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The Homecoming of Three Prodigal Sons

The Battle Is Won in the Heavenly Places

by Ken Barnes
Page 1

Also in this Issue:

Page 2

**How to Teach Truths They
Will Always Remember**

by Joe McKeever

Page 4

Staying Focused

by Alan Stewart

Page 8

Don't Lose Heart

by Wayne Barber



Table of Contents:

The Homecoming of Three Prodigal Sons - - - - -	1	Marks of the Master- - - - -	13
How to Teach Truths They Will Always Remember- -	2	Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel- - - - -	14
Staying Focused- - - - -	4	Book Reviews- - - - -	15
Exegetically Speaking - - - - -	5	News Update - - - - -	15
Following God - - - - -	8	Sermon Helps - - - - -	17
Words to Stand You on Your Feet - - - - -	9	Puzzles and ‘Toons- - - - -	-18
Jewels from Past Giants - - - - -	10		

The Homecoming of Three Prodigal Sons: The Battle Is Won in the Heavenly Places

By Ken Barnes

Are you a Christian mother or father who has a son or daughter who seems to be so distant from God? Are you a believing grandparent who has labored over you grandchild in prayer, but the more you pray the worse their spiritual condition becomes? You are starting to wonder if all the Christian training he or she received as a youth was all in vain. Listen to this little story and be encouraged because the “Hound of Heaven” is loose and the battle is won in the heavenly places.

In the early 1990s I was leading a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) team traveling up the East Coast, working with churches in evangelism and promoting short-term mission opportunities. Our team did creative movement, mime, music, testimonies, and preaching—all with a focus on reaching the lost. We had a contact in Jacksonville, North Carolina, who arranged some ministry opportunities for us. One day we had an unusually full schedule. The plan this day was to visit a nursing home in the morning, put on a storefront church service in the early evening, and evangelize in the red light district later that night.

The nursing home went well. The storefront church was packed and the service was going well, but in the middle of the service the air conditioner failed. It was a sultry Southern evening, and after the service my team looked sapped of energy. One of the team members came up to me and said, “Are we really still going out to evangelize tonight? The team is very tired.” She looked at me like I had asked her to go to Siberia. I walked away thinking, “Am I being too tough on the team? Lord, what do I do?” I had a sense deep inside me—just continue.

A few minutes later, a man from the church came up to me and said, “You don’t want to go to the red light district. The mall is the happening place. There is not going to be anybody in the red light district tonight.” I thought, “The mall? Lord, is this from You?” I decided to send one of our team members to the red light district to spy out the land. He returned with the report, “It’s packed.”

We hurriedly loaded the bus, but the team seemed to be fading. As I got on the bus, I heard one of my team members say under his breath, “Ken Barnes works his

people day and night.” I fired up another prayer, “Lord, are you sure you want us to do this?” I still felt it—just continue.

We arrived in the red light district, and the sidewalks were packed. Jacksonville, North Carolina, is home to one of the largest Marine Corps bases in the world. It was payday and the streets were crowded with young Marines eager to spend their money until their pockets were empty. Finding a spot to do our ministry was a problem, so I approached a policeman thinking he might assist us. He politely told us to go take a hike, adding that us “church people” should not even be down here. I shot up another prayer. Just continue.

As we walked up and down the street, it got later and later and the team was growing wearier. Finally, we found a little spot on a sidewalk and quickly started to set up. A crowd was starting to form even before we were done setting up. Our friendly officer of the law showed up and told us to move, as the crowd was swelling to the point of impeding the flow of traffic in the street. Another plea for help went up. By this time I was asking, “Lord, do you really want us to do this?” The same thought came to my mind—just continue. By this time I was tempted to say to the Lord, “Then give us a break, will Ya?”

With increasing difficulty, we continued walking the street, looking for a suitable spot. The feeling that I should “cut and run” was growing stronger. Suddenly, I looked across the street, and there it was. A vacant lot between a tattoo shop and another commercial establishment was sitting there waiting for us. The tattoo shop was closed, but the other store was still open. The lights from the store provided the illumination we needed to do our ministry. “Thank you, Lord.” We quickly got set up and started our ministry. A crowd of young marines gathered to watch. Things were going well.

And then the lights went out. The store either closed, or they turned their outside lights off because they didn’t want us there. Either way, we were in the dark. “Lord, help.” My prayers were getting shorter and more desperate. In less than a minute the owner of the tattoo shop, who still happened to be in his shop, turned on his

lights. He told us later that it made him mad when the store turned their lights off. God can use the owner of a tattoo shop.

We continued our presentation. About halfway through our program something changed. From the time we had arrived at the church that afternoon, it had been nothing but struggles. But in the middle of our ministry time, God broke through. I can only describe it as God invading that little piece of North Carolina real estate. The presence of the Lord permeated that alleyway, and I could sense that God was touching people's hearts. An atmosphere of struggle and trial had changed to liberty and freedom.

When we gave an invitation to accept Christ, no one came forward. But as the crowd dispersed, we noticed three young marines lingering on the perimeter of our makeshift stage area. We approached them and heard a similar story from each of them, an account about being raised in a Christian home but forsaking the faith of their fathers and living in the sinful ways of the world. We ministered to them, and they confessed their sins and recommitted themselves to the Lord. That night, three of God's prodigal sons came home. One of the young marines, after his discharge, even joined our mission.

What was going on that evening? There was a battle raging in the heavenly realm over the souls of these three young men. We were in pursuit of these three, who

were like lost sheep of the House of Israel. When I get to heaven, I believe I may run into prayer warrior parents or grandparents who were crying out to God to bring their Marine Corps sons or grandsons back home. We had the privilege of being part of the answer to those prayers.

Well after midnight, as we drove back, our bodies were weary but our spirits were soaring. We rejoiced with the angels in heaven over not one but three sinners who had repented and had come home.

So, weary Christian parents or grandparents, take courage because God hears your prayers and sees your concerns. Christ's spirit (the Hound of Heaven) is following your loved one's tracks and is poised to break through at just the right time and place, even in a dark alley in a pit of Hell. God is prepared to perform his Word. *"Train up a child in the way they should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Prov. 22:6).

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Adapted from *The Chicken Farm and Other Sacred Places: The Joy of Serving God in the Ordinary*, by Ken Barnes, 2011, YWAM Publishing, Seattle. Pp. 122-125.

How to Teach Truths They Will Always Remember

By Joe McKeever

I've been thinking about the following conversation ever since it ended.

A friend whom I know only from our internet exchanges wanted to know if in all the articles on my website, there was anything on a particular text. I responded that I could not recall dealing with those verses, but suggested where he might find help. Then, I said, "Are you preaching on that text?"

I had no idea whether he was a pastor or not. It turned out he was a layman and had been asked to bring a message that Wednesday night to his church. The Lord had laid on his heart a particular text, and he was trying to find out all he could on it.

Then he said something which has lingered with me: "I want to give the people truths from this passage which they will remember the rest of their lives." Wow. That's a big assignment he has given himself.

My first thought—which I would not dare have stated, lest it seem I was trying to discourage him—was: "Yeah, me too. Every time I stand to preach, that's one of my goals." I suspect his pastor would say the same. Every preacher loves it when our sermons convey truths which people never forget.

However, this was my second thought: it's hard to do. Church people hear hundreds of messages, lessons, and sermons. They are fed such a relentless stream of revelations, insights, truths, principles, and biblical information that few of them walk into the sanctuary, take their seats, and look toward the pulpit expecting to hear something life-changing. Most will be satisfied to receive something interesting or thought-provoking.

That said, I come before you this morning to declare that it is indeed possible to deliver a message to your people that will never be forgotten. I might add, with as much humility and gratitude as I can muster, I have done it a few times in nearly a half century of preaching. Here's how.

1) Start early. You have given yourself a big assignment. If today is Friday and you're just getting started on a sermon you're preaching Sunday morning, chances are this message is not going to knock their socks off and win you a place in the sermonic hall of fame.

If you are a pastor and delivering multiple sermons each week, the "sermon-of-sermons"—which is what we will call this "life-changing message containing never-

forgotten truths”—must stand out from all the others you preach. For that, it will need special attention.

2) Start on your knees. Look at it like this: **a)** The Lord wants your sermons to succeed far more than you ever will, and **b)** He knows every message that has ever been delivered in history. So He is your obvious starting place. Pray. Ask Him. Ask what He wants you to preach, what the people need, and how you shall go about it. After asking, don't rush away. Listen for the answer. If your experience is like mine, it will come in a still small voice. What that often means is that an idea pops into your head as to what you should do. Start on your knees and go there often.

3) Pay attention to what the Lord has been burdening you with lately. The sermon-to-end-all-sermons will not be something you thought of Monday, researched Tuesday and Wednesday, wrote Thursday and preached Sunday. This one will be as much a part of you as your bones and marrow. This subject is as near and dear to you as the very fiber of your body, as one of your precious children. You will care deeply about this subject. In some ways, you will have been preparing for it all your life.

4) Listen. Listen very closely. As you prepare, listen to what your people are saying in their unguarded moments, what they're saying in hospital rooms, what they ask you on the way out the door on Sundays, what they say when reading the paper or watching the news. Listen to your family. Listen to your children when they get serious, your spouse when she gets worried, your elderly mother when she reminisces. Listen to your heart. God uses all of these—usually not at the same time—to send messages and insights to the preacher/teacher working on the “SOS” (Sermon of Sermons).

5) Keep it simple. If it's complicated, forget about anyone remembering it the rest of the week, much less the rest of their lives.

Some years ago, I was asked at the last minute to speak to the annual recognition banquet for the board, supporters, adults and children at our state denomination's children's home. The challenge was to deliver a message which would pertain to the hundred or so children of all ages as well as to their benefactors and house parents. The message the Lord gave me I called “Four Things the Lord Wants You to Know about the Rest of Your Life.” It turned out to be the most memorable sermon I had preached in years.

In the decade or so since that banquet, I have revised that sermon again and again and preached it a dozen times in several states. In every case, some people walk away declaring they found it helpful, will not forget it, and will pass this on to others. In time, the sermon became “Five Things God Wants You to Know about the Rest of Your Life.”

1. God has big plans for your life. (Earthly and Heavenly.)

2. He's not going to tell you what they are. (The good you would mess up and the difficult you couldn't handle.)

3. He's getting you ready for the future right now. (Which explains the boot camp He's putting you through.)

4. Your job is to be faithful today where He has placed you. To bloom where you are planted.

5. You will walk into the future by faith—trusting Him—or you will miss out on all He has planned.

6) Preach it several times. My strong hunch is my layman friend who wanted to deliver the SOS on a Wednesday night is asking for what never was and never can be: a single shot message that knocks the ball out of the park. Most great sermons—or may we say, most highly effective messages—are worked on and refined and tweaked for years before they become the definitive sermon for a preacher. They are constantly prayed over, revised, and thought about. Points are thrown out and replaced, ideas are sharpened, and illustrations are improved.

7) Get feedback. We're tempted to say one should get responses to the sermon from the sharpest Christians we know, the ones whose judgment we most respect. However, while that's a good idea, we do well to listen to our spouse, to the children, to anyone with a word about that sermon. Not necessarily to change anything, but simply to know what they are saying. Ask the Lord for feedback. No one knows preaching better than He.

8) Never consider that sermon “finished.” After preaching it today, even if the sermon felt practically perfect, bear in mind that if you preach it next month, your setting will be different, the audience will not be the same, and the Lord may have something special in mind. So, you will regularly come back to this message and think it through. Does that story still work? Was that point clear enough? Is something going on in the news that pertains to this?

9) Accept that you may never know which of your sermons people found most memorable. I remember a conversation with the chairman of a pastor search committee that had just interviewed me. Before I drove away, he said, “Our committee would like to come hear you preach. However, we will not tell you when. My experience is that every preacher has at least two good sermons. If he knows a committee is coming, he'll pull one out and preach it. And we don't want that.”

It must have been a year or more before I thought of the answer to what he said. It *is* true that every preacher has at least two good sermons. The problem is, he doesn't know which ones they are. He thinks it's these two, his wife thinks it's some others, and the congregation is all over the map in their choices.

It's best to just leave it with the Lord. Do your best on every message, preacher, then let Him take the truths

home to the hearts and make them fit and endure as He wills.

Only when we get to Heaven will we find out which of our sermons were the really good ones. Until then, we will pray and labor with the expectation that it will be the next one.

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Staying Focused

By Alan Stewart

The Flying Wallendas are known as arguably the greatest family of aerialists and tightrope walkers in the world. Their daredevil circus act became famous for performing death-defying stunts without a safety net. However, even though the family had faced several tragic accidents, those tragedies on the high wire were not enough to prevent this family from continuing with their stunts. Founder Karl Wallenda said, "Life is being on the wire; everything else is just waiting."

Holding to that philosophy, on March 22, 1978, Karl attempted to walk between the two towers of the ten-story Condado Plaza Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico, on a wire stretched 121 feet above the pavement. Although known for his attention to detail and his deep concentration on the task, at age 73, Karl fell to his death when winds exceeded 30 miles per hour. Later, Karl's wife recalled that before her husband had fallen, for the first time since she had known him, he had become more focused on falling instead of on walking the tightrope. He had personally supervised the attachment of the guide wires, which he had never done in 67 years of performing. Oftentimes, the difference between success and failure is found in the direction which we are focused.

During my early twenties, Moody Bible Institute professor William Thrasher made a statement in class that made a profound impact upon my life. He said, "One of the great secrets of the Christian life is to choose one thing and do it well all of your life for the Lord." Such a philosophy sounds foreign in our society which boasts of ability to multi-task and be diverse. However, the danger we face is a generation that is becoming jacks-of-all-trades but masters of none.

In James 1:8, James writes, "*A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*" It is the picture of someone who hesitates and wavers while being pulled in two directions. As a consequence, he never really accomplishes anything. The effectiveness of our lives is directly associated with the focus of our hearts.

The heart of Jesus had a focus "*...to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work*" (John 4:34). At the end, Jesus would cry from the cross, "*It is finished.*" The heart of Paul was focused running a race of honor and avoiding disqualification. At the end, Paul would say, "*I*

have fought a good fight, I have finished my course..." (2 Tim. 4:7). Where we place our focus is generally the direction we find ourselves going. A well-focused life will make possible a well-finished life. How do you keep life in focus when everything around you is a blur?

I. Staying Focused Will Demand Being Removed from Our Distractions

In Matthew 14, Peter dared to walk where no other would walk with Jesus: on a stormy sea! However, we are told in verse 30, "*But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried...*" The distraction of the storm would bring Peter's miraculous moment to an end.

No matter how much success a man has achieved, his life will begin to sink when his attention is drawn away from Jesus. When a lion tamer enters a cage of lions, he carries both whips and pistols. However, they tell us the most important tool he carries is a stool. Why? A lion becomes confused when trying to focus on all four legs at the same time and is quickly overwhelmed with a sense of paralysis when its attention is divided.

While distractions are inevitable in a busy and stressful world, the secret is minimizing their influence. Noah faced the distraction of scoffers, but he never stopped building the ark. Joseph faced the distraction of disappointment, but he never stopped trusting God's plan. Daniel faced the distraction of intimidation, but he kept on kneeling to pray to his God. As an ancient Greek fabulist once wrote, "Beware lest you lose the substance by grasping at the shadow." It is worth remembering that a single distraction can hold a lifetime of regret.

II. Staying Focused Will Demand Being Resolved in Our Direction

In Isaiah 50:7, it is prophesied of Christ, "*...I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.*" It was describing the courage in His firm resolve to never shrink away from the great purpose He had been given. Jesus knew exactly what He had to do, and nothing could derail Him from fulfilling the will of the Father.

Although every detail may not be understood, once we are convinced that a particular course of direction is

God's will, we must be undaunted in our effort to follow and fulfill it. Far too many golden opportunities of life never come to pass because we are always waiting until the time is right, until we can afford it, or until we can figure it all out.

What if Abraham had waited for God to supply him with a map? What if Nehemiah had waited on God to provide the blueprints? What if Esther had waited for God to speak through a burning bush? Those who walk with God are able to bring clearly into focus those things the rest of the world will miss. The more obsessed we are with following God, the more confident we find are the steps we take. And, the world will stand in line to follow a man who knows where he is going.

III. Staying Focused Will Demand Being Restrained in Our Desires

In Colossians 3:2, Paul writes, "*Set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth.*" Jesus explained why that is so important in Matthew 6:21, "*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" The Lord knows how prone our nature is to gravitate toward the object at which we are staring. It is worth remembering that a disciplined stare will always prevent a disappointing life.

One of the most difficult things every artist must face is how to keep a fresh perspective while staring at the same canvas for hours on end. I read of a seasoned artist who hung a sparkling diamond from the top of his easel to which he would look periodically in order to keep all of the

colors on the canvas from growing dull in his sight. The only way to maintain a right perspective of this world is to make sure nothing within it sparkles brighter in our eyes than the Lord.

While Abraham beheld many beautiful lands, he continually "*...looked for a city...whose builder and maker is God*" (Heb. 11:10). While Moses beheld the spectacular riches and treasures of Egypt, he was consumed with the heavenly reward still awaiting. Jerome, the great Bible translator, wrote, "A Christian's life is a state of holy desire." Any man who has taken heavenly glimpses can never be fully satisfied with earthly gains again.

Though our life may be the journey of a thousand miles, it is only accomplished one step at a time. No matter how hard a man may try, he will never take multiple strides in a single step. That is important when our journey has led us to a narrow, high wire path. In such a place, it is imperative that your heart remain fixed on the goal, and that your eyes remain fixed on your steps. You can mark it down, a defective focus will always precede a devastating fall.

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

Jesus Predicts His Return in Glory

Matthew 24:1-8

From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers

The twenty-third chapter of Matthew closes with Christ's final denunciation of Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism (vv. 34-39), following eight woes He pronounced on the scribes and the Pharisees (vv. 13-29).

[1] Most Bible scholars assume that the questioning of Christ's authority in chapter 22 and His denunciation of the Pharisees in chapter 23 take place on Tuesday of the Passion Week and that the Olivet discourse of chapters 24 and 25 takes place later on the same day. Thus, while leaving the complex of the "temple" (*hierón* [2411]) on Tuesday and before crossing the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives in view of the temple structure still under construction, we read, "*His disciples came to* (from *prosérchomai* [4334], to come near) *Him for to shew* (from *epideíknumi* [1925], to exhibit, display, show off) *Him the*

buildings (from *oikodomē* [3619], buildings under construction) *of the temple.*"

The stones used in the construction of this temple were huge, some measuring 40 x 12 x 20 feet each, and weighing up to one hundred tons. The disciples were evidently impressed by the immense size and apparent indestructibility of these building blocks. The arches of the temple were 24 feet long. The porches (Solomon's and the Royal) were upheld by pillars of pure marble. First Kings 6 describes the remarkable opulence of the first temple. This temple was covered within and without—the walls, doors, floors, altar, and many other things—with pure gold, and the second (Herod's) Temple which stood in Jesus' day was similarly decorated.

Why would the disciples show off the temple to Jesus? They were impressed, and they may have thought Jesus was less familiar with the architecture than they. *Epideíknumi*, "to exhibit," derives from *epí* ([1909], upon)

and *deíknumi* ([1166], to show). But how could Jesus possibly be impressed when He had just left the glories of heaven?

[2] Jesus made full use of their awe at human construction. He used an intensive negative to predict the certain destruction of this admittedly glorious edifice, a prophecy fulfilled by Roman armies under Titus in A. D. 70: “*And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily (amēn [281], truly) I say unto you, There shall not (the two negatives ou [3756] and mē [3361] combined as an intensive combination meaning absolutely not, never, at any time) be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown (from katalúō [2647], to throw down) down.*”

Katalúō derives from the preposition *katá* (2596) or the adverb *kátō* (2736), down; and *lúō* (3089), to loose. Paul uses it to describe the dissolution of our physical bodies that house our spirits like tents (from *skēnos* [4636]). These present bodies, he says, will be dissolved (from *katalúō*) and replaced with a new building from God in heaven (2 Cor. 5:1).

From this ominous prediction and another teaching (John 2:19), the Jewish opposition concluded that Jesus personally was going to destroy the temple. At His trial, they claimed, “*We heard him say, I will destroy (katalúsō, the future tense of katalúō) this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands*” (Mark 14:58). But their conclusions were incorrect. Here Jesus predicted the destruction without any reference to Himself. The record in John 2:21 includes John’s comment that “*He was speaking of the temple of His body*” (NASB). In plain language, the opponents deliberately misconstrued Jesus’ words or did not listen carefully and got it wrong! Since they rejected Jesus’ deity, it was absurd for them to suppose that a mere man could destroy such a massive edifice and reconstruct it in three days!

Since the Greek manuscripts do not contain question marks, Jesus’ question could be taken in the indicative mood: “*You do not see all [that is related to] these things.*” This would be a fitting introduction to the prophecy that began with the strong adverb, “*truly*” (a.t.; *amēn*). To paraphrase Christ’s words, “*There is more in respect to this magnificent building,*” Christ was intimating, “*and you do not see the whole picture. When the panorama is extended to A. D. 70, the stones are no longer standing one upon the other.*”

Apocalyptic vision is unique. Whenever we are awestruck by the edifices of the world, we are blinded to higher realities. The cure is prophecy—the ability to foresee God’s judgments on human pride. Eventually, the material structures of this world are destined to destruction and replacement by spiritual structures: “*And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which*

cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:27). As Jesus said, absolutely not (*ou mē*) a single stone would remain on another!

[3] Before expounding on the dramatic events leading to the overthrow of the temple, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives and further taught His disciples. “*And as he sat (from káthēmai [2521]) upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately (kat’ from katá [2596], according to; idían [2398], private, own, personal), saying, Tell us, when (póte [4219], an interrogative adverb meaning at what time) shall these things be? and what (tí, the singular neuter pronoun of tís [5101], “what one thing,” meaning, from the context, “what one sign”) shall be the sign of thy coming (from parousía [3952], presence, appearance), and of the end (from suntéleia [4930], the noun associated with the verb suntelēō [4931], to bring together to completion, as e.g., in Heb. 12:2 where Jesus is called the teleiōtēs [5051], the finisher of our faith) of the world (from aiōn [165], age)?”*

Just as the Pharisees spoke authoritatively from the chair (ex cathedra; Matt. 23:2) of Moses and as a king would from his throne, now Jesus sat to describe the sweep of history to the end of the age, including dire predictions for the city and temple of Jerusalem. Actually, Jesus spoke in this manner from two mountains—the Mount of Beatitudes in Galilee where He taught His disciples how to pray (see Matt. 6:9–13) and the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. Here at the close of His earthly ministry, His disciples asked Him about His Second Coming (*parousía*) and the consummation of the age.

The word *parousía* derives from *pará* (3844), which denotes close proximity; and the feminine participle of *eimí* (1510), to be (spiritual and/or material). It is used frequently with respect to the Second Coming of Christ (see vv. 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8). *Parousía* describes single events as well as processes of several events. There is no doubt that Jesus will return physically to earth in His glorified body. Revelation 1:7 says, “*Every eye (ophthalmós [3788]) shall see (from optánomai [3700], to see physically) Him*” (cf. Acts 1:11).

The phrases “*that day,*” “*the day,*” or “*the great day*” together occur more than 75 times in the Old Testament. Zechariah 14:1–4 speaks of the Day of the Lord as an event of the Second Coming in the program of God. Second Peter 3:10 appears to include the entire millennial age within this period. During this “*day,*” Jesus will personally come to raise dead believers (1 Cor. 15:23), transform living believers, and take them to be with Him forever (1 Cor. 15:50–54; 1 Thess. 4:13–17). This “*coming*” is also described by the Greek words *apokálupsis* ([602], revelation) (Rom. 2:5; 8:19; 1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13; 4:13), and *epipháneia* ([2015], manifestation) (2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10; 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13).

Thus, the coming of Jesus and His *parousía* is a series of events and comings, not just one single event. The disciples had no doubt that the events Jesus predicted were going to take place, but they wanted to know “*when*” (*póte*) and what one sign would confirm or verify His presence and the consummation of the age. When the scribes asked for signs, Jesus answered that no sign would be given but the sign of the resurrection, typified by Jonah’s incarceration in the belly of the great fish (Matt. 12:39–41; 16:4; Luke 11:29–32). Accordingly, the resurrection would be the basic assurance that events predicted in this “Olivet Discourse,” as it is called, would occur. At least five hundred people witnessed Christ’s resurrection, over half of them still alive at the time Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:6).

Notice that, in the Greek, the disciples did not ask concerning “*the end* (KJV, as if from *télos* [5056]) *of the world* (KJV, as if from *kósmos* [2889])” but rather concerning “*the completion* (a.t.; *suntéleia* [4930]) *of the age* (a.t.; *aiōn* [165]).” “*Completion*” adds conceptually to the term *aiōn*, age, the qualitative idea that events within the age will all contribute to the completion like bricks to a building (e.g., we speak of a building’s completion, not its end). The Second Coming will be a process, a consummation of foreknown events rather than a disjointed series of crises. All the events will tie together, contributing to a culmination, a climax in which the old order will be superseded by the new.

An *aiōn*, age, itself is not a *chrónos* (5550), mere measured time like a delay or interval but rather a dispensation—time with a divinely appointed content. Although the disciples requested a single sign (*tí*), they also inquired about “*these things*” (*taúta* [5023])—a number of observable events that will complete the age (*aiōn*). This age has *kairoí* (2540), seasons, opportunities that God extends to people to repent. Jesus also taught, however, that “*blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven him [man]...in this age nor in the one to come*” (Matt. 12:31, 32 a.t.).

In Mark 13:33, Jesus told His disciples to “*Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when (póte [4219]) the time (kairós, season) is*” (NKJV). *Póte*, then, refers not to an instant of time but to a season, a period. Similarly, in Luke 21:8, the “*time (kairós) [that] has drawn near* (from *eggízō* [1448])” (a.t.) includes a series of events: earthquakes, wars, portentous signs in the sky, persecutions, etc.

[4, 5] Because this age will be characterized by unique deception, Jesus issued the warning: “*Take heed that no one deceives (planēsē, the aorist subjunctive of planāō [4105], to lead away from the proper course; the aorist tense means even once) you*” (NKJV).

“*Take heed*” translates the Greek verb *blépete* (the present imperative of *blépō* [991], to see, heed). The present

tense means that believers should constantly watch for signals in the prophetic future. Jesus did not directly answer the disciples’ question “*when?*” because the emphasis lies not on when but on what to look for.

When false prophets fix the date of Christ’s return, they deceive believers. They cause them to lose their commitment to the Savior in exchange for escape from the very tribulations intended to glorify Christ’s power. “*Thou hast left thy first love*” (Rev. 2:4), the Church of Ephesus was told. New believers are consumed with love and enthusiasm when they first come to know Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior. When anything leads them away from this first love, even the study of eschatology (events in the last times), then they should beware.

[6] Adam and Eve’s rejection of God brought suffering and death into the world. We cannot escape this sorrow and trouble (John 16:33), but God has promised to give us victory.

Christ’s message to believers is, “*See to it that you do not become panicked* (from *throéō* [2360], to disturb, trouble, terrify)” (a.t.). The verb *throéō* is found in the two recordings of the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:6; Mark 13:7) and in Paul’s counsel to the Thessalonians that they should not panic in the face of events attending the Day of the Lord (2 Thess. 2:2). Panic, the syndrome that now fills whole shelves of large bookstores, involves a subordination of logical thinking to highly vacillating emotions. Since Jesus commanded His disciples to neither panic nor be afraid (*phobéō* [5399], fear; see Matt. 14:27; etc.), panic is a response contrary to faith. Of course, we all need the Lord’s grace to overcome fear.

Jesus told the disciples that all these things “*must*” (*deí* [1163], it is bound to be, or necessary) occur. God, therefore, will work out His purposes through these events; they should neither take us by surprise nor plunge us into despair. Wars, and there will be many, must not cause us to lose hope because “*the end is not yet (oúpō [3768]; derived from the negative ou; and pō [4452], yet)*.” In John 16:33, Jesus said, “*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation* (from *thlipsis* [2347], pressure, squeezing).” The Lord will allow us to be pressured by individuals, nations, and events during this age (*aiōn*) in order to strengthen our faith and commitment to Him.

[7] Natural disasters such as “*famines*” (from *limós* [3042]; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), plagues or “*pestilences*” (from *loimós* [3061]; Luke 21:11), and “*earthquakes*” (from *seismós* [4578], shaking as, of the earth or even the heavens; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11; Rev. 6:12; 11:13, 19; 16:18) all operate within the power and wisdom of our God.

[8] As terrible as they are, these tribulational pressures should not cause us to panic. Jesus said they are the beginning of “*sorrows*” (from *ōdín* [5604], birth pangs), comparable to the labor pains a woman forgets when her

child is finally born (John 16:21). By analogy, we can expect sudden and painful stress, but we should not be overwhelmed because the Lord will deliver us from these evils as surely as He delivers a mother from her labor pains.

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

Following God—by Wayne Barber

Don't Lose Heart

The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:1 “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart.” The “therefore” of chapter 4:1 incorporates all that Paul has said in chapters 2 and 3 concerning the very presence of God living in us. Summing it all up he says “Therefore...we do not lose heart.”

But, what does it mean to “lose heart.” This must be understood because all of us as believers are susceptible to it. The words “lose heart” are really one word in the Greek—*ekkakeo*. It comes from two words which paint a picture—*ek* (“out of”) and *kakos*, which is that which is evil and bad and always points to our wicked flesh. The interesting thing about this word is that in secular Greek, it was used of a soldier who acted cowardly in battle and turned back. So, the idea of the word in this context seems to be that since Paul is a servant of a new covenant, he is determined not to turn back or resort to what he can do in the power of his flesh. He was determined not to go back to depending upon his own adequacy.

When a believer, because of difficulties or challenges in his life or any other reason resorts back to his flesh he has just begun to lose heart. He will soon find out that the flesh cannot produce what only the Spirit can. By going back to the flesh he frustrates the grace of God as Paul said he would not do in Galatians 2:21 “*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.*” This would be someone who neglects his salvation, as the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 2. In so doing, he shuns the enabling strength of strength of Christ in him and therefore becomes fainthearted because he discovers that the flesh cannot help him. The Spirit will wear you out but the flesh will burn you out, and there is such a difference.

So let's begin to look at the symptoms of a person who has lost heart. To do this, we'll simply follow the word throughout the New Testament and see what we can find. The first symptom of losing heart is prayerlessness.

“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, ‘In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, “Give me legal protection from my opponent.” For a while he was

unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, “Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.” And the Lord said, ‘Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?’” (Luke 18:1-8).

Luke contrasts prayer with losing heart, which uses our Greek word here. The word for “pray” is the word *proseuchomai*. It means to express a deep desire of the heart to God! It is in the present middle/passive. Prayer is the verbalization of our trust and dependence on God and His Word. Here is an illustration of how prayer works in the midst life's challenging situations.

In the midst of life's daily journey when the challenging, unannounced circumstances of life come at us, we allow them to drive us to Christ knowing that we can bring our deepest desires to Him and He hears us. But we also have the attitude of willingness to allow Him to do what He chooses to do, even if He does differently than what we requested, convinced that what He chooses to do is good, acceptable and perfect. That way we don't lose heart.

Believers who have lost heart are those who have chosen to take matters into their own hands and have stopped trusting God. They do not pray. Life is God's way of drawing us into prayer and into what He is doing!

In Luke 18, Jesus is showing the heart of the Father to answer prayer. He uses the widow who persistently goes to the wicked judge to get the legal protection that the judge was appointed to give her! Finally, out of frustration, because of her persistence the wicked judge gives her the protection that she deserved as a citizen in his jurisdiction. This isn't about wicked judges or desperate widows but it is about the fact that if a wicked judge had to be pestered to be faithful to what he said he would do, then what would our Heavenly Father do if we just go to Him?

This passage doesn't teach that if we want a new car and if we persist in asking for it, God will give it to us! But it is about trusting God in everything. This wicked judge had a legal assignment to do what was right. If we

come before our loving heavenly Father with a plea for more of His sustaining grace for our perseverance in obedience, how much more will He gladly grant our request?

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Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

The Fruit of the Spirit Is: Joy

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22).

In the 1950s, Frank Lovejoy was a popular movie and television actor. I wonder how someone decided to join those two fruit-of-the-Spirit qualities into one name? And I wonder if anyone has tried it with any of the others. Is anyone on the planet named Gentlenessgoodness? Faithfulnesshumility? Probably not.

No question, but the first three qualities that make up this Christ-likeness—love, joy, and peace—are the best-known and best-loved of the nine. I suspect ten times as many sermons have been preached on these three than all the remaining six combined.

Joy is the flag flown from the castle of your heart to show the king is in residence.

I would have thought C. S. Lewis’ book *Surprised by Joy* dealt with his meeting Joy Davidman Gresham, who became his wife. Instead, its subtitle gives it away: “The Shape of My Early Life.” The joy which took this Oxford professor of English literature so by surprise arrived when he put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He had built up such an army of misconceptions regarding the Christian life that when it arrived, he found it to be nothing like anything he had anticipated. He was unprepared for the joy.

“Joy,” Lewis later wrote, “is the business of Heaven.” If it is—and who can doubt that, based on so many revelations of Scripture—then, for a believer to experience joy is to have a “foretaste of glory divine,” as the hymn puts it.

“In thy presence there is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). Our Lord Jesus said, *“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).*

Do you find it strange that the one described in prophecy as *“a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3)* would devote so much attention to making sure His followers experienced joy in a full and permanent way?

Let’s look at the mentions of joy in John’s Gospel alone:

Speaking of the arrival of the Messiah, John the Baptist told his disciples, *“This joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:29-30).*

The rest of the statements are from our Lord. *“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11).* Joy is related to the Word. *“You too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you” (16:22).* Joy is related to the Lord’s presence. *“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be made full” (16:24).* Joy is related to prayer. And finally, in His priestly prayer, Jesus said to the Father, *“But now I come to Thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves” (17:13).* Joy is the desire of the Savior for every believer. It’s standard equipment.

When a pastor decides to preach on joy—and when this preacher opts to write on it—he is stymied by several things: the scope of the subject, the vast number of scriptures dealing with it, and the almost limitless writings of others about joy. The problem is limiting the sermon or article to something manageable.

Define “joy”. Good luck with that. To my knowledge, Scripture never attempts to define any of these nine Christ-like graces in a strict sense. We’re on our own here. Years ago, I heard a college student say, “I feel like I’ve swallowed sunshine.” That says it for me as well as any theological understanding anyone has ever offered. You can be hurting and grieving, but the joy is still present. The sunshine still beams inside.

In what way does the Spirit produce joy? Keep in mind—we’ll need to say this frequently—that we must not isolate any of these nine qualities from the others. The Lord is not interested in producing disciple specialists (one with great love and nothing more, one who specializes in joy but has no peace or self-control, etc.).

What that means is that at the same time the Holy Spirit is exhibiting joy in the life of a believer, we will also notice love, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, etc. All nine traits will bloom from the one tree.

It appears that, just as a tree takes all that nature sends its way—rain, drought, sunshine, storms, nutrients in the soil or the absence of certain nutrients—and processes them into the tree it becomes and the fruit it bears, the Holy Spirit does something similar in the life of believers.

The Lord takes “*the testing of your faith*” and produces endurance or longsuffering (James 1:2-4). What we used to call “patience” is a steadfastness and steadiness without which believers will drop by the wayside in the heat of the day or the stress of the battle.

The Lord’s greatness and grace combine in the lives of believers to produce humility. This in turn makes us teachable, flexible, and obedient.

What produces joy? Nothing is more responsible for a joyful spirit in the life of a believer than obedience to the commands and teachings of the Savior.

We must not get it backward and go for the joy first. I think of the line in the Declaration of Independence which names as inalienable rights of mankind “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” No doubt Jefferson meant well, but when one pursues happiness, he never finds it. Only as a byproduct of a life of faithfulness and service does that elusive quality show up. So also with joy.

Joy in the midst of suffering and trials is the strongest witness believers will ever have before a watching and skeptical world.

As the Lord prepared His disciples for the lifetime of harassment, opposition, and persecution which lay before them in Matthew 10, over and over He cautioned them not to let their fears take over. “*Do not become anxious about how or what you will speak*” (10:19). “*Do not fear [your critics], for there is nothing covered that will not be revealed*” (10:26). “*Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul*” (10:28). “*Do not fear (want and need); you are of more value than many sparrows*” (10:31). “*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth*” (10:34).

That is, do not be misguided and do not be disappointed in me.

Do not lose your joy. Do not let suffering steal it from you. Do not hand it over to your attackers or critics, and do not let the empty cupboard rob you of your joy. That’s asking a lot.

Jesus sure is.

That’s why joy absolutely has to be a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, we will be up and down, hot and cold, rejoicing when things go our way, complaining when they don’t.

The Old Testament prophet understood: “*Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines; though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food. Though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls—yet, I will exult in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of My salvation*” (Hab. 3:17-18).

The apostles understood: “*But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the (other) prisoners were listening to them*” (Acts 16:25).

Finally, this benediction: “*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen*” (Jude 24-25).

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Jewels from Past Giants

Sin-Part 1 of 3

By Charles Hodge

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

All men are sinners. The nature of man, since the fall, is depraved.

Since then the Scriptures are undoubtedly the Word of God, with what reverence should we receive their divine instructions; with what assiduity and humility should we study them; with what confidence should we rely on the truth of all their declarations; and with what readiness should we obey all their directions. We are specially concerned to learn what they teach with regard to the character of men, the way of salvation, and the rule of duty.

With respect to the first of these points, (the character of men) the Bible very clearly teaches that all men

are sinners. The apostle Paul not only asserts this truth, but proves it at length, in reference both to those who live under the light of nature, and those who enjoy the light of revelation. The former, he says, are justly chargeable with impiety and immorality, because the perfections of the divine Being, His eternal power and godhead, have, from the creation, been manifested by the things which are made.

Yet men have not acknowledged their Creator. They neither worshipped Him as God nor were thankful for His mercies, but served the creature more than the creator. In thus departing from the fountain of us excellence, they departed from excellence itself. Their foolish hearts were darkened and their corruption manifests itself not only by degrading idolatry but by the various forms of moral evil both in heart and life.

These sins are committed against the law which is written on every man's heart; so that they know that those who do such things are worthy of death, and are therefore without excuse even in their own consciousness.

With regard to those who enjoy a supernatural revelation of the character and requirements of God, the case is still more plain. Instead of rendering to this God the inward and outward homage which are His due, they neglect His service, and really prefer His creatures to Himself. Instead of regulating their conduct by the perfect rule of duty contained in the Scriptures, by breaking that law they constantly dishonor God.

It is thus the apostle shows that all classes of men, when judged by the light which they have severally enjoyed, are found guilty before God. This universality of guilt moreover, he says, is confirmed by the clear testimony of the Scriptures, which declare, *"There is none righteous, no not one. There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God. They have all gone out of the way; they have altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one"* (Rom. 3:10-12).

This language is not used by the Holy Spirit in reference to the men of any one age or country, but in reference to the human race. It is intended to describe the moral character of man. It is in this sense that it is quoted and applied by the apostle. And we accordingly find similar declarations in all parts of the Bible, in the New Testament, as well as in the Old, in the writings of one age, as well as in those of another. And there are no passages of an opposite character; there are none which represent the race as being what God requires, nor any which speak of any member of that race as being free from sin.

On the contrary, it is expressly said, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). In many things we all offend. There is no man that sinneth not. *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23). Hence the Scriptures proceed on the assumption of the universal sinfulness of men. To speak, to act, to walk after the manner of men, is, in the language of the Bible, to speak or act wickedly. The world are the wicked.

This present evil world is the description of mankind, from whose character and deserved punishment is said to be the design of Christ's death to redeem His people. *"The world cannot hate you,"* said our Savior to those who refused to be His disciples, *"but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil"* (John 7:7) *"They are of the world, therefore they speak of the world and the world heareth them"* (1 John 4:5). *"We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness"* (1 John 5:19).

This, however, is not a doctrine taught in isolated passages. It is one of those fundamental truths which are taken for granted on almost every page of the Bible. The whole scheme of redemption supposes that man is a fallen

being. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. He was announced as the Savior of sinners. His advent and work have no meaning or value but upon the assumption that we are guilty, for He came to save His people from their sins; to die the just for the unjust; to bear our sins in His own body on the tree. Those who have no sin need no Savior; those who do not deserve death need no Redeemer. As the doctrine of the redemption pervades Scripture, so does the doctrine of the universal sinfulness of men.

This doctrine is also assumed in all the Scriptural representations of what is necessary for admission into heaven. All men, everywhere, are commanded to repent. But repentance supposes sin. Every man must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God; he must become a new creature; he must be renewed after the image of God. Being dead in trespasses and in sins, he must be quickened, or made partaker of a spiritual life. In short, it is the uniform doctrine of the Bible that all men need both pardon and sanctification in order to be admitted to heaven. It therefore teaches that all men are sinners.

The Scriptures moreover teach that the sinfulness of men is deep seated; consisting in a corruption of the heart, it manifests itself in innumerable forms in the actions of the life. *"All the imaginations of man's heart are only evil continually"* (Gen. 6:5). God says of the human heart that it is *"deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"* (Jer. 17:9). All men, by nature are the *"children of wrath"* (Eph. 2:3). And therefore the psalmist says, *"Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"* (Ps. 51:5).

This corruption of our nature is the ground of the constant reference of everything good in man to the Holy Spirit, and of everything evil, to his own nature. Hence in the language of the Bible, the natural man is a corrupt man; and the spiritual man alone is good. Hence, too, the constant opposition of the terms flesh and spirit; the former meaning our nature as it is apart from divine influence, and the latter the Holy Spirit or His immediate effects. To be in the flesh, to walk after the flesh, to mind the things of the flesh, are all Scriptural expressions descriptive of the natural state of men. It is in this sense of the term that Paul says, *"In my flesh there dwelleth no good thing"* (Rom. 7:18), and that our Savior said, *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh"* (John 3:6).

This humbling doctrine is, moreover, involved in all the descriptions which the Bible gives of the nature of that moral change which is necessary to salvation. It is no mere outward reformation; it is no assiduous performance of external duties. It is a regeneration; a being born of the Spirit; a new creation; a passing from death unto life. A change never effected by the subject of it, but which has its source in God. Of no doctrine, therefore, is the Bible more full than of that which teaches that men are depraved and fallen beings who have lost the image of God, and who

must be created anew in Christ Jesus before they can see the kingdom of heaven.

These Scriptural representations respecting the universality of sin and the corruption of our nature are abundantly confirmed by experience and observation. Men may differ as to the extent of their sinfulness, or as to the ill desert of their transgressions, but they cannot be insensible to the fact that they are sinners, or that they have sustained this character as long as they have had any self-knowledge. As far back as they can go in the history of their being, they find the testimony of conscience against them. As this consciousness of sin is universal, and as it exists as soon as we have any knowledge of ourselves, it proves that we are fallen beings; that we have lost the moral image of God with which our first parents were created.

It is a fact, of which every human being is a witness, that our moral nature is such that instead of seeking our happiness in God and holiness, we prefer the creature to the Creator. It would be just as unreasonable to assert that this was the original, proper state of man, as to say our reason was sound, if it universally, immediately, and infallibly led us into wrong judgments upon subjects fairly within its competency.

The proof that man is a depraved being is as strong as that he is a rational, social, or moral being. He gives no signs of reason at his birth, but he invariably manifests his intellectual nature as soon as he becomes capable of appreciating the objects around him or of expression the operations of his mind. No one supposes reason to be the result of education or the effect of circumstances merely because its operations cannot be detected from the first moment of existence. The uniformity of its manifestation under all circumstances is regarded as sufficient proof that it is an attribute of our nature.

The same remark may be made respecting the social affections. No one of them is manifested from the beginning of our course in this world. Yet the fact that men in all ages and under all circumstances evince a disposition to live in society, that all people have more or less sympathy in the joys and sorrows of their fellow men, is proof that these affections are not acquired but original—that they belong to our nature and are characteristic of it.

In like manner, the Apostle reasons from the fact that all men perform moral acts and experience the approbation or disapprobation of conscience that they have, by nature, and not from example, instruction, or any other external influence, but in virtue of their original moral

constitution, a law written on their hearts—a sense of right and wrong.

But if the uniform occurrence of any moral acts is a proof of a moral nature, the uniform occurrence of wrong moral acts is a proof of a corrupt moral nature. If the universal manifestation of reason and of the social affections proves man to be by nature a rational and social being, the universal manifestation of sinful affections proves him to be by nature a sinful being. When we say that anyone is a bad man, we mean that the predominant character of his actions proves him to have bad principles or dispositions. And when we say that a man's nature is depraved, we mean that it is a nature whose moral acts are wrong. And this uniformity of wrong moral action is as much a proof of a depraved nature as the acts of a bad man are a proof of the predominance of evil dispositions in his heart.

This is the uniform judgment of men, and is sanctioned by the Word of God. "*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Therefore by their fruits shall ye know them*" (Matt. 7:18, 20). This illustration was used by our Savior with the express design of teaching that the predominant character of the acts of men is to be taken as a certain index of the state of the heart. Hence the uniform occurrence of sin in all men is a certain evidence of the corruption of their nature. Indeed there is no one fact with regard to human nature which consciousness and observation more fully establishes than that it is depraved.

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

Marks of the Master—by The Old Scot

Welcome to Oceanus

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, November 2005.

Welcome to a world of water. That's us—the folks who live on the third planet out from the Sun. Sure, we call it Earth, but that is strictly a minority viewpoint, because there is about 18 times more water than earth on Planet Earth. And a good thing, too! Besides being absolutely essential to our bodies, water makes all the difference between Earth being a barren slag-heap in space, and the beautiful green home that God has given us.

Don't be misled into thinking water is very ordinary, just because there is so much of it. As a matter of fact, water is a most remarkable substance.

Take ice, for example: Water is the only known substance that is lighter when frozen than in its normal liquid state. And that makes a difference between life and death to us, and to nearly all life. Suppose that ice were heavier than water: when freezing temperatures came, the ice would sink to the bottom of ponds, rivers, lakes—every body of water—as it formed, and there it would stay! It would build up and up, with each freeze, until finally all but the surface would be perpetually frozen.

Scientists have demonstrated that ice held at the bottom of a tank remains frozen for a good long while, even if the water on top is made to boil. The “permafrost” in northern Canada and Alaska is a good example of this in nature. Permafrost is soil beneath the surface of the ground that never thaws, under normal circumstances.

So the sun's rays would never have a chance to melt the ice at the bottom of lakes and rivers, and as the ice increased, it would gradually change the climate. Ultimately even the oceans would freeze, and our Earth would be just a great ball of ice. Life would be impossible.

There's more: life on earth would also be extremely difficult if the temperature at which water freezes was anything but 32 degrees above zero. Imagine rain at 20 degrees (just 12 degrees below the actual freezing point)—a really tiny difference in view of the 672-degree range from absolute zero to the boiling point of water, but a huge difference to man and beast.

The wet cold would mean death, without protection. There would also be no protective blankets of

snow for plants, but instead freezing and destructive winter flooding. And if the freeze point were merely a few degrees higher, the snow and ice would never melt in the colder parts of the world, and glaciers would again march south to cover much of our land.

No, our heavenly Provider knew exactly what He was doing when He made water! And He made water from two invisible gases: hydrogen and oxygen. Being made from two light gases, water really should not be liquid at all. It should be an invisible gas itself.

Water, which has an atomic weight of 18, is liquid below its boiling point of 212 degrees. Ammonia, however, with an atomic weight of 17—only 1 less than water—is a gas and stubbornly remains a gas, clear down to about 90 degrees below zero. No wonder a research chemist said: “The fact that water exists as a liquid at all, at ordinary temperatures, is something to make one stop and think.”

Water is also a powerful solvent. More things dissolve in water than in any other liquid. This is vital to all growing things, for plants depend on water to carry nourishment in solution up through their roots.

Again, water is a wonderful weather “shock-absorber,” cushioning against great changes in temperature. Our oceans and lakes help keep our Earth a livable place.

The Earth was designed for life by a Master Builder. And as we learn more about even the “simple” elements of God's creation, we'll understand the praise song which the Apostle John placed in Rev. 4:11: “*Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for thy glory they are and were created.*”

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

Sources:

Leonard Engle: *The Sea* (in Life Nature Library Series), Time, Inc., 1961.

Thomas David Parks: “Plain Water Will Tell You the Story,” in *The Evidence*, John Clover Monsma, ed., Gospel Literature Service, Bombay, 1968.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

One...One...One

By Chad Smith

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

My family and I moved to Guatemala just over three years ago to work with at-risk children. Though we were not sure what that would look like exactly, we were confident in the calling God had put on our hearts.

For two and a half years we served in a children's home, committing ourselves to better understand the problem of the orphaned, abandoned, and abused children. We discovered that a majority of all children in institutional care in the world have at least one living parent; that many are in those institutions because of "poverty"—a lack of opportunities and resources; and that a majority of children prefer to return to their original family if given the chance.

We also discovered that physical and sexual abuse is a huge problem within the poorer class, and that reuniting the child with their family is not always an option because of the risk of recurring abuse.

While at the children's home we became familiar with AMG Guatemala, their focus on preventing the breakdown of the family, and of carrying out ministry by working with the local church and through indigenous leaders. AMG Guatemala also recognized the need for a child protection and restoration program to respond to the many cases of abuse that children were facing in their homes and communities.

With our desire to serve God by ministering to the needs of at-risk children, it became very apparent that this is where God was calling us, and we came on board with AMG in January 2011.

Each child that comes into our care has a story, and that story matters to God and to us. Our mission at AMG is to "advance with compassion the command of Christ to evangelize and make disciples," but we recognize that if we do not confront the abuse, and rescue and restore these children from the abusers, it will be very difficult for them to hear and understand the love of God. It is vital to understand each individual child, their story, their past, and seek to bring healing. This can ultimately only be done through the love of Christ, so they can be brought to a healthy place of understanding and receiving of His love.

Many of these precious children have been wounded by physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Most of their abusers were themselves abused. Our goal is to break these cycles—to deal with the abuse the children have

experienced, and address the haunting effects of abuse in their adult life. We seek to develop and implement a Child Protection Program before the end of this year.

Mother Teresa once said, "I never look at the masses as my responsibility; I look at the individual. I can only love one person at a time—just one, one, one. I began by picking up one person. Maybe if I had not picked up that one person, I wouldn't have gone on to pick up forty-two thousand. The same thing goes for you...in your family...in your church or community. Just begin—one, one, one." This has become our motto.

The program we are developing will have two sides to it: Protection and Restoration. Confronting abuse here in Guatemala is very difficult. Corruption and theft of funds meant to do good are routine. Injustice and impunity are rampant. Violence, gangs, and fear of threats and retribution are commonplace in the areas where we work. So we are cultivating relationships with other NGO's and government officials to assist us with protection, and are concentrating more of our efforts on restoration once the child is as "safe" as possible.

The challenge can be overwhelming but our calling is clear. So we invite you to consider ways to partner with us in this ministry of care for the children of Guatemala.

Become informed. Learn more about AMG Guatemala and our ministry to at-risk children when you visit <http://www.amgguatemala.org>. Pray that God will send us trained counselors and social workers for the program by year's end—the right persons, with the calling and preparation to work with at-risk, wounded children.

Give. We are seeking help to fund the salary (\$6,000) of at least one social worker and one psychologist—positions that are crucial to our team. To make a gift visit AMG's website or call 1-800-251-7206. Thank you for joining with us in prayer and support.

Chad Smith and his wife Marlana serve with AMG International in Guatemala City, Guatemala. They have four children.

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

Book Review—9/12/2011

Preaching as Worship: An Integrative Approach to Formation in Your Church, Michael J. Quicke, 2011, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Mich., ISBN 9780801092268, 260 pages. \$17.99, softcover.

In our culture, we tend to separate church services into two pieces, preaching (the spoken teaching from God's Word) and worship (the music and/or other creative arts). In *Preaching as Worship* (as the title implies) Michael Quicke seeks to show that this dichotomy is neither biblical nor the most effective model for promoting spiritual growth.

In analyzing the perceived problem, Quicke seeks to remind those who specialize in "worship" (i.e. song leaders, musicians, etc.) that all of Christian life and service constitutes worship, and of the primacy and power of God's Word in bringing life to God's people. He urges them to allow Scripture and orthodox, Trinitarian theology direct all creative expressions of worship.

Quicke then turns his attention to preachers, reminding them that Scripture is filled with references and commands to worship God through singing, dancing, playing music, etc. He challenges those pastors who take little or no interest in the worship service beyond their sermon preparation to re-evaluate their approach. He shows that music and art can help God's truth sink into our hearts at an emotional (almost subconscious) level that complements the rational level on which the written and

spoken Word of God operates and that both are crucial to spiritual growth in the Church.

After diagnosing this disparity, Quicke offers a few correctives. First, he encourages pastors and worship leaders to consider examining a more traditional liturgical approach to integrating the emotional and rational aspects of worship (such as following a Church Year lectionary, incorporating the congregational recitation of creeds and Scripture into the service, etc.). Second, he spends several chapters sharing practical advice on how pastors and worship leaders can work together to prepare unified services that bring music and sermons together to most fruitfully draw believers to glorify God.

While Quicke's heart is in the right place in this book, many readers may find his appeal to liturgical traditions too much of a de-emphasis on expositional preaching and teaching. Still there is much value in his appeal to bring our minds and hearts together through worship to rightly glorify our magnificent, holy God. For this, *Preaching as Worship* is worth reading.

Justin Lonas

Target: Pastors, Worship Leaders
Type: Preaching/Worship/Church Practices
Take: Recommended

News Update—9/12/2011

Iranian Authorities Free Christian after Year in Prison

Iranian authorities on August 29 released a Christian after 359 days of detainment on charges of spreading Christianity among Farsi-speaking Iranians and having ties with foreign Christian organizations, according to Compass Direct News.

Authorities arrested Vahik Abrahamian, 45, a dual Iranian and Dutch citizen who belongs to Iran's Armenian community, and his wife on Sept. 4, 2010 in Hamadan, along with another Iranian Christian couple, Arash Kermanjani and Arezou Teimouri. On April 30 authorities released Abrahamian's wife, Sonia, along with Kermanjani and Teimouri, and Abrahamian was ultimately held in the Hamadan general prison ward.

The couple worked with drug addicts and other marginalized Iranians, according to Farsi Christian News Network. Abrahamian had become a Christian in the Netherlands, where he visited an Iranian church. At that

time he found freedom from his own drug addiction, and in 2006 he returned to Iran to work with drug users.

Authorities were incensed that Abrahamian worked with marginalized Farsi-speaking Muslims, and even more that he had connections with foreign Christians, said an Iranian Christian pastor in the region on the condition of anonymity.

Religion Today Summaries

Pakistan: Police Admit Taliban Murdered Minister Shahbaz Bhatti

Shahbaz Bhatti, 42, the first-ever Christian to serve in the Pakistan cabinet, who had vigorously campaigned for minority religious rights in Pakistan, which is 95 percent Muslim, was killed by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

ASSIST News Service says this news was told to Pakistan's Senate Standing Committee (Interior) on August 24, 2011, by Islamabad's most senior police officer, IGP Bani Amin Khan, according to *The Express Tribune*. "The

IGP said that the police had identified two suspects, but they had gone abroad—to Dubai—before they could be caught,” said a message sent by Aftab Alexander Mughal, editor with Minorities Concern of Pakistan.

According to this group, Bhatti had received numerous death threats from religious extremists before his assassination. Bhatti had criticized the country’s blasphemy laws, which makes it a capital crime to insult Islam, and has also campaigned for the release of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother-of-five who has been sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy and is appealing her sentence on death row.

Religion Today Summaries

Study Shows Abortion Tied to Depression, Suicide

Women who have undergone an abortion have an 81 percent higher risk for mental health problems and are more likely to attempt suicide, abuse alcohol and suffer depression, *Baptist Press* reports.

The study appears in the latest edition of the *British Journal of Psychiatry* and is getting considerable attention from both sides of the abortion debate. The researchers examined 22 studies from 1995-2009 involving 877,000 women, including 163,000 who had experienced an abortion. The paper’s author, Priscilla K. Coleman of Bowling Green State University, said there actually are “hundreds of studies” showing a link between abortion and serious mental health risks, and that three recent studies that reached a very different conclusion had major flaws.

“There are in fact some real risks associated with abortion that should be shared with women as they are counseled prior to an abortion decision,” Coleman writes, chiding the research community for not conducting unbiased research. The fact that the study was published in one of the world’s leading psychiatric journals is important, those who monitor the abortion debate say.

Religion Today Summaries

Clergy Plan Ground Zero Public Prayer Service for September 10

With clergy and first-responders not invited to the official 10-year memorial of the 9/11 attacks, a group that feels it is imperative to have a public prayer witness at Ground Zero initiated a public prayer service which met in front of St. Paul’s Chapel on Broadway, at 10:00 a.m. on September 10, and walk over to Ground Zero.

According to a Christian Newswire release, the organizers of the prayer service are deeply troubled that Mayor Bloomberg has banned all prayer, public expressions of faith and clergy at the Sunday 9/11 Memorial Service.

In correspondence to New York City Police Commissioner Kelly Attorney Brian Chavez-Ochoa states: “We are aware of Mayor Bloomberg’s edict that no public prayer will be offered and furthermore, that no clergy will be able to speak at the city’s planned event for September 11, 2011 at Ground Zero. Therefore, we are seeking a permit and/or consent to hold a prayer vigil the day before the city’s event. I am asking for your intercession in facilitating and expediting the process.”

Religion Today Summaries

Texas Sonogram Law Blocked by U.S. Judge

A federal district judge has blocked enforcement of a Texas law passed in May requiring women seeking abortions to undergo a sonogram at least 24 hours prior to the procedure and to hear the baby’s heartbeat and a description from the abortion provider of the baby’s physical features.

Baptist Press reports that U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks of Austin, in an Aug. 30 injunction, said the law, which was to go into effect Sept. 1, “compels physicians to advance an ideological agenda with which they may not agree, regardless of any medical necessity, and irrespective of whether the pregnant women wish to listen.” Elaborating on his ruling, Sparks wrote that the law’s requirements expand beyond medically necessary information and “are unconstitutional violations of the First Amendment right to be free from compelled speech.”

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott filed a notice of appeal in the case shortly after the decision was announced. Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who signed the bill into law on May 19, lamented the ruling. “Every life lost to abortion is a tragedy and today’s ruling is a great disappointment to all Texans who stand in defense of life,” Perry said in a statement.

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—From SermonHall.com

Sermon Starters
Finishing the Race
 2 Timothy 4:6-10

Intro.: Paul describes the Christian life as a race. He served faithfully and finished well. In this race, there are four kinds of runners.

I. Some Never Start the Race: King Agrippa Was almost Persuaded to be a Christian (Acts 26:28)

II. Some Start Running But Then Quit: Demas Deserted Paul Because He Loved This Present World (2 Tim.4:10)

III. Some Have a Great Start, But Get Sidetracked: Although King Solomon Was the Wisest Man on Earth, He Turned to Idols when He Was Old (1 Kings 11:4-6)

IV. Some people Are Faithful until the End: “*Run in Such As Way That You May Win*” (1 Cor. 9:24)

Kent Crockett

The Device of Diversion

2 Corinthians 2:11

Intro: A diversion is “a turning aside from a course or plan; an attack or feint that draws the attention and force of an enemy from the point of the principle operation.”

Prop: Satan uses many devices to divert us in life. Let us notice several.

I. The Diversion of Earthly Affairs (2 Tim. 2:4)

A. There are many non-sinful things we should not get wrapped up in.

B. We are not good soldiers for Christ if we get overly-involved in earthly affairs.

II. The Diversion of Cares and Riches (Matt. 13:22)

A. Cares are forbidden (Matt. 6:25ff; Phil. 4:6, 19).

B. Riches deceived Judas, rich young ruler, etc. (1 Tim. 6:9, 10, 17-19).

III. The Diversion of Worldly Things (1 John 2:15-17)

A. Flesh diversions (sexual sins).

B. Sight diversions (Matt. 5:29).

C. Pride diversions (self, outward appearance, accomplishments, etc.).

IV. The Diversion of Another “Gospel” (Gal. 1:6)

V. The Diversion of Profitless Questions (1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16; Titus 1:14)

A. These are diversionary issues that turn us away from the real issues of eternity.

B. Even good Barnabas was carried away by such (Gal. 2:13).

Conc: 3 ways to overcome these clever, subtle devices: set a goal (Col. 3:1-2), keep your eyes on the goal (Phil. 3:13-14), and always look unto Jesus (Heb. 12:1-3; Matt. 24:23-26).

Croft M. Pentz

Illustrations

Falling as Rome Fell?

In his essay on “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, Jeffrey D. Arthurs quotes Edward Gibbon’s book, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, to establish the resemblance between our postmodern culture and that of the ancient Roman Empire, “All religions were regarded by the people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by

the politicians as equally useful!” Aren’t the contemporary similarities striking? If we continue as we’re going, won’t our American culture come to an end the same way as Rome’s?

Steve D. Eutsler

Recognizing the Value of a Soul

To speak enthusiastically of a Rubens or Rembrandt finely framed and installed in the stately chambers of the National Gallery of Art, is easy enough. It is only to echo the general judgment, to do which we need none of our own. But to know in an instant a masterpiece, when lying in a lumber shop or amid the rubbish of a sales room, when the colors are overlaid with grime and no signature is to be seen, is to possess the true artistic sense indeed.

So our gracious Lord discerned in the men and women of His day, whom others despised, the image of God, though all defaced and marred with sin, and spoke of them as lost sheep, lost pieces of silver, lost souls over whose finding all Heaven would rejoice. He saw worth—soul value—in the apparently unworthy.

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts

On the Future

Do you know how to make God laugh? Tell Him your future plans!

Anonymous

The world is not through with the cross, but it will soon be through without it.

Paul E. Holdcraft, *Quick Notes for Church Bulletins*

You will keep on getting what you always got if you keep on doing what you always did.

R. W. Seaman

Today’s poor choices are a down payment on tomorrow’s problems.

J. David Branon

Plan with vision, proceed with optimism, and achieve with enthusiasm.

No one can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending.

The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.

These three via the *Old Union Reminder*

Puzzles and 'Toons

Church 'Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:

- ANSWERS**
1. A faithful messenger to those who send him (Prov. 25:13).
 2. Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:1).
 3. Euroclydon (Acts 27:14).
 4. Hail, mingled with fire (Ex. 9:23,24).
 5. "A continual dropping in a very rainy day" (Prov. 27:15).
 6. Zion's Nazarites (Lam. 4:7).
 7. Four angels standing on the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1).
 8. Killed a lion in the midst of a pit (1 Sam. 23:20).
 9. A cloud of the latter rain (Prov. 16:15).
 10. Elam (Jer. 49:36).

- ACROSTIC #33: ANSWERS**
- Mark (10:15) — "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."*
- A. TARSHISH
 - B. COVET
 - C. OUTFIELD
 - D. LONELY
 - E. MICAH
 - F. ALL THINGS
 - G. REVELLE
 - H. KEDESH
 - I. VOODOO
 - J. YOUTH
 - K. TRINITY
 - L. ENROGEL
 - M. SWEATER
 - N. HENNA

Father Abraham's Question Box

A Matter of Taste

1. Under the Mosaic Law, what was a woman accused of adultery required to drink?
2. How is the "bread of deceit" described?
3. What was the Israelite required to season with salt?
4. To whom is every bitter thing sweet?
5. What did Job ask had any taste?
6. What horticultural proverb seemed to have been popular in Ezekiel's day?
7. How did Elisha purify the spring near Jericho?
8. What cannot come forth simultaneously from a fountain?
9. To the "foolish woman," what is sweet?
10. When John ate the "little book," in Revelation, how did it taste?
See answers on page 27.

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, May 1994

Hidden Wisdom on next page

HIDDEN WISDOM: BIBLE ACROSTIC # 34

BY MARK A. OSHMAN

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

HAPPY SOLVING!!

1K	2I			3F	4D	5L			6A	7B	8E	9G			10N	11J	12K
13F	14M	15L	16I	17E	18Q			19H	20A	21C	22E	23I		24D	25J		
26G	27H	28L		29N	30M	31G	32A	33Q		34E	35B	36D	37F	38L	39I	40A	
41M	42N	43G	44K	45L	46C		47H	48I	49M			50E	51N		52A	53M	54I
	55H	56B	57J	58F	59G	60M			61Q	62I		63N	64D	65B	66K		
67L	68E	69B	70C	71G	72Q	73A		74L	75M	76J	77I	78E	79H		80D	81C	
82F	83B	84K		85E	86N	87I	88L			89B	90M	91G		92D	93F	94E	95I
	96G	97B	98J	99F	100Q	101E	102L	103K	104I		105H	106E	107G	108C	109B		

- A. Abode 6 20 40 73 32 52
- B. "I will make thine enemies thy
....." 65 7 35 89 109 69 97 56 83
- C. A prominent figure in Joseph's
first dream 21 70 108 46 81
- D. U.S. author and physician (1809-1894) ... 4 80 92 36 64 24
- E. Descriptive of Jesus Christ,
metaphorically 34 68 94 101 22 8 50 85 106 78 17
- F. Enormous 99 82 13 37 93 3 58
- G. Conversed 26 71 31 96 59 107 43 91 9
- H. A daughter of Job 55 79 19 27 105 47
- I. Miscellany (3 wds.) 77 16 104 2 87 48 54 62 39 95 23
- J. Gomorrah's sister city 57 25 76 11 98
- K. A Shakespearian protagonist 44 1 12 84 103 66
- L. Fearless 74 15 102 38 45 67 88 5 28
- M. He tried to usurp Solomon's throne 14 49 30 75 53 41 60 90
- N. The Israelites worshipped his image
in the wilderness (alt. spelling) 29 51 63 42 10 86
- O. What Venus de Milo lacks 61 100 72 18 33