He is the real keeper of which doors will be opened and closed, and He was opening the door to His Kingdom to these new Christians, and closing the doors of the synagogue. This would have been a great comfort for these believers, as it was very hard for them to be rejected from their Jewish heritage.

There is no condemnation listed for this church or the new Christians. The only thing that He tells to John to write to them is not to rest on past performance, but to continue being strong their faith and reaching out to others. It is this idea of reaching out that may be the reason Philadelphia is often referred to as a missionary church.

Christ’s commendation to the church at Philadelphia is that they are holding fast to what they have in Him. He had protected them in the time of peace, and He

promised them in the time of any persecution, now and in the future.

Christ’s correction and consequence for this church is simple: they will have a pillar in heaven with a new name written on this pillar. Again, Christ is telling them something that Christians in the city of Philadelphia would have understood, because many of the pagan’s temples had pillars with the names of famous person inscribed in them. All these Christians had to do to get this pillar with their name inscribed on it was to remain faithful.

Did they? Philadelphia prospered during the Byzantine era. In about the year 600, the domed Basilica of St. John was built, remains of which are the main archaeological attraction in the modern city (Alaşehir, Turkey). The city maintained a church for many centuries, finally becoming a Muslim stronghold after the Greek-Turkish population exchange of 1923. The Greek city Nea Filadelfeia, a suburb of Athens, was founded by citizens of Philadelphia who were relocated to Greece at that time.

Next month, we will look at the last of the Seven Churches, Laodicea.

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Two Primary Goals of Disciple Making

By Tim LaFleur

As the old saying goes, “if you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time.” This helps us remember how important it is to work toward goals and objectives in whatever we do. If this is important in everything we are involved in, how much more when it comes to things that are eternal—God, His Word, and the souls of men?

What are the primary goals that the Disciplemaker is working toward? As I examine the New Testament, I believe there are two main goals of a Disciplemaker. To equip believers to grow and mature and to empower them to equip others.

I. Disciplemakers Equip Believers to Grow and Mature in Christ

Notice Paul’s “mission statement” in the Book of Colossians: “*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ*” (Col. 1:28). Paul was not content simply to lead others to faith in Christ. His desire was to help them to come to full stature! He wanted to “*present everyone mature in Christ.*” He had this end in mind—to equip believers to become whole-hearted followers of Jesus!

Later in the same letter, he writes: “*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted*

and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6-7). In this text, his desired goal is that believers be “*established in the faith.*” He would not be content with these believers just being evangelized! His great passion was that they be “*rooted and built up*” in foundational truth! Those who are “*established in the faith*” would be Disciplemakers or leaders of Disciplemakers.

Are you beginning your Discipleship group with the end in mind? The goal is not only to make disciples, but also to make disciples who will in turn make disciples.

II. Disciplemakers Empower Mature Believers to Equip Others

Paul embraced this strategy when it came to training Gospel co-workers. Notice what Paul admonished and exhorted his son in the faith, Timothy, to do: “*And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul entrusted Timothy with the Gospel, and he admonished him to entrust what he had received to faithful men who could “*teach others also.*”

Clearly, the goal here is two-fold—Paul not only equipped Timothy with the Gospel message, but he empowered him to equip others!

The definition I use in our church for “making disciples” is this: “To equip believers with the Word of God, through accountable relationships, empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that they can mature in their faith and can replicate the process.”

If that is true, the work of discipleship is not done until the mentee becomes the mentor. And although everyone who goes through a discipleship group will not lead a group, we still strive to empower everyone who is in

the group to “reproduce after their kind” by replicating the process.

“If you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time.” Be intentional! Equip your discipleship group to grow in their faith and then empower them to help equip others to grow in their faith!

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

The Blessedness of Doing

James 1:25b

From Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James, AMG Publishers, 1997.

“...and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (James 1:25b).

In examining the first part of verse 25, we saw that the real meaning of it is that we should bow down close to the perfect law of freedom. We demonstrated that we live toward freedom in proportion as we live toward fidelity. The more faithful we are to Christ, the freer we are to obey His law; and our happiness is complete when we obey, not because of compulsion, but because of love.

If the Apostle had used another tense, that of the continuous present, in describing the man who bows down close to the mirror of the Word of God, he would not have needed to use the word that we are about to study, because he would have indicated that this obedience to Christ is not something that takes place once and for all, but that it is something continuous.

There are some people today who, when they hear a sermon on sanctification or holiness and raise their hands, think that they suddenly become perfectly sinless. Such people are the most likely candidates for an insane asylum, because soon after that event they are sure to find out that they are not perfectly sinless and will feel a tremendous burden of guilt. What a terrible blow it must be for one to think that he is perfect, only suddenly to discover he is not. I remember my professor of abnormal psychology saying once, “There is something wrong with the person who thinks and says that he is perfectly sane.” The law of God is so perfect and we are so imperfect, even in our state of regeneration, that after we have yielded ourselves once to Christ (as the word *parakupsas*, which in our English Bible is translated “beholdeth,” indicates), we need to continue in that condition of yieldedness.

What are we to do, having bowed down to Christ once? To get up and walk away as the man in verse 24 did, who looked at himself in the mirror, understood his

condition and his need, but did nothing about it? No, indeed. James says, “He, who having bowed down close to a perfect law, that of liberty, and having stayed there.” That is somewhat different from what we have in our English New Testament. There is so much more in the Word of God when we study it in its original inspired language.

Now the word *paramēnas*, which the King James Version translates “*continueth therein*,” is another participle to match the one with which the sentence starts and which means “having stayed close.” It is a compound verb, the first part of which is the same preposition as that of the first participle, which, as we saw previously, means, among other things, “near” or “close by.” The main verb means “to stay.” It is not enough to have bowed down close to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of truth, but it is necessary to stay close by, to stick by Him. This is in contrast to the man who stood before the mirror of the Word, understood, and immediately left without doing anything about his condition.

Here we have a man who did not erect his self-righteousness before the Lord Jesus, but bowed down before Him in humility and stayed in that position. There was an Irish peddler who went from door to door selling his wares. He was met by a Christian who knew him and, after the regular greeting, the Christian remarked to the Irish peddler, “It’s a grand thing to be saved.” “Eh?” said the peddler. “It is, but I know something better than that.” “Better than being saved?” the Christian friend asked in astonishment. “What can you possibly know better than that?” “The companionship of the Man who saved me,” was the unexpected reply. That is exactly the message which James wants to convey to us. It is wonderful to bow down close to Christ, but it is even more wonderful to stay put, to stay close to Christ; and the closer we stay to Him, the easier it will be to obey His law. There will be no compulsion; it will be within our nature to obey Him.

A king once asked a rebel who had been brought into his presence, “Do you know that it is in my power to punish you?” The rebel replied, “Yes, but it is not in Your Majesty’s nature.” So it is with Christians who stay close to Jesus Christ. It is within their power simply to hear and not do, and even to sin, but it is not in their nature, for the closer we are to Christ, the longer we stay with Him, the more like Him we grow to be. After stating the case positively, James now states it negatively. It concerns the blessed Christian—the one who, having bowed down close to Christ, stays there. But there is no inactivity, no laziness with the Christian. James continues, “He, being not a forgetful hearer.” A more accurate translation of this would be, “not becoming a forgetful hearer.” James uses the same verb which he used in verse 22, which means “*becoming*” rather than “*being*.”

It is true, we all forget, but what Jesus wants us to avoid is that state of mind when it becomes natural for us to forget. We go to hear the Word, having determined beforehand that we are going to forget what we hear. That is a terrible state to be in and is certainly not conducive to happiness. I would rather see a man who honestly refuses to hear the Word, than one who hears constantly and makes it his business to forget what he has heard.

That same verb of becoming extends to the next sentence which James uses. We should not become habitual forgetters, but instead become “*doers of the work*.” I would have you note here that James has changed the phraseology somewhat. Up to now he has urged us to become doers of the Word, but now it is “*doers of work*.” There is no definite article before the word “*work*.” Nor does James say “works.”

I believe this word here is used to place emphasis on the word “doer.” We might paraphrase it this way: “Get yourself into such a state that you are a doer of something that is tangible.” The word *ergon*, “work,” among other things means “the result of work.” God does not want us Christians to build castles in the air, but to direct our efforts into the performance of something which can be seen by others. Let us remember what our Lord said: “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:16). God wants finished products which can be seen by others.

We have previously noted that the word “*doer*” in Greek has the connotation of giving shape and beauty to something, just as the poets take words and put them together to make a work, a beautiful poem, which can inspire and challenge. We ought to gather the fragments of life found here and there, which seem to have so little meaning for others, and make something out of them which will attract their admiration, not toward us, but toward the

One to whom we have bowed our lives and our talents. God is not interested in how much work we are doing, but in the net product of our work. There may be thousands of auto workers in a factory, but of what use are they if they are not going to turn out a finished product, a car or some part to be used in a car? If we could only comprehend what God demands of us! The trouble with Christianity today is that there are so many doers, but there is very little work accomplished which, like a beautiful poem, inspires others to follow our Christ. We do and do, but still the work of God remains undone. Let us produce some finished products for the Lord, shall we?

Furthermore, this word “*work*” in Greek usually has the connotation of hard work, a hard task. A neighbor knocked at a lazy man’s door and told him of a position he could get by going after it. “Um,” said the man, “it appears that considerable effort will be involved.” “Oh, yes,” said the neighbor, “you will pass many sleepless nights and toilsome days, but it is good pay, and a chance for advancement.” “Um,” said the man, “and who are you?” “I am called Opportunity.” “Um, you call yourself Opportunity, but you look like Hard Work to me.” And he slammed the door. What wonderful opportunities are granted to us as Christians to do hard work for the Master! Let us be productive through hard and humble labor.

A wonderful thing is said by James of this man who works hard to produce something tangible for the Lord. “*This one shall be blessed in his doing*.” This is as if the Lord had added another beatitude through James, “Blessed are the hard workers.” The thrilling thing about this is that we do not need to wait till payday to be happy; there is happiness in the performance of the work itself. As we work for God, we experience something which we do not feel when working for material benefits. There is happiness in doing things for God. If you are not happy in what you are doing, perhaps you should attempt something that is a bit harder but which may have in it inherent happiness and blessedness.

A refined girl was converted. After a little while, in a testimony meeting, there were those who were expressing thanks for what God had done for them, saving them from drink, or gambling, or worldly pleasures. Presently this sweet girl got up and said, “Christ gave me a bigger salvation than any of you. He has saved me from an easy armchair.”

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Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

Your Works Are Following You, but Christ Is with You

Can a Scripture be encouraging and scary at the same time? Try this one: *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labors. And their works do follow them”* (Rev. 14:13).

There is a reason Scripture does not teach that we are judged immediately after death, but following the final resurrection: The record is not in yet. Those who have lived as disciples of Jesus Christ on earth and are now gone from us are *“blessed,” “in the Lord,” “rest[ing],”* and they are watching the record of their lives continue to form. The lives they lived on earth—teaching, writing, working, giving, baking, assisting, a thousand other activities—have touched countless other lives that remain after the individual has departed the scene.

In Heaven, the Lord takes note of each one. That’s why only He can judge impartially and fully, because He is the only One who sees and knows the full record of each life. Shakespeare wrote that *“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.”* That’s only half true, though. Both live on.

What started me thinking along this vein was spending an hour one night surfing the web for various comments on God and worship by H. L. Mencken and Mark Twain. These two writers were witty and profound in a hundred ways, but their comments on God, the Bible, and Christians were hostile and so ugly. They’ve been gone for many decades now, but their words live on, fueling the animosity of so many to the Lord and His Kingdom. And, even if one could make a case for these men having repented of these writings, they are out there, doing their damage to this day. Their works are following them.

Let this be a reminder to me and to you. *“May those who come behind find us faithful.”* Of course, it is not

in our own strength that our deeds are done, and certainly not because of anything in us that they have any impact on eternity.

One of the benefits of reading the entire Bible through in a short time is that you begin to see recurring themes. For instance, take what God said to Jeremiah when He called the young man as a prophet and “Jerry” began protesting that he was too young for this sort of thing, untried, inexperienced, and such. God answered, *“Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you”* (Jer. 1:8). A few verses later, as this scene ends, God says, *“They shall not prevail against you, for I am with you to deliver you”* (1:19).

In former days, we would have said this was like a broken record, the way the Lord keeps saying it to people. He said it to Jacob in Genesis 28:15. When He called Moses (Ex. 3-4), He said it 3 times, and later twice to Joshua (Josh. 1). Later, He said *“I will be with you”* when He called Gideon (Judg. 6:16) and said it repeatedly to Israel at various stages of their sojourn (Ex. 33:14; Deut. 20:1; and Isa. 43:2 are favorites).

In the New Testament, when the Lord Jesus sent out His disciples to take the Gospel to the world, He promised the same thing: *“And lo, I am with you all the ways, even to the end of the world”* (Matthew 28:20).

Anyone see a pattern here? The Lord seems to think that His presence makes all the difference, not your talent or my abilities or our brains. Sort of removes all our excuses, doesn’t it? Now, what can I do for eternity today?

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

Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

Pain to Praise

Lamentations 3:1-23

As we come to the heart of Lamentations, the poet takes the suffering of Israel into himself, crying out to God in the first person. Chapter three is the longest of the book, maintaining the acrostic format but extending it to three verses for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In addition to the switch from third to first person, Jeremiah begins to turn from speaking about God to speaking to Him directly, transitioning from woe to worship.

He starts, though, with deep anguish, showing the pain and suffering of the judgment God has wrought on his people. The Afflictions of the first third of this chapter echo the description of the destruction of Jerusalem in chapters one and two, but with metaphors of intense personal desolation.

He speaks of God’s wrath as His turning away, casting him into darkness, and also in physical terms as

illness, suffering, and death: *“I am the man who has seen affliction because of the rod of His wrath. He has driven me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. Surely against me He has turned His hand repeatedly all the day. He has caused my flesh and my skin to waste away, He has broken my bones. He has besieged and encompassed me with bitterness and hardship. In dark places He has made me dwell, like those who have long been dead”* (3:1-6).

He says that the Lord’s judgment has trapped him as a prisoner, and cornered him like a ravening beast ready to pounce and devour: *“He has walled me in so that I cannot go out; He has made my chain heavy. Even when I cry out and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. He is to me like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in secret places. He has turned aside my ways and torn me to pieces; He has made me desolate”* (3:7-11).

God is called a warrior, armed and powerful: *“He bent His bow and set me as a target for the arrow. He made the arrows of His quiver to enter into my inward parts”* (3:12-13). Jeremiah sees the reaction of others to the afflictions God has brought to him, and lists again ways he has been brought low: *“I have become a laughingstock to all my people, their mocking song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel; He has made me cower in the dust”* (3:14-16).

Finally, the poet sinks to despair: *“My soul has been rejected from peace; I have forgotten happiness. So I say, “My strength has perished, and so has my hope from the LORD”* (Lam 3:1-18). For most of us, it is difficult to conceive of prayer like this, laying such charges (accurate thought they are) at God’s feet, but Jeremiah ascribes to God responsibility for the just punishment he has received. That theme resonates throughout the book—because of our sin, God must both wound and redeem.

Yet this is not where he stays, and the turn is nothing short of miraculous. His ability to hope under his own strength may have perished, but the focus of that hope—the same sovereign, holy, omnipotent God who has brought devastating chastisement for sin on His people—is

imperishable. So, from his downcast resignation, the poet begins to pray.

“Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and bitterness. Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:19-23). In the midst of great darkness, the light of truth breaks in as Jeremiah remembers God’s character, dwelling on His great compassion and utter trustworthiness. This rekindles hope, stirring praise. You will undoubtedly recognize this passage as the source of one of our great hymns of the faith, Thomas O. Chisholm’s “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”. This praise builds further as the chapter goes on, as we will see next month, revealing hard and beautiful truths about God’s sovereign will.

What is the purpose of this emotional and personal drama at the heart of what is otherwise a very collective book? Is Jeremiah taking some poetic license here, as he among all the people of Israel, saw the judgment of the Lord coming and was told by God Himself (see the entire book of Jeremiah) of the purposes of the suffering? Did he truly feel these pangs, and pray this prayer? As a member of the family of Israel, he must have felt the pain of His people, and to be a servant of the Most High does not always mean untroubled acceptance of His will (as we see even from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane). Still, it is also likely that the Lord instructed His prophet to include this section as a picture of the desired outcome of His judgment for all the people—that they would recall in their hearts and minds His character and power and plan, and then turn again to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

As we have mentioned before, Israel had to lose the kingdom to pave the way for the coming of her one true King, and the Old Covenant’s promises (in this case, the curses) had to be kept in order for the New Covenant to come. Even in the fury of His wrath, great is His faithfulness to those He has chosen and called.

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Following God—by Erik Christensen

Submission as to the Lord

Ephesians 5:22-24

Paul states in Ephesians 5:21, *“Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”*

Within the context of the letter, Paul has commanded the believers to *“walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”* (4:1), and the

ways that this plays out in conduct and relationships within the Body of Christ. The relationship of believers with one another is a reflection of their relationship with the Lord and a picture of love to a lost world. God uses the Church in order to reveal His love, and marriage is a particularly

beautiful picture of His love. As a husband and wife submit to one another in Christ, God manifests His love in and through their relationship providing a picture of the love of Christ for the Church.

Having looked at the role of a husband to love his wife as Christ loved the church in 5:25, as well as how all believers, both men and woman, are told by Paul in chapter 5:21 to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ, we look back at the wife's role.

Paul states in 5:22, "*Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord,*" and in 5:24, "*But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*"

These verses have been twisted to mean many different unbiblical things. Men have used these verses to demand unbiblical activity from their wives. Wives have used these verses to blame their husbands for their own unbiblical activity. The world has used these verses to twist the idea of submission into some otherworldly view of tyranny. Many marriages have been rent apart due to the unyielding attitude and lack of Christ's love from both husbands and wives.

In what Paul has told husbands, that they are to "*love their wives as Christ loved the church*" (5:25), the idea that the wives' submission is to a tyrant who is walking in a manner unworthy of Christ and His calling is absurd. Furthermore the idea that submission is a "feel-good proposition" that a wife has the ability to choose to walk in or not depending on her agreement with her husband is also absurd.

Paul makes it clear in 5:23 that "*the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church.*" The husband is the leader of the marriage. The wife is to submit herself to her husband and follow his lead. This is clear as Paul gives Christ Himself as the picture of headship to the Church. Just as Christ is the head of the church, the leader, the church is to follow the leadership and submit to the headship of Christ.

The word "submit" (*hupotasso*: from *hupo*, meaning under and *tasso*, means to line up or place in order—present middle imperative) in this context means to willingly make the decision to line up under the authority of another. Can you imagine if the Church decided that there was more than one leader besides Christ? Or what if the Church were to decide not to follow the Lord? What

happens if a wife decides to "*submit*" herself to others? To other things, ideas? What if a wife decides she is the leader? The confusion in not following the commands of the Lord through the apostle Paul is devastating. Just as the Church is to walk by faith, and in so doing to line up under the leadership of the Lord Himself, so to, a wife is to willingly choose to line up under the headship, the leadership, of her husband.

What if a husband becomes tyrannical, abusive, ungodly in his demands and leadership? Is a wife is to line up under every and or any man? Clearly not! A wife is to subject to her "*own husband.*" Furthermore, the idea of submission here is all in the context of following Christ. If a husband begins to demand that a wife is to do anything contrary to Christ and what it means to walk in wisdom, in the filling of the Spirit, ultimately in the love of Christ, a wife is NOT told to submit in that case. The last four words of 5:22 make this clear... "*as to the Lord.*"

A wife is to submit willingly to her husband "*as to the Lord.*" As the husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church, the wife is to submit to her own husband as the church submits to Christ. The beautiful relationship between Christ and the Church is reflected within the spousal relationship of a husband and wife. All of this is within the greater context of believers and their walk with the Lord as a result of being saved by Christ and sealed in the Holy Spirit.

The direct context of chapter 5 is clearly for believers to be walking in wisdom (5:15) and being filled with the Spirit (5:18). When believers are filled with the Spirit, ultimately there is the submitting to one another. Within the context of a marriage, we see the submitting of the husband to his wife's need and the wife to her husband's lead. What beautiful picture of sacrifice, love and trust is presented in this!

As believers are we submitting to the Lord? Are we walking by faith and "*in a manner worthy of the calling with which [we] have been called*" today? Are we being filled with the Spirit and empowered by Him? As believing husbands and wives, is the Lord's love being reflected through our marriages? Are we following Christ in every area of our lives?

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Points to Ponder—by David L. Olford

The Need to Focus in Order to Finish

Text: "*And say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord'*" (Col. 4:17).

Thought: As important as getting started is, it is just as important to finish. The Apostle Paul was a great encourager and exhorter, especially when faithfulness was

needed. In this short text at the end of the glorious letter to the Colossians, the Apostle is seeking to do just that. As we view this text, consider it an illustration of the need for faithfulness in doing the will of the Lord. Observe first of all:

I. The Need for Exhortation

“*And say to Archippus....*” This exhortation is to be addressed to Archippus, who was probably a church leader. He may in fact be the same Archippus referred to in Paul’s letter to Philemon (vs. 2). But, let’s pause to consider who was supposed to “*say*” this to Archippus.

The directive is in the plural, and it seems to include the readership of this letter. In other words, the church or some people representing the church were to pass on these words of exhortation to Archippus. This was a church matter, indeed an important church matter. We have no idea why such a specific and strong word of exhortation and encouragement was needed, but obviously the Apostle Paul was concerned that Archippus be told to complete the ministry he was given to do. We find Paul encouraging and challenging Timothy and Titus in their ministries, and the Apostle was constantly exhorting his readers. Even though we should be obedient to the Lord and faithful in service, words of encouragement are needed many times along the way. The Lord may ask you and me to be encouragers in the immediate future for the furtherance of His work and glory. Also, we may need that word ourselves today.

II. The Need for Attention

“*See...the ministry that you have received in the Lord.*” The command to “*see*” may have the sense of giving attention to or to focus on. As we have mentioned, we could speculate as to the reason(s) for the need for this specific call to attention, but what is clear is that Archippus needed to give attention to the ministry he had received in the Lord. Whatever that ministry was, whether a specific service or a broader meaning of the word “*ministry*,” Archippus was to give it full attention.

And it is instructive to underline that Paul sees this ministry as having been “*received in the Lord.*” This ministry was given to Archippus, he had received it, and therefore it was his responsibility. Ultimately, his accountability was to the Lord, for he received this ministry “*in the Lord.*” By way of application, is it not true that we

can get distracted by things that the Lord has not given us to do? We can get side-tracked by trivial pursuits or by responsibilities that we put on ourselves or others put on us, responsibilities that actually are not from the Lord or even for the Lord. Archippus needed to make his ministry, the ministry given to him, the ministry he had received, a priority concern. Maybe we need to ask ourselves what the Lord has given to us to do. Are we seeing to it that what the Lord has entrusted to us is being done through Him and for Him?

III. The Need for Completion

“*See that you fulfill the ministry....*” The actual word order in the original text is different from the translation we have used. The meaning is well-preserved, but the sentence ends “*that it you fulfill.*” The “*it*” is the ministry, and what needs to happen is that the ministry needs to be fulfilled. In short, Archippus was faithfully to see through to completion the ministry he had received. The word “*fulfill*” and similar words in this letter are key words to the theme and thrust of this majestic letter. Here the word is used in the simplest way for faithfully doing what the Lord had called Archippus to do.

When the Apostle shared his parting words to the Ephesian elders, he spoke of his life’s goal as being to “*finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24). Faithfully seeing through to fulfillment (or to the end) is a common Biblical theme. Was it not true of our Lord Jesus Himself that he finished the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4), He saw it through to completion (John 19:30)? Whether in the small seasonal ‘ministries’ the Lord gives us to do, or viewing our lives as a whole, we need to see through to completion the Lord’s will for us.

Thrust: Faithfulness calls for focus and fulfillment. Are we lacking focus on what the Lord has given us to do? Is it time to re-focus? Have we lost the goal of finishing what the Lord has given us to do? Let’s focus in order to finish well.

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Jewels from Past Giants

Why Is Holiness So Important?

By J. C. Ryle

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Can holiness save us? Can holiness put away sin,

cover iniquities, make satisfaction for transgressions, or pay our debt to God? No: not a whit. Holiness can do none of

these things. The brightest saints are all “unprofitable servants.” Our purest works are no better than filthy rags. The white robe which Jesus offers, and faith puts on, must be our only righteousness; the name of Christ our only confidence; the Lamb’s Book of Life our only title to heaven. “*By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Why then is holiness so important? Why does the Apostle say, “*Without [it] no man shall see the Lord*” (Heb. 12:14)? Let me set out in order a few reasons:

I. We Must Be Holy Because God Plainly Commands It

The Lord Jesus says, “*Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt. 5:20). Paul tells the Thessalonians, “*This is the will of God, even your sanctification*” (1 Thess. 4:3). And Peter says, “*As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation...*” (1 Pet. 1:15).

II. We Must Be Holy Because This Is One Grand Purpose for Which Christ Came into the World

Paul writes to the Ephesians: “*Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it*” (Eph. 5:25,26). And to Titus: “*He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:14).

Are believers said to be elect? It is “*through sanctification of the Spirit*.” Are they predestinated? It is “*to be conformed to the image of God’s Son*.” Are they chosen? It is “*that they may be holy*.” Are they called? It is “*with a holy calling*.” Are they afflicted? It is that they may be “*partakers of holiness*.”

III. We Must Be Holy Because This Is the Only Sound Evidence That We Have a Saving Faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ

James warns us there is such a thing as a dead faith (James 2:17). True faith will always show itself by its fruits. It will sanctify, it will work by love, it will overcome the world, it will purify the heart. I suspect that, with rare exceptions, men die just as they have lived. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is holy life. If we would die the death of the righteous, let us seek to live His life.

IV. We Must Be Holy Because This Is the Only Proof That We Sincerely Love the Lord Jesus Christ

This is a point on which He has spoken most plainly: “*He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me*” (John 14:21, cf. also 15:14). It was sin that wove the crown of thorns. It was sin that pierced

our Lord’s hands, and feet, and side. It was sin that brought Him to Gethsemane and Calvary, to the cross and to the grave. Cold must our hearts be if we do not hate sin and labor to get rid of it.

V. We Must Be Holy, Because This Is the Only Sound Evidence That We Are True Children of God

Children in this world are generally like their parents. It is seldom indeed that you cannot trace a kind of family likeness. And it is much the same with the children of God. The Lord Jesus says, “*If ye were Abraham’s children ye would do the works of Abraham*” (John 8:39); “*If God were your Father ye would love Me*” (v. 42). If men have no likeness to the Father in heaven, it is vain to talk of their being His “sons.” “*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they,*” and they only, “*are the sons of God*” (Rom. 8:14). “Say not,” says Gurnall, “that you have royal blood in your veins, and are born of God, unless you can prove your pedigree by daring to be holy.”

VI. We Must Be Holy, Because This Is the Most Likely Way to Do Good to Others

Our lives will always be doing either good or harm to those who see them. You may talk to persons about the doctrines of the Gospels, and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape. They may not understand justification, but they can understand love.

I believe there is far more harm done by unholy and inconsistent Christians than we are aware of. They supply the children of this world with a never-ending excuse for remaining as they are. Let us take heed lest the blood of souls should be required at our hands. From murder of souls by inconsistency and loose walking, good Lord, deliver us! Oh, for the sake of others, if for no other reason, let us strive to be holy!

VII. We Must Be Holy Because Our Present Happiness Depends Much upon It

We are sadly apt to forget that there is a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation. God has so wisely ordered it, that our well-being and our well-doing are linked together. Oh, for our own sakes, if there were no other reason, let us strive to be holy! He that follows Jesus most fully will always follow Him most comfortably.

VIII. Lastly, We Must Be Holy Because without Holiness on Earth We Shall Never Be Prepared to Enjoy Heaven

Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of heaven is a holy Being. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven. The Book of Revelation says expressly, “*There shall in no wise enter into it*

anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (Rev. 21:27).

People may say, in a vague way, "they hope to go to heaven," but they do not consider what they say. There must be a certain "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light." To reach the holiday of glory, we must pass through the training school of grace. We must be heavenly-minded, and have heavenly tastes in the life that now is, or else we shall never find ourselves in heaven, in the life to come.

How shall we ever be at home and happy in heaven, if we die unholy? Death works no change. The grave makes no alteration. Each will rise again with the same character in which he breathed his last. Where will our place be if we are strangers to holiness now?

A Few Words of Application

Do you know anything of the holiness of which I have been speaking? I do not ask whether you attend you church regularly, whether you have been baptized, and received the Lord's Supper, or whether you have the name of Christian. I ask: Are you holy, or are you not? I do not ask whether you mean some day to be holy. I ask: Are you holy this very day?

Why do I press the question so strongly? Because the Scripture says, "*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*" (Heb. 12:14). It is the word of God, not of man. Alas, I look at professing Christians, and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn to the Bible, and I hear the Spirit saying, "*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*"

You may say, "It was never meant that all Christians should be holy, and that holiness, such as I have described, is only for great saints, and people of uncommon gifts." I answer, "I cannot see that in Scripture. I read that *'every man who hath hope in Christ purifieth himself'*" (1 John 3:3). "*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*"

You may say, "At this rate, very few will be saved." I answer, "I know it. It is precisely what we are told in the Sermon on the Mount." The Lord Jesus said so 1,900 years ago: "*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*" (Matt. 7:14). Few will be saved, because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Men will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a little season. "*Ye will not come unto Me,*" says Jesus, "*that ye might have life*" (John 5:40). "Let not men deceive themselves," says Owen: "[The Lord Christ] leads none to heaven but whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit of dead members."

I doubt not that many believers know these things, but I think it good for us to be put in remembrance of them. I must frankly say I wish there was not such an excessive sensitiveness on the subject of holiness as I sometimes

perceive in the minds of believers. A man might really think it was a dangerous subject to handle, so cautiously is it touched! Yet surely when we have exalted Christ as "*the way, the truth, and the life,*" we cannot err in speaking strongly about what should be the character of His people.

I do not set up myself to be better than other people, and if anyone asks, "What are you, that you write in this way?" I answer, "I am a very poor creature indeed." But I cannot read the Bible without desiring to see many believers more spiritual, more holy, more single-eyed, more heavenly-minded, more whole-hearted than they are today. I want to see a more decided separation from the world, a closer walk with God.

We are all more than half asleep. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us awake. Let us open our eyes more widely. "*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us*" (Heb. 12:1). "*Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God*" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Would You Be Holy?

Would you become a new creature? Then you must begin with Christ. You will make no progress till you feel your sin and weakness, and flee to Him. "*Without Christ we can do nothing*" (John 15:5). There is not a brick nor a stone laid in the work of our sanctification till we go to Christ. Holiness is His special gift to His believing people.

Holiness is the work He carries on in their hearts, by the Spirit whom He puts within them. Holiness comes not of blood. Parents cannot give it to their children. Ministers cannot give it to you by baptism. It is the result of vital union with Christ. It is the fruit of being a living branch of the True Vine. Go, then, to Christ and say, "Lord, not only save me from the guilt of sin, but send the Spirit, whom You promised. Make me holy. Teach me to do Thy will."

Would you continue holy? Then abide in Christ. He says Himself, "*Abide in Me and I in you, he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit*" (John 15:4-5). It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell—a full supply for all a believer's wants. He is the Physician to whom you must daily go, if you would keep well. He is the Manna which you must daily eat, and the Rock of which you must daily drink. Paul was indeed a holy man of God—and what was the secret of it all? He was ever "*looking unto Jesus*" (Heb. 12:2). "*I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God*" (Gal. 2:20). Let us go and do likewise.

John Charles Ryle was born in 1816 in Macclesfield, England. The son of a wealthy banker, he was spiritually awakened in 1838 on hearing Ephesians 2 read in church. He was appointed bishop of Liverpool at Disraeli's

recommendation in 1880. C. H. Spurgeon called him “the best man in the Church of England.” He upheld the Reformation doctrine of grace, and he recommended the English Reformers, Puritans, and eighteenth-century evangelicals as models for both doctrine and devotion.

More than 12 million of his tracts were sold in over a dozen languages during his lifetime. Their influence on popular Christianity, like that of Spurgeon’s sermons, was incalculable. He died in 1900.

Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Modeling Godliness: Consistent Parenting

Raising children in today’s society seems to be getting more and more challenging for Christian parents. The Center for a New American Dream reports that 55 percent of young people say they are successful at getting their parents to give in to their wants. For example, about 40 percent of children have asked their parents for an advertised product they knew their parents would not get for them. However, 59 percent of that group keep asking and asking and eventually the parents give up and give in. It takes an average of about nine times before the parents give in.

That is a picture of children manipulating their parents to get what they want. Why do parents do this? For the most part, their commitment to parenting is not strong enough to stay the course. Boundaries would help, but boundaries are not very effective unless there are consequences and consequences mean nothing unless they are enforced.

Some parents came to me with a problem. They reported that their kids were disrespectful and rebellious. Mom and Dad were not agreed on how they would parent and so the kids played them against each other. Mom and Dad ended up giving in to the kids and their marriage began to come unraveled. The kids worked the family system to their own immature and selfish ends. Two parents united in the parenting work could have stopped that tragedy.

It is important that parents stand shoulder to shoulder as they parent their children. Consistency is one of the important principles that must be realized in a family. Without it, children will find a way to get things from their parents that the parents really do not want them to have.

This often results in children growing up thinking they can manipulate their way through life. They may conclude that “no” really doesn’t mean “no.” Their interpretation may be, “If I can just keep asking, I will win.” When they later meet with the hard reality that “no” means “no” regardless of how they feel, they can become emotionally distressed and personally devastated.

Parenting is often a battle of the wills. While parents must regard their children with value and treat them with respect, they must also be in authority over them. Children should not be allowed to rule. They must learn to

submit to godly authority in the home or they will have great difficulty submitting to authority in society at large.

The biblical practice in Ephesians 6 is for children to obey their parents. It is right to do this. The principle which children should be learning in this process is to honor their father and their mother. A mother and a father never really lose those titles. They will be Mom and Dad for, hopefully, many years. But, they will not be parents for many years. What children learn when they are taught to obey their parents (presuming the parents are godly people who do not abuse their children) is the principle of honor.

Kids who can get what they want by just wearing their parents down by repeated asking will not develop the kind of character and outlook that will help them become quality and caring people later in life. Love does not always give in. There are times when love must be tough, say “no,” and hand out the well-earned consequences.

It is so much easier to learn something right the first time than try to relearn it the second time. Parents can help their children learn it right the first time, which will insure a greater potential for purposeful and godly living later in their lives.

Parenting is not about the feelings of the moment, although it must take place moment by moment. Parenting is about doing for our children what is right. It is about valuing them, encouraging them, teaching them, disciplining them, and showing them love. It is not good parenting to give up when difficulties arise. It is not good parenting to give in when pressures come against us. It is not good parenting to give out because our children keep on asking for something we have already denied. Parenting is about caring for our children and bringing them up in the instruction of the Lord. It is about modeling godliness before them. It may sometimes mean asking our children to forgive us.

But parenting should never be turned over to the children. They are not equipped to be parents. They need parents who can say “yes” and who can say “no” to their requests without sending a message of inconsistency.

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 editor of *The Baptist Courier*, the official newspaper of the South Carolina Baptist

Convention.

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

The Influence of a Sixteen Year-Old

Song: “My Jesus, I Love Thee”

“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

Occasionally, in the search for information concerning the story behind a particular hymn, great barriers are encountered. Such is the case with one of our best-loved hymns, “My Jesus, I Love Thee”—it was not until recent years that the identity of the songwriter, William Ralph Featherstone (1846-1873), became known.

It is reported that he probably grew up in Canada, since it was in Toronto in 1862 that he became a Christian. His conversion must have been very special, because just afterward and in connection with this glorious event, this 16 year-old wrote the hymn that is still meaningful to so many people.

Some historians have said that William mailed the poem to a relative in Los Angeles, who must have sent it to England, because it appeared there in *The London Hymnal*, published in 1864, just two years following his conversion.

Sometime later, in Boston, Massachusetts, A. J. Gordon was busy putting together a hymnal for Baptist worshipers. During the process he was going through other hymnals, getting ideas and perhaps some songs for his hymnbook. In *The London Hymnbook* he saw “My Jesus, I Love Thee” but was not at all impressed with the musical setting. He thought he could make great improvements for the beautiful, meaningful lyrics by composing better music for the song. The melody that he wrote has carried Featherstone’s lyrics to every corner of our world.

A. J. Gordon was born in New Hampshire on April 19, 1836. He was educated at Brown University and

Newton Theological Seminary. He was ordained at age 27, and he became the pastor of a Baptist church in Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts. He later pastored the Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston and died there in 1895, at the height of his wonderful ministry. And yet the height of his ministry might actually have been in 1864, when he gave to the world the musical setting that has carried “My Jesus, I Love Thee” around the world.

The life of every Christian is changed after conversion. The Bible says, *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Cor. 5:17). Perhaps this young man had keenly realized his guilt before the Lord Jesus became particularly near and dear to him. He must have sensed a tremendous need for forgiveness. And we know that those who are forgiven more love more.

As you look back on your life and see the things from which you have been forgiven, there should be a strong tendency to draw closer to and increase your love for the Savior. If we will love Him, then we must love others. If we pray according to His will, our prayer must be for others. We cannot love Him without loving others.

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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

Victorian Missionary: Amy Carmichael

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, October 2005.

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) did not find romantic adventure in missionary work: “You go to a hut and find nobody in; [at the next] nobody wants you; [in another, you] find an old woman who says yes, you may talk if you like, and she listens in an aimless sort of way and perhaps two more drift in; you go on, a prayer behind each sentence.”

Her first major book, *Things As They Are*, languished for years without a publisher; “no one would believe the harsh truths it described.” Nevertheless, she served in India for more than half a century with great distinction and deserves to be remembered as an outstanding heroine of faith.

Amy was born in Ireland and early came to know the Lord. She first became a missionary in Japan, though

she had also felt called to serve with Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission (now Overseas Missionary Fellowship).

When health failed she returned to England. She had been brought up in the Presbyterian Church and followed the deeper-life Keswick teachings. Under the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, she sailed for India to begin her life work.

She faced a society so "rigidly divided by rules of caste and sex" that people resisted open air preaching or even casual contact between Christians and Hindus. But her close friendship with Ponnammal, a gifted Indian Christian, became her special entry into the perplexing ways of a foreign culture.

Soon Amy found her calling—the rescue of girls "devoted to the gods," which meant they would grow up in the temple and eventually become ritual prostitutes. Since she was fully occupied caring for infants and sickly children, itinerant evangelism was impossible.

Amy wore the traditional sari, though without the jewels and adornments that were indispensable feminine status symbols in Hindu society. Thus she adapted in every way possible to local customs.

Some have speculated why she never married. Her correspondence "is extremely reticent on this subject although there are hints of at least one romantic attraction." But she was private and her reasons will probably never be known. Perhaps no available men measured up to her dedication and drive. Of course the supreme passion of her life was the Lord Himself, who had called her to a demanding life of service. Her deep degree of death to self meant that sometimes she "seemed unable to enjoy a casual friendship for its own sake."

She founded the Dohnavur Fellowship, through which so many girls (and later boys) were delivered from

slavery to a better life. She greatly admired the work of the China Inland Mission and in many ways patterned herself after Hudson Taylor. She did not solicit funds.

When people asked [to sponsor a child] she refused their help. All funds went into the mission account to be dispersed as the Lord directed. The many workers God brought to her side were not paid salaries, and the mission never borrowed or went into debt.

But alas, in 1931 she suffered a serious fall. Complications set in and her active ministry ended. After that she directed all affairs through her assistants, being limited to her room and an occasional veranda stroll.

In 1948 she fell again and was confined to her bed for the rest of her life. Home-going came in 1951, but the Dohnavur Fellowship continues to minister effectively in southern India. Amy had planned and prepared well.

Carmichael wrote 35 books—devotionals, stories of redeemed children, messages for the suffering, and others—including *Candles in the Dark*, *Edges of His Ways*, *Figures of the True*, *God's Missionary*, *Gold by Moonlight*, *Gold Cord*, *Learning of God*, *Rose From Brier*, and *Whispers of His Power*.

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: *Things As They Are*, quoted by Margaret Bendroth, in *More Than Conquerors*; © 1992 Moody Bible Institute; excerpts used by permission. *Victorious Christians You Should Know*, by Warren Wiersbe; used by permission.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Tools in God's Hand: Medical Ministry

By AMG International Staff

Disease, injury, and medical care bring fear and worry to people across the globe. Their effects touch everyone, particularly those with few resources to pay for treatment.

Our Lord, during His earthly ministry demonstrated His love for man by touching them in this area of deep and persistent need: "And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people" (Matt. 4:23). Sickness and death are the most visible marks of the Fall, and breaking their power showed that Jesus had come to make an end of all our sin.

Awaiting the Lord's second coming, when at last "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be any mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore" (Rev. 21:4), Christians follow His example. Compassionate care for the sick and dying goes hand-in-hand with sharing the good news of spiritual healing and eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ. The Church's witness is strongest when Christ's love is seen in our care for others—both in this life and in eternity.

Through AMG, you can touch lives of sick and suffering people around the world. From Haiti to Uganda to Romania to Guatemala to Greece, AMG medical ministries

(often in partnership with short-term medical teams) range from rural “urgent care” clinics to full-service modern hospitals. Doctors, nurses, and technicians shine as bold Gospel witnesses, touching hearts and lives as they serve patients and their families. Clinic staff provide treatment for those who have no access to other care and often cannot pay for needed medicines and services.

Perhaps nowhere are the effects of AMG’s medical ministry so immediately visible as in India. In this second-largest country of the world, millions still suffer from the ravages of leprosy. Beyond the tremendous physical suffering the disease brings (including loss of limbs, blindness, and frequent infections), its victims are cast out from society, enduring shame and separation even from family members, and receiving no medical care. Without intervention, the disease progresses, further disfiguring patients. Because of the social stigma, many are also in danger of starvation and exposure.

Because of the love of Christ, Believers in India stand against the cruelty of the Hindu caste system to heal the physical and spiritual condition of leprosy victims. AMG India has long been a leader in leprosy ministry. Today, AMG’s leprosy colonies provide basic food, clothing, and medical care to patients. Mobile clinics travel around the country to provide diagnostic testing and antibiotic therapy to stop new cases of the disease in their tracks. At the **Kadyum Eye Hospital** in Andhra Pradesh, thousands of patients each year receive the gift of sight through the cataract surgeries.

In God’s perfect will, even the scourge of leprosy can be a tool in His hand to bring people to salvation thanks to the faithful, compassionate work of AMG India. Paul Jenks, AMG’s vice president for Asian outreach, recalls a visit to India years: *“It is an amazing thing to see leprosy victims with no fingers, with deformed faces, singing praises to God with their hands lifted to the heavens, thanking God for His salvation and for the life they have in Jesus Christ. One patient said, ‘If I hadn’t gotten leprosy, I would have never come to know Jesus Christ.’ How incredible that in the middle of adversity, hope and life can be given to a person. In a situation that none of us would want to find ourselves in, this man was rejoicing to the Lord for what God had done in his life.”*

Financial and prayer support from ministry partners makes this work possible in India and other countries where AMG carries out medical ministry. Will you join AMG to touch the sick with the love of Christ?

To learn more about AMG’s medical ministries around the world, and discover how you can get involved, please visit www.amginternational.org or call 1-800-251-7206.

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 more than 30 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.

Marks of the Master—by the Old Scot

The Elaborate Plans of the Capricorn Beetle

Originally published in Disciple, January 10, 2011.

The larva of the European Capricorn beetle (*Cerambyx cerdo*) is a tough little grub. It can and does tunnel through the heart of oak trees, and fattens on the sparse nourishment it finds in the fibers and juices of the living oak.

For three years this grub bores its way deep within its hardwood home, safe from hungry predators. But at the end of its appointed time, some trigger causes the larva to end its random foraging and tunnel its way out to the bark—to, but not through the bark, for it is not yet ready to emerge.

Having left but a thin veneer of concealment, the grub retreats to the interior and there prepares a sumptuous bedroom for its pupa stage. It hollows out a chamber three to four inches long, and lines it with raveled woody fibers fluffed soft as velvet.

The Capricorn grub also fixes an inner barrier to protect the helpless pupa. This barrier is composed of wood chips from its tunneling, plus a hatch made of a substance resembling limestone. It has carried the ingredients for this hard plug in its stomach throughout its years in the larval stage.

Its preparations complete, the grub retires to its bedchamber, turns to face the exit tunnel, and commences the slow transformation into an adult beetle. When the metamorphosis is complete, the beetle will push its way through the protective barrier and the final bark obstruction, ready to fulfill its adult destiny.

But several details of the grub’s preparations call for further reflection: First, some sort of internal clock or time-sense tells it when its three years as a grub are nearly finished. Second, the larva knows, somehow, just the right amount of outer bark to leave undisturbed. Had it left less,

unwelcome intruders would be more likely to discover the entrance. Had it left more, the adult beetle would not be able to escape, as it is not equipped with the powerful digging jaws of the grub. Third, the grub always enters the pupa stage with its head toward the exit. This is essential, because the adult beetle, with its hard external skeleton, is incapable of turning around in the bedchamber. It would die where it was born, if it were headed in the wrong direction. Fourth, the larva knows how soft and vulnerable the pupa's flesh will be, and upholsters its chamber accordingly. Fifth, it creates a wall to protect the immobile pupa, utilizing a calcium "cud" it has brought along for the purpose.

There is, of course, no way for the larva to learn about these things. It goes through its life cycle totally alone. So the question must be asked: "How does the grub come by all this knowledge?" Obviously, it must be instinctive knowledge. The Capricorn larva is "programmed" with implanted directives, just as surely as a modern computer is programmed by its operator. But the "Operator" in this case has a mind infinitely beyond man's. While we grope and fumble to comprehend such mysteries of life, the all-wise Creator goes on sustaining the

universe, as He has done through long ages. Truly, it is as God said through the prophet Isaiah: "'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' saith the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isa. 55:8-9).

Surely a God who fashioned such an intricate world—whose living parts are woven together by divinely given instinct—is worthy of all praise and reverence. Let us indeed praise our Father God, and set our hearts to know Him better!

The Old Scot (Ted Kyle) served as managing editor for *Pulpit Helps* magazine (*Disciple's* predecessor publication) from 1993-2008. He was always fascinated by the natural world, and readily saw God's hand in every detail. Ted went to be with His Creator and Savior in April 2013

Source: *The Wonders of Instinct*. Jean Henri Fabre, The Century Co., New York, 1918, pp. 55-58.

Book Review—May 2015

What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality? Kevin DeYoung, 2015, Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., ISBN 9781433549373, 150 pages, \$12.99, softcover.

The books we review in *Disciple* most often cover theological and scriptural subjects, and it is our hope that sharing these recommendations helps equip you for ministry in your local church. Less often, we review books that address cultural or social issues of pressing importance. Rarely do we get to share a book with you that combines both these aims with adroit scholarship, succinct arguments, and pastoral compassion.

Michigan pastor Kevin DeYoung has developed a reputation for writing punchy books that speak directly to theological and practical concerns within the body of Christ. He has touched on discerning God's will (*Just Do Something*), evangelism (*What Is the Mission of the Church*), catechesis (*The Good News We Almost Forgot*), holy living (*The Hole in Our Holiness*), work (*Crazy Busy*), and the doctrine of Scripture (*Taking God at His Word*). His latest, *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*, follows that line, calmly and carefully laying out the Biblical underpinnings of Christian teaching on sexual relationships.

DeYoung begins by offering a defense of "making a big deal" of sexual issues based on a) the overarching story of Scripture (which consistently likens mankind's relationship to God with the marriage between a man and woman, even referring to the consummation of all things as the "marriage supper of the Lamb"), and b) the fact that this is the issue at hand—the world's chosen battleground against Christ today. He also takes time at the beginning to define his terms, focusing his attention (as Scripture does) not on constructs of sexual identity, but issues of sexual practice.

From there, he launches into the two main segments of the book. The first section presents a thorough exegesis of selected Scriptures of particular importance to the subject. Section two seeks to apply the Scriptural lessons from section one by way of answering seven common objections to the biblical and historical view of sexual sin. Throughout, his gift of summarizing mounds of more scholarly works on the subject into understandable terms (without undermining their significance) is put to good use.

To unpack the biblical case, DeYoung starts with Genesis 1 and 2, showing how the Lord designed marriage as a testimony of His internal communion within the Trinity and a reflection of the interconnected complementarity He built throughout Creation (light/dark, day/night, sea/land, plants/animals). Second, he examines the case of Sodom

and Gomorrhah in Genesis 19, showing from the text (and other passages referring back to it) that a significant part of God's judgment of these cities was homosexual behavior itself, not merely the particularly violent expression thereof. He devotes a chapter each to the relevant part of the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 18 and 19), Paul's description of homosexual behavior as "contrary to nature" (Romans 1), and his inclusion of this particular sin in the "sin lists" of 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1. Through each passage, DeYoung brings out detailed word studies and faithful exposition of the text in its context.

In seven brief chapters of section two, DeYoung works to engage with several arguments he has encountered in favor of accommodating same-sex relationships within the church: "The Bible hardly ever mentions homosexuality;" "Not that kind of homosexuality;" "What about gluttony and divorce;" "The Church is supposed to be a place for broken people;" "You're on the wrong side of history;" "It's not fair;" and "The God I worship is a God of love." In each instance, he digs down to the root of the question, and winsomely builds a case in opposition that is grounded in Scripture, love for others, and honest acceptance of areas in which Christians have failed to apply God's Word to their actions.

DeYoung concludes the book with an appeal to readers to walk in faithfulness and love, boldly trust in Christ's power to save all sinners, and humbly seek God's glory in how we live among those with whom we cannot agree. He also includes three very practical appendices on same-sex marriage, same-sex attraction (as differentiated from homosexual acts), and speaking truth with love.

For such a short book, there is much to digest here. DeYoung ties together the big picture of God's sovereignty, holiness, and love with the details of sexual morality and its practical effects in our lives and churches. His deft shoring

up of the biblical view on marriage should embolden Christians to remain faithful to God and His Word as the cultural pressure continues to mount. His restatement of these truths is also a winsome appeal for the sake of the Gospel to those who disagree. Moreover, the book offers blunt but loving rebukes to those who attempt to remain within the Church while affirming revision of Christian morality, and challenges the "live and let live" crowd to consider the cost of their withdrawal from the discussion.

DeYoung, who is not yet 40, writes with the pastoral and personal urgency of someone who must engage the issue, someone who will still be preaching, teaching, and counseling, long after this cultural shift and all it entails is complete. He recognizes that the Church is on the losing end of the question of the day, but is ready to hold the line for the sake of truth and to preparing Christians to answer well, come what may.

Among the "blurbs" on the back of the book is this endorsement from Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention: "Every Christian should read this book." This may sound hyperbolic, but I second Moore's recommendation. The changes to our culture are working their way through our legal system, and will be knocking at the door of every church sooner or later. Take time to read and remember what God's Word teaches and what you have believed so that you are not unprepared when your moment comes.

Justin Lonas

Type: Theology/Cultural Analysis

Target: All

Take: Must Read

News Update—May 2015

House Approves 20-Week Abortion Ban Legislation

A bill that would ban abortions performed after 20 weeks of pregnancy was approved by the U. S. House of Representatives May 13. Fox News reports the legislation passed at a "near party-line" of 242 to 184.

The bill, formally called the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, was written to protect babies that can feel the pain of an abortion in the womb. Speaker of the House John Boehner, of Ohio, praised the bill as "the most pro-life legislation to ever

come before this body." "We should all be proud to take this stand today," he said.

Still, the pro-life bill will likely never become law. The Obama administration has already stated its opposition against the legislation, and urged the President to veto the bill.

A statement from the White House reads, "The Administration strongly opposes H.R. 36, which would unacceptably restrict women's health and reproductive rights and is an assault on a woman's right to choose. Women should be able to make their own choices about their bodies and their health care, and Government should not inject itself into decisions

best made between a woman and her doctor. If the President were presented with this legislation, his senior advisors would recommend that he veto this bill.”

Christian Headlines

Pastor’s Children Give Bully a Bible, Bully Apologizes for Harassment

A school bus bully in Texas apologized for his behavior after a pastor’s son and daughter gave him a Bible to read.

Christian Today reports the bully was harassing an eight year-old and his seven year-old sister, children of a local pastor. The children told their parents that the bully called them names and taunted them, so the parents a different seating arrangement on the bus. When that did not work, they prayed for a solution.

“So, I prayed about it and God said, ‘You know what? Let’s get this kid a Bible. Tell him Jesus loves him and invite him to church and see what happens,’” the pastor said. The children gave the bully a Bible and said he responded with an apology two minutes later. The harassment has not been a problem since.

The son said, “I don’t know, maybe [the bully] started to read the Bible at his house and found the Scripture about it.”

Christian Headlines

Chinese Province Removes Hundreds of Crosses from Churches

Chinese authorities in Zhejiang province have stripped crosses from the outside of hundreds of churches, according to reports.

Pastor Zheng Leguo, who is originally from Zhejiang province, said, “The authorities have attached great importance to this religious symbol. This means no more prominent manifestation of Christianity in the public square.”

According to *The Christian Post*, a new law has also been proposed that would ban churches in the province from placing any new crosses on the roofs of buildings. Authorities have justified that law by saying crosses on building violated building codes.

“This new draft law is just another attempt by the government to legitimize its existing illegal violent

campaign of destruction and removal of the cross,” said Bob Fu of U.S.-based China Aid.

About 400 crosses have been removed from churches in Zhejiang since 2014.

Christian Headlines

Pakistan’s Biggest City Has Unlikely Addition to Skyline: 14-story Christian Cross

A Pakistani businessman says God told him to build one of the largest crosses in Pakistan. “I said, ‘I am going to build a big cross, higher than any in the world, in a Muslim country,’” said Parvez Henry Gill, 58. “It will be a symbol of God, and everybody who sees this will be worry free.”

Four years ago, Gill dreamed that God told him to find a way to help protect Christians in Pakistan. God told him to “do something different.” Today, the 14-story cross (140 feet tall) is almost finished. It’s being built at the entrance to a large Christian cemetery. “I want Christian people to see it and decide to stay here,” said Gill, who started the project about a year ago.

Other large crosses around the world include “The Great Cross” in St. Augustine, Fla., the tallest in the world at 208 feet. Gill says his cross is the largest in Asia.

Gill said about 20 Muslim workers have quit in protest over building the cross. Over all, both Muslims and Christians have worked together to build it. “Tons and tons of steel, iron and cement,” he said. “If anyone tries to hit this cross, they will not succeed.”

In Pakistan, Muslims make up about 90 percent of the population, while Christian account for just 1.5 percent of Pakistan’s 180 million people.

Christian Headlines

Nepali Christians Return to Worship after Earthquake Turns Churches into Tombs

A congregation of Christians in Nepal finished singing a worship song this week that they had been singing when an earthquake rocked the capital April. It’s one of many accounts coming out of the area of Christians returning to worship and prayer after the earthquake devastated the area.

“I was standing in a row near to the wall and praying when the trembling started. The pastor continued the prayer and suddenly, everything collapsed,” said Maili Tamang, who was worshipping

at the Vision of Salvation Church. “I was half conscious and could hear people screaming. After one hour I was pulled out. While lying there, I knew God would save me.”

Christianity Today reports the Vision of Salvation Church collapsed during the quake. There were 62 members at the church at the time. Seventeen people died, including Tamang’s husband, sister and three other family members. The senior pastor Elia Ghale and his son were also killed.

It’s unclear how many churches were destroyed in the 7.8-magnitude earthquake. Thus far, the Baptist World Alliance is reporting that about 150 Christians were killed in the quake. “I am getting reports of entire Christian families being wiped out in Kathmandu and outside,” said Simon Pandey, chairman of the National Christian Fellowship of Nepal.

More than 8,000 people thus far have been reported killed by the earthquake and aftershocks.

Christian Headlines

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines

Sin and Salvation

Romans 3:10-17; 21-26

I. The Sinner’s Condition—vv. 10-12

- A. Sin (v. 10. See Is. 53:6).
- B. Slothful (v. 11, See 2 Tim. 3:1-5).
- C. Stubborn (v. 12. Sin by one person - Rom 5:12).

II. Sinner’s Character—vv. 13-17

- A. Tongue (v. 13).
- B. Talk (v. 14).
- C. Traits (v. 15).
- D. Trouble Makers (v. 16).
- E. Trouble (vv. 17-18).

III. Sinner’s Cure—vv. 21-26

- A. Purging (vv. 21-22).
- B. Problem (v. 23).
- C. Pardon (v. 24).
- D. Patience (v. 25).
- E. Plan (v. 26).

Croft M. Pentz

Seven Great Men

Ezekiel 22:30

Intro.: God has always sought men whom He could use and work through. He sometimes used the most unlikely men, because they were surrendered to Him. No church, community, or nation can be strong without good strong Christian men.

I. Noah—Pure Obedience (Gen. 6:9)

- A. Mature in his attitude. He did not question God.
- B. Mature in his acceptance. Did not demur or deny or delay.
- C. Mature in his actions. He acted upon the commands of God.
- D. Because of this, the human race was saved.

II. Abraham—Provision (James 2:23)

A. A friend of God in practice: note how he practiced hospitality (Gen. 18:2-5).

B. A friend of God in prayer (Gen. 18:20-32).

1. The sin of Sodom (vv.20-21).

2. Salvation offered for Sodom (vv. 25-32).

III. Joseph—Patience (Gen. 37-50)

A. Persecution: hated, sold as slave by his brothers (27:1-35).

B. Prison: Potiphar’s wife lies about Joseph. While in prison, he interprets dreams (39-40).

C. Plan: He interprets the king’s dreams. He is made second in leadership over all Egypt (41:1-57).

D. Patience: He forgives his brothers and saves Israel (42-45).

IV. Nehemiah—Plan (Neh. 1-6).

A. Personal: He mourns and fasts because of the broken-down walls of Jerusalem (1:4).

B. Plan-“Let us arise and build” (2:18-20).

C. Persistence-They worked with one hand, with a sword in the other (4:6,18,20,23).

V. Job—Pain (Job 1-23)

A. Job’s fate: Lost his riches, family, and health (1-2). Note: “*The Lord gave and the Lord took away*” (1:21).

B. Job’s faith: Though God slay him, he would not lose faith (13:15).

C. Job’s future: After he was tried, he came forth as gold (23:10).

VI. Daniel—Purpose (Dan. 1)

A. Purpose: Determined not to defile himself (1:8).

B. Prayer: Prayed as before, giving thanks to God (1:6-10).

C. Protection: God closes the mouths of the lions (1:11-28).

VII. Stephen—Preaching (Acts 6-7).

A. Person: Chosen as a deacon. Did great wonders! (6:5-8).

B. Problem: His words rejected. He is murdered (6:9-15; 7:1-6).

Conc.: God seeks good men, husbands and fathers who will surrender their lives to God and follow His commands.

Croft M. Pentz

Sermon Illustrations

What Kind of Father Are You?

Some people say any man can be a father; it is a job that takes little talent. However, the rate for failure in fatherhood is actually higher than in any other occupation. Fathers have a colossal full-time job that most people underestimate. It is the most important task a man can tackle.

Despite vast changes in America's social fabric in recent years, one thread of tradition shows no sign of unraveling: sons and daughters who follow in their father's footsteps.

A nationwide survey was taken recently to determine how much time fathers were spending with their children. The results were astounding. Fathers with children between the ages of two and twelve were spending twelve minutes a day with their children. Twelve-minute dads contribute greatly to twelve-year-old delinquents.

You cannot substitute a popsicle for Pop himself, though both may have their places. Whether it be a car or a candy bar, a fishing rod or a hot rod, you cannot substitute these "presents" for the "presence."

America is standing at a crossroads of history; our very survival as a nation may depend on the presence or absence of masculine leadership in millions of homes; leadership in the form of loving authority, leadership in the form of financial management, leadership in the form of spiritual training, and leadership in maintaining good marital relationships.

A Treasury of Bible Illustrations

Home as a Refuge

Blessed is the man whose home is a real refuge! Who, being tossed to and fro on the waves of a tumultuous and combative sea throughout the day, leaves his office, his business perplexities behind him, and when he opens the door and enters the house, enters the landlocked harbor. But the home ought not to be a refuge for the husband and the father only, but we who are husbands and fathers ought to make it a refuge for the wives and mothers as well. They

have their cares also, and when we come to our homes we ought to come bringing with us such a spirit as shall exorcise these cares and make home their refuge.

Lyman Abbott

Bulletin Inserts

On Various Subjects

Men do not reject the Bible because it contradicts itself, but because it contradicts them.

The Bible does not record what man thinks about God, but what God has to say to man.

The task ahead of us is never as great as the Power behind us.

You can tell how big a person is by what it takes to discourage him.

Think like a person of action. Act like a person of thought.

Deciding not to choose is still making a choice.

These six anonymous.

Your words may hide your thoughts, but your actions reveal them.

The refiner is never very far from the furnace when His gold is in the fire.

Your strength is seen in what you stand for; your weakness in what you fall for.

These three via the *Old Union Reminder*

A man's heart is right when he wills what God wills.

Thomas Aquinas

We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.

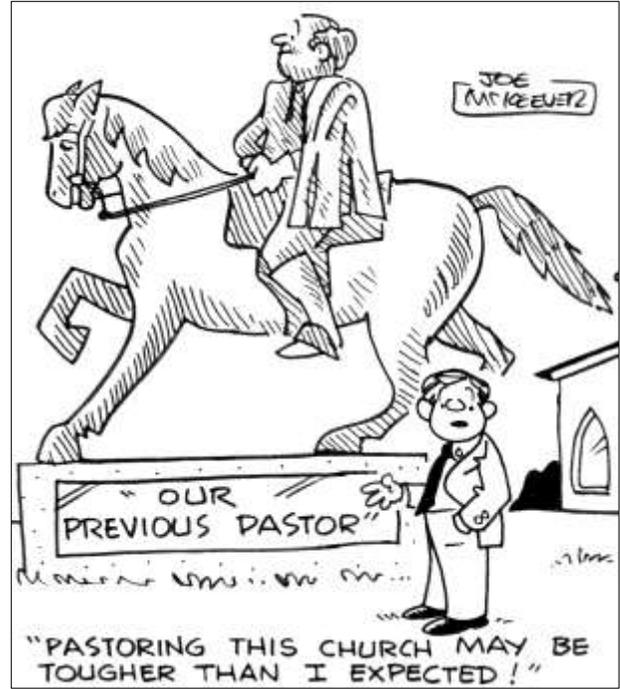
Charles Swindoll

The only things that are improved by breaking are the hearts of sinners.

Banner of Truth

Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:

Hidden Wisdom Bible Acrostic Answers

James 2:12: "For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy; and merry rejoiceth against judgment." A. Mouth • B. Adjunct • C. Wagthedog • D. Jethro • E. Aristarchus • F. Magnetix • G. Eldad • H. Shechem • I. Humanity • J. Froth • K. Erroy • L. Jewelry • M. Theme

Hidden Wisdom and Father Abraham

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, August 1999

Father Abraham's Answer Box

Father Abraham's Answers from p. 24

1. "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).
2. Four times: "early in the morning" (Matt. 20:1); "about the third hour," i.e., c. 9 a.m. (Matt. 20:3); "about the sixth hour," i.e., c. 12 p.m. (Matt. 20:6); and "about the eleventh hour," i.e., c. 5 p.m. (Matt. 20:6).
3. "We cannot tell" (Matt. 21:27).
4. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37).
5. Judgment, mercy, and faith (Matt. 23:23).
6. The fig tree (Matt. 24:32).
7. He was cast into outer darkness (Matt. 25:30).
8. In Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper (Matt. 26:6, 7).
9. Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19).
10. On a mountain in Galilee to which Jesus Christ directed them (Matt. 28:16).

Father Abraham's Question Box

By Mark Oshman

The Gospel of Mark, Part I

Fill in the missing word(s):

1. What did John the Baptist eat? (Mark 1)
2. Who did Jesus Christ heal of a fever? (Mark 1)
3. For what did the Pharisees criticize Jesus Christ's disciples? (Mark 2)
4. Whom did Jesus Christ nickname "Satan"? (Mark 3)
5. What did Jesus Christ liken to a mustard seed? (Mark 4)
6. Where did Jesus Christ encounter a man with an unclean spirit? (Mark 5)
7. How did the woman with an issue of blood receive healing? (Mark 5)
8. Where could Jesus Christ "do no mighty work"? (Mark 6)
9. What word did Jesus Christ speak when He healed a deaf and dumb man? (Mark 7)
10. Who rebuked Jesus Christ when He spoke of His death and resurrection? (Mark 8)

See answers on page 21

Hidden Wisdom on next page

Hidden Wisdom: Bible Acrostic

by Mark A. Oshman

Solve the acrostic by using the clues 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. All quotations are from the King James Version. HAPPY SOLVING!

1D	2H	3A		4C	5F	6J	7K		8E	9M	10H	11L	12I		13D	14G	15N
16H	17C	18D	19K	20G	21F		22H	23L		24J	25M	26F	27K	28B	29H	30C	
31M	32A	33F	34E		35J	36I	37G		38H	39D	40F	41C		42K	43I	44A	
45L	46D	47I		48M	49A		50B	51H	52K	53I		54E	55J		56L	57F	58A
	59M	60G	61I	62H	63L	64D	65A	66B		67C	68I	69J		70E	71D		
72K	73J	74H	75M		76F	77N	78G		79F	80D	81I	82J	83G	84K	85A	86E	87M
88H	89N	90L		91E	92D		93M	94B		95A	96G	97J	98C		99A	100I	101N

CLUES

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| A. Misshapen | 85 | 32 | 58 | 3 | 49 | 44 | 95 | 65 | 99 | |
| B. Direction of travel from Bethany to Jerusalem | 50 | 28 | 66 | 94 | | | | | | |
| C. Ready's partner | 98 | 30 | 17 | 67 | 41 | 4 | | | | |
| D. "Earth is my _____." | 18 | 39 | 80 | 64 | 92 | 13 | 46 | 71 | 1 | |
| E. One of King David's "valiant men" (1 Chr. 11) | 54 | 70 | 8 | 86 | 91 | 34 | | | | |
| F. The ability to use language effectively | 40 | 76 | 21 | 33 | 5 | 26 | 57 | 79 | | |
| G. One of King Ahasuerus' "wise men." | 78 | 14 | 37 | 60 | 96 | 83 | 20 | | | |
| H. Metaphorically used of the human body by Paul (2 Cor. 5) and Peter (2 Pet. 1) | 62 | 51 | 22 | 2 | 16 | 88 | 10 | 29 | 38 | 74 |
| I. Capital of Nepal (alt. spell.) | 53 | 100 | 12 | 36 | 81 | 61 | 68 | 47 | 43 | |
| J. "All the house of Israel are _____." | 97 | 82 | 24 | 6 | 69 | 73 | 55 | 35 | | |
| K. City in SE Virginia | 84 | 19 | 7 | 27 | 42 | 52 | 72 | | | |
| L. Where Absalom's maternal grandfather reigned | 45 | 23 | 90 | 56 | 63 | 11 | | | | |
| M. <i>Lathyrus odoratus</i> | 59 | 31 | 9 | 25 | 48 | 75 | 87 | 93 | | |
| N. A.k.a. "The Abominable Snowman" | 101 | 15 | 89 | 77 | | | | | | |