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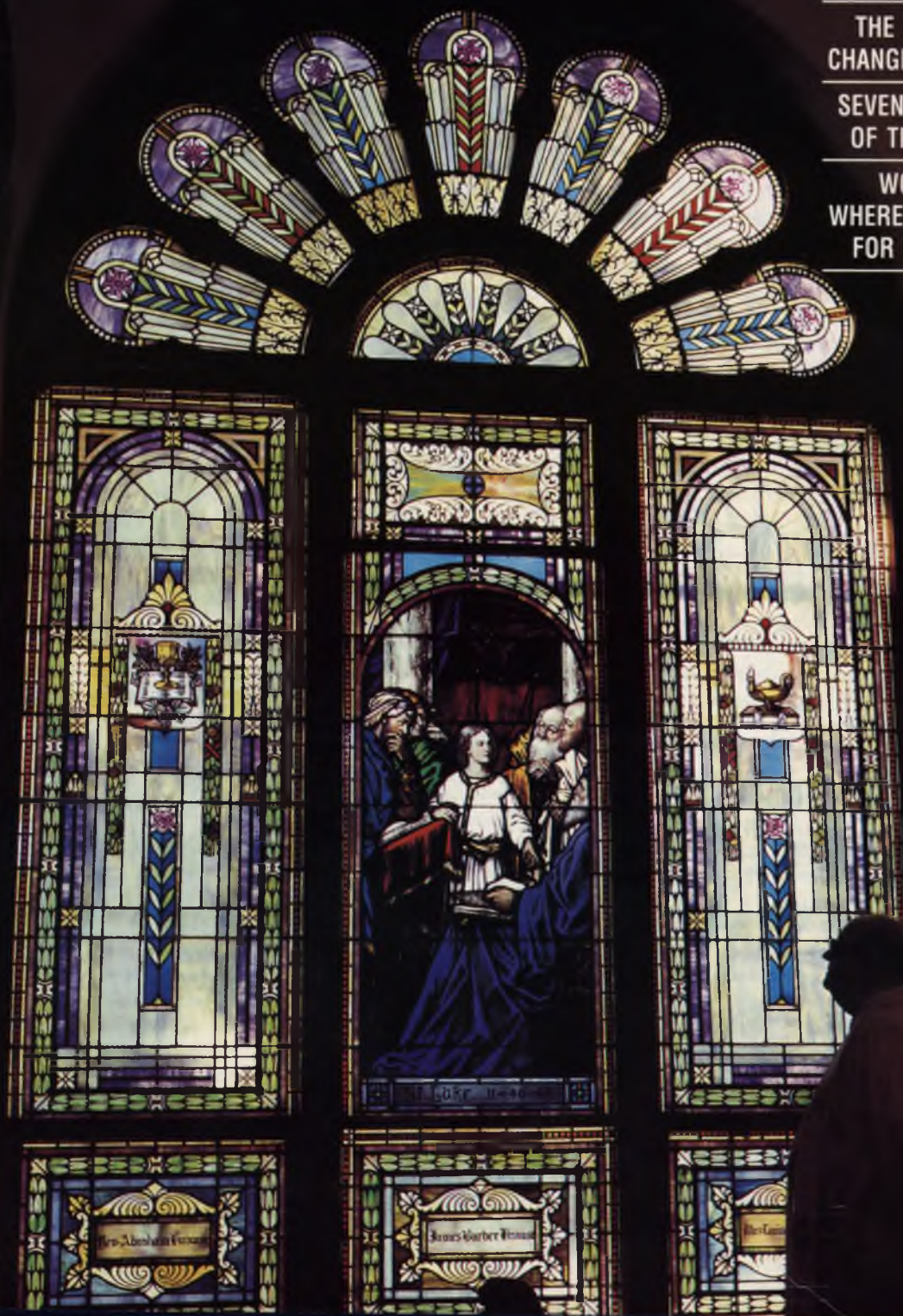
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MAGAZINE

THE GOD WHO
CHANGES HIS MIND

SEVEN BLUNDERS
OF THE WORLD

WORSHIP:
WHERE DO YOU GO
FOR LESSONS?



*A faith to live by,
a self fit to live with,
a work fit to live for,
somebody to love
and be loved by
—these make life.*

—Joseph Fort Newton



The Most Neglected Ministry in the Church

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.

What is the most neglected ministry in the church? Ministering to ministers. Out of deep gratitude, Paul spoke of "Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me" (2 Tim. 1:16-17).

During a very disappointing time during my early ministry, two pastoral friends took me to lunch, Maurice Palmquist and Neil Wiseman. They taught me that day that we need each other in the ministry. Too often we get so busy that we neglect building networks among our peers. Unfortunately, when a pastor is hurting, we either don't know it, or we avoid getting involved. Either way the deep loneliness feels like neglect and rejection.

Many years ago I resigned my church with no place to go. When I attended the District Assembly, I was shocked that I had suddenly become invisible among my colleagues. No longer did I fit in. I felt very much alone. However, I learned to appreciate the much-needed ministry of Onesiphorus—and have tried to join his clerical order.

We need to minister to the former pastor. He has invested a part of his life in the place you now serve. He knows the rules of the game: stay away and don't interfere. However, as a successor, I have tried to express love and appreciation and open the door for former pastors to come freely any time. Following Wayne Hagemeyer became a special joy. For 14½ years he served as pastor. He stepped aside to retire. I knew what he didn't know: after being out for a few months, he would feel isolated. So I invited him to stay in our congregation and be part of our family. We

celebrated his birthdays and anniversaries with gifts of appreciation. His close friends became our close friends. Pastor Hagemeyer was one of my best supporters. I love him!

We need to minister to the unassigned pastor. The unassigned pastor feels like "neither fish nor fowl"—he often feels ill at ease among pastors and certainly does not feel like a layman. One pastoral family visited our church, having been voted out of a church in a distant city. Fellows from our church got a truck and moved the family to our community. They are among our most faithful families, having contributed much to the ministry of our congregation. The unassigned pastoral families in my church are some of my closest friends and best supporters.

We need to minister to the retired pastors. Never have they been threats to me or my churches. But I have met many who feel pushed aside, unsure of where they should fit in. Many have found meaningful service on church staffs and have given far more than they have received. Seek them out for your church family.

We need to minister to the wounded pastor. Remember again, "Onesiphorus . . . searched hard for me until he found me," Paul rejoices. Often a wounded pastor pulls away from pastors and people—but I urge you to pursue him or her. That pastor is worth salvaging to the church. Befriend him. Three neighboring pas-

tors and two neighboring youth pastors have found encouragement and emotional healing and a lot of love from my congregational family. Some eventually moved on to successful ministries, and others have joined the ministry of my church. Reach out to your wounded pastoral friends.

A ministerial friend got a fatal case of "staff infection." We were able to reach across the miles by telephone to join hands in prayer and encouragement. The Lord has brought him through the desert time and given him a beautiful place in which to serve as pastor once again. And I know he would be there for me also.

A retired pastor of long-standing friendship wrote a letter about a pastor who had left his church under some kind of pressure. He had been a fellow pastor and friend long ago. Again, by telephone, we shared and prayed. He told me, "You are the only person who has called me."

Wounded pastors need someone to help them through the devastating experiences. I believe, also, that wounded pastors need time for emotional and spiritual healing to take place before they take their next assignment. That healing can be assisted by careful, loving, sensitive friends who can join with the hurting colleague in seeking the touch of the Healer of broken hearts. Would you join me in the Order of Onesiphorus?

What can we do?

First, we must take time to genuinely care.

Second, we must listen without a censorious spirit.

Third, we must keep utter confidentiality.

Fourth, we must let them return to service at their own pace. Do not push them into ministry, but give

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CONTACT:
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On March 19, 1992, a major fire destroyed our church sanctuary and other parts of our local church building, including my office and study and all of its contents. The fire was deliberately set after thefts of about \$10,000 of contents.

I had been a member of the Ministers Tape Club, I think, almost from its beginning. Many of the messages and much of the information had become a valued part of my resource material. I would like to know if it might be possible to replace some or all of these tapes. I would also, welcome anything from minister's libraries that might be for sale, in part or in whole.

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Authors should address all articles and correspondence to Editor, *The Preacher's Magazine*, 10814 E. Broadway, Spokane, WA 99206. Self-addressed, stamped envelopes should accompany all manuscripts.

This quarter's theme on worship comes from our first all-Canadian editorial board.

True Worship Is Work As Well as Pleasure

by Ronald Fry

Downsview, Ont.

The real enemy of worship is not dullness or boredom. The deadliest foe of true worship is a kind of indulgent, insatiable quest for gratification. I'm referring to an egocentric "pit stop" approach that treats worship as a rejuvenating kind of tonic that meets for a moment the need to experience God.

A lot of frustration and emptiness that now surrounds worship flows from a frantic attempt to attract and keep this generation coming to church by catering to their needs and expectations. Carefully designed "pep rally" worship touches people primarily at a feeling level and contributes to the polluted atmosphere of indulgence. A lot of nice songs are being sung; nice feelings are being felt; nice thoughts are being thought without any genuine acknowledgment of the presence of God and His claim upon our lives. Much of our current worship remains more psychological than theological, more fleshly than spiritual, and gives enjoyment but little else. Little of it seems even remotely connected to the worship of Almighty God.

If one can escape the indulgent atmosphere and bow before a holy God with humility and adoration, the elements of true worship have the power to transform lives.

Take a fresh look at worship—worship as service. While the concept of "worship as service" has been with us a long time, a spectator generation has consciously or unconsciously ignored it. A beautiful expression of the meaning of worship is found in the Greek word, *latreuō*. It means "to render religious service or honor, and, in the strict sense, to perform sacred services, to offer gifts, to worship God."¹ Our word *liturgy* is derived from this Greek word. "Originally a service or

public duty rendered by citizens of a Greek city-state, the translators of the Septuagint applied it to public worship, the public service of God."² The word *liturgy* is composed of two elements: *laos* and *ergon*, "people" and "work." The underlying concept sees worship as the work of the people. "It is not a performance that we observe, but a service that we do."³ Worship is not primarily for our personal enjoyment but is a service we render to God.

This service is not confined to the formal hour of worship. The real service, in terms of the mission of God's people in the world, begins once the formal worship service concludes. Worship, far from being a timed event that better not run over the hour, is actually a continuous, consistent way of life. In true worship, the "liturgy" does not end with the benediction.

Much of Our Worship Is Introverted

Many persons have missed the point of true worship. John MacArthur observes correctly that "we've been too long conditioned to think that the church is to entertain us."⁴ The sense that worship is presented for God does not exist in many churches. There is little articulation of His worth or praise of His glory to the honor of His name. People may

experience worship that has almost none of the qualities of true worship—offering ourselves and bending to God's will and ways. Rather, many popular movements experience indulgence in emotions and an inordinate quest for self-gratification. Worship as service, inside and outside the church, in word and deed, in spirit and in truth often is missing.

Today we witness pastors and lay leaders in a frenzy, frantically attempting to make worship exciting and relevant. Nothing causes greater embarrassment than worship that is criticized as being irrelevant or boring. God forbid! As a result, many church leaders bend over backward to cater to a spectator generation that wants worship that is enjoyable. When they don't like the worship they most likely will quit. "They go where they believe their needs are being met."⁵ The concern uppermost in their minds is not the worship of God but having a good time. When asked why they don't attend worship they simply say "they don't care" for the music or the preaching or the people or whatever. Self-centered, self-absorbed, they express little concern for anyone or anything but themselves. Their consumer outlook is limited to their own needs. "This narcissism," Leith Anderson says, "is the product of their individualism and sense of entitlement."⁶ Having grown up in a world of relative security and affluence, where everything has been given to them, they have a sense of entitlement. They're entitled to enjoyable worship that meets their needs.

People approach worship with the expectation of getting something out of it, as if it were a slot machine with a payoff. Getting something out of worship may be a legitimate expecta-



tion, but it is not a legitimate aim. The primary aim in true worship is to please God by bringing an offering or performing a service worthy of Him and honoring Him. In making the prime aim of worship the satisfying of our own needs, we lose authentic worship as a myriad of desires.

Rethinking the Target Audience

It's important to realize that "the most basic consideration in true Christian worship, however, is not the effect it has on the one who worships, but the effect it has on God."⁷ We need to reconsider who it is we are trying to please in worship. We ought to ask, "What does God want from our worship?" This requires rethinking about the target audience. Failure to target the right audience in marketing a product can result in loss of sales and profit. Failure to target the right audience in worship is to miss the most important priority in worship—God.

Naively people hold the idea that the audience in worship is the worshipers and that worship is for them. They think that the worshipers are to enjoy the performance of the director (pastor) and worship leaders. However, in true worship, the worshipers are part of the cast; God is the audience. The worshipers perform for His good pleasure. Instead of concentrating on what the worshipers are going to get out of worship, we need to wonder what God is going to get out of it. Will our worship bring Him pleasure? Will our songs, prayers, praise, and giving please Him? God is the audience in true worship. The actions of the worshipers should please Him.

Genuine worship is responsive. "It is the response of the creature to the eternal."⁸ Divine initiative evokes our response. A worshiper who seeks to please only himself in worship has misunderstood the meaning of worship. At the very heart of worship is a desire to please God. The goal of true worship is not the maximum personal satisfaction of the worshiper, but rather the satisfaction of God with the worshiper who does "worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24, KJV). The writer to the Hebrews admonishes the true worshiper to "continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do

good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (13:15-16). The worship that pleases God is sacrificial service.

True Worship Is Essentially an Offering of Ourselves to God

Worship is the response of the worshiper to God. Two aspects are involved in the worshipers' response to His redemptive act of love in Christ. First, there is the nature of the response; and, second, there is the nature of those making the response.

Carefully designed "pep rally" worship contributes to the polluted atmosphere of indulgence.

The nature of the worshipers' response to God in worship is summed up in the concept of sacrifice. "Sacrifice is a positive act. Its essence is something given; not something given up. It is a freewill offering."⁹ Worship should not be considered as getting from God. Worship is giving; worship is offering. Rob Staples says, "All our worship should be regarded as an offering to God."¹⁰ Robert G. Rayburn is emphatic when he says, "If there is anything that evangelical Protestants need to understand today, it is this fact."¹¹ Worship is sacrifice.

In sacrifice, something is given voluntarily and unconditionally to God. This gesture of generosity in turn evokes God's generosity toward the worshiper. As a responsive act, sacrifice or offering is a service done in obedience to God. The apostle Paul urged Roman believers, "in view of God's mercy," to offer themselves "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom. 12:1). Offering oneself as

a "living sacrifice" does not mean a once-for-all surrender, but the continuously new act of obedience the believer makes to God. Paul calls this our "spiritual act of worship" or "reasonable service" (KJV). Such service does not attempt to coerce God into granting favors, but it is a genuine response of gratitude. Obedient service to God is the essence of true worship. Sacrificial service "consists of confessing and praising God and of loving deeds."¹² The writer to the Hebrews admonishes, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (13:15-16).

True Christian worship offers to God that honor, praise, thanksgiving, and obedient service of which the worshiper is totally convinced He is worthy. The clearest example of true worship is seen in Christ Jesus, who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:7-8). Rayburn says, "The cross of Christ is at the very center of all truly Christian worship."¹³ As the worshiper becomes aware of God's love for him in Christ, he is moved to offer himself to God.

The second aspect involved in the worshipers' response to God is the nature of the worshiper himself. MacArthur says, "The crucial factor in worship in the church is not the form of worship, but the state of the hearts of the saints."¹⁴ John Stott concurs. He says, "In essence, the worship pleasing to God is inward not outward, the praise of the heart not the lips, spiritual not ceremonial. It is not movement of our bodies in elaborate ritual (however graceful and elegant); it is the movement of our spirit toward Him in love and obedience."¹⁵

The most important preparation of all for worship is the preparation of the worshiper. And this is usually the most neglected. Our readiness for worship depends upon the condition of our hearts—our sincerity, fidelity, humility, expectancy, and purity. Scripture sounds the note of preparedness in Psalm 51: "You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt

offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (vv. 16-17).

The true meaning of worship is lost when people use worship only for personal satisfaction or therapeutic side effects. The big watershed is reached when we move from trying to get something from God to offering something to God—principally ourselves. Pastors must find ways to help their people make this shift of focus.

The Role of the Pastor in Worship

How can true worship of God be restored in our churches? The initiative lies with the pastor as one who is called to lead people in worship. The supreme task of the pastor is to encourage people to offer themselves to God.

The ultimate questions for the pastor are not: "How can I satisfy the needs of my congregation? How can I meet their expectations?" The most appropriate questions are: "In what ways can I as a pastor help my congregation to worship? How can I help the people (remember that liturgy literally means in the Greek, 'work of the people') to offer themselves to God?"¹⁶ Every pastor is constrained to attempt four basic tasks that bear upon helping the people to truly worship God.

1. Create worship that is God-centered.

Much worship is self-centered. We need to rediscover that God is the Object of worship. Our people need to be confronted with the overwhelming glory and holiness of God. In our day of casual and informal worship, people tend to assume an unwarranted familiarity with God. We are encouraged by the writer to the Hebrews to "be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (12:28-29).

Whatever happened to reverence for God? Awe is an essential part of worship that is missing today. People can be aided in contemplating the holiness of God through the use of hymns and choruses that focus their attention on the objective, transcendent, and mysterious rather than on the personal, immediate, and mundane. Songs, prayers, and scriptures

that speak directly to God rather than about Him can aid the worshiper in centering his thoughts and affections upon Him.

2. Provide opportunities in worship for people to offer themselves.

Every worshiper has a gift or gifts that can be offered in worship. These gifts need to be released and deployed. This can only happen when those responsible for worship take the initiative to involve people in worship. The pastor must be an enabler and liberator. The key concept is that of participation, making it possible for the people who worship to take an active part in various forms. When the pastor is sensitive and open to contributions from people with various abilities, all kinds of diverse gifts become evident. When these gifts are discovered and offered to God, they may enable the whole congregation to become more aware of the reality of God and to respond to Him joyfully and completely.

The primary aim of true worship is to please God.

With some imagination, numerous ways can be perceived in which people can share more positively in worship. Persons in our congregations would welcome an opportunity to contribute in worship. We might consider the possibilities of using a wide range of people with musical talent, vocal and instrumental. We need to accept the gifts of the inspirational reader, the creative banner designer, the skillful flower arranger, and the dramatic actor. Creative people in our congregations could share in planning the shape and content of worship. Still others would be willing to give a personal testimony or be interviewed about some aspect of their life of faith. People can be involved as greeters, ushers, and in preparation

and serving of Communion. The task of helping people to discover, develop, and deploy their gifts is one of the rewarding duties of the pastor. One minister of music spent time developing the talents of a budding guitarist. Once a week he met for several hours with the fellow to practice the songs and choruses to be used in the children's worship on the following Sunday. The result was not only improved musical skills but also spiritual growth and a stronger personal relationship. The pastor must help people to understand their contribution as an offering to God, a ministry with eternal consequences.

3. Construct worship that is contemporary.

This means shaping worship to relate meaningfully to real people in the real world. Meaningful worship is significant and influential in the life of the worshiper. It requires listening first to God and then to the people we're leading in worship. Today emphasis is on listening to the people and meeting contemporary needs. Much is being written about church growth and the importance of the pastor keeping in touch with the people he wants to serve. The underlying assumption is that meaningful worship will not happen unless it meets the needs of people.

Keeping in touch with the people is important. But if it is the major consideration, or only consideration, it will lead to compromising worship to meet the needs of this age. Indulgence will take the place of sacrifice. Bending to the will and ways of the people will dominate rather than bending to the will and ways of God. People will come to worship to get, not to give; to watch a performance, not to serve.

Elements of vital worship are found in the New Testament Church. In Acts, Luke records that the disciples "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (2:42).

First, prayer is a vital element of worship because it creates the climate for true worship. Prayer influences our minds toward God and sanctifies our motives and wills. Thus prayer creates the conditions conducive to worship.

Second, instruction is vital because

correct beliefs are essential to the true relationship between the worshiper and God. Truth and worship are related. Prayer creates the climate, and instruction provides the proper perspective, for worship. Instruction helps the worshiper to evaluate his life from the viewpoint of God's revelation in Christ.

A third vital note in worship is celebration. This is proper. Jesus died for our sins; He arose from the dead as Victor over sin and death. True worship celebrates in the presence of the living, risen Christ. We experience the joy of being with the One who loves us and is therefore loved by us. We receive strength and vision and life, which enable us to meet life's challenges. If our celebration is genuine, it will lead to loving relationships and dedicated service to God's will and purpose for us.

Finally, in fellowship, the church embodies the unity of those who are in Christ. Therefore, if there are divisions within the congregation, worship is jeopardized. Thus a strong ethical emphasis characterizes Christian worship. Consider the words of our Lord himself: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). Our people must be prepared to let this word govern their relationships with the church. Fellowship, along with instruction, celebration, and prayer, is vital in creating meaningful worship.

Robert Webber says, "The principle to keep in mind in constructing worship for today is that we ought not to allow worship to be accommodated to current cultural norms to such an extent that worship loses its meaning."¹⁷ We need to heed this warning. However, this should not prevent us from making necessary changes in our worship for our own time and place. Rather than uncritically endorsing the traditional forms passed on to us, we need to continually reconsider and reshape our worship to relate to the people of our day. This constructive task involves creativity and imagination. It also involves risk. Adapting worship prac-

tices to meet the needs of people where they are in our secular and pluralistic society requires prayer, divine wisdom, and discernment. Before the pastor listens to the people, he needs to listen to God. The real needs of people will only be met as they respond to His love within the context of His grace.

Every worshiper has a gift that can be offered in worship.

4. Lead worship that calls people to live transformed lives.

A transformed life begins with an awesome sense of the holiness of God. This was Isaiah's experience in worship as recorded in chapter 6. The vision of God's holiness led Isaiah to a devastating sense of his own unworthiness and sin. He responded to the holiness of God with confession and repentance for sin. With his confession came God's action of forgiveness and cleansing. Purged and made clean, he was available and ready for the Lord's service. Acknowledging God's claim upon his life, Isaiah was led to offer himself in service to God. True worship calls people to receive His gift of forgiveness, reconciliation, and cleansing. The gift of God commands our courageous discipleship. We cannot seriously worship Him without seriously asking what He commands us to do. This generation will be led into true worship only as pastors and leaders help them move from a life-style of self-fulfillment to one of self-denial for the cause of Christ.

In a worship service, the responsibility of worship leaders and members of the congregation is to direct their worship to God, not to the congregation. People came to worship God, not just to receive His blessings.

The entire service is an offering to Him. When worship is understood as a sacrificial offering to God, people come to worship for a different purpose. Rather than coming to "get their batteries charged," they come to give themselves to God. They understand that worship gives rather than receives.

Worship leaders need to ask themselves and their congregations: Is the worship of our people God-centered? Does our worship provide adequate opportunities for people to offer themselves to Him? Do our worship services relate to people today? Does our worship lead our people to live transformed lives? These questions of worship must be asked, not once, but continuously. Courageous, honest, and prayerful consideration of these questions will aid worship leaders in leading their people in worship that glorifies God.

If you are hoping for spiritual transformation in your people, don't cater to their immediate, self-centered needs. Instead, lead them to the Cross and especially to the One who laid down His life for them. Help them awakened to the reality of sacrificial love. Lead them to stand in awe and reverence in the presence of the Holy One. Moved to offer themselves to Him, they will discover the essence of true worship. Worship is service, the work of the people. ■

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Worship and Ministry

by Earl R. Wood

Surrey, B.C.

Worship and ministry intertwine closely as the fibers of a well-woven piece of fabric. To worship God is to minister to Him as well as to minister to or serve people.

The worship of God is considered by the Bible to be of paramount importance in the life of anyone who is attempting to live in relationship with Him. Judson Cornwall writes: "In a broad sense, worship is inseparable from life. It is not that man cannot live without worship, it is that he cannot fully live without worship, so deeply ingrained in his life is this component."¹

The Scriptures offer valuable insight into the life-style of various individuals and groups of people who gave themselves to the worship of God. Worship was not something tacked on to their schedules at the end of a busy and exhausting day, as if to say: "Oh yes, I almost forgot. I ought to spend some time in worship in order to keep God happy!" On the contrary, worship seems to have been looked upon as an integral part of the day's activities. In fact, it is not difficult to believe that at least some of the time, worship was the point around which the day and its activities revolved. It is noteworthy that momentous occasions were culminated by the gathering of the family or the nation around the altar of God in worship. The Bible indicates, for example, that Noah worshiped God as soon as he disembarked from the ark: "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it" (Gen. 8:20).

Abram made it a habit to spend time in worship as he responded to God's call. The Bible says:

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built an altar there to

the Lord, who had appeared to him.

From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord. Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev (Gen. 12:6-9).

One of the most beautiful scriptural passages is the story of the Israelites pausing in midflight in their exodus journey from Egypt to Canaan to praise the Lord for His hand of blessing and protection upon them. The Bible tells us that Miriam led the entire group of refugees in a celebration before the Lord, in the midst of what must have been an emotionally and physically exhausting time (Exodus 15). Worship seems to bring a sense of purpose and meaning to life.

I. WORSHIP IS MINISTRY

The book titled *God, Man, and Salvation* helps us understand the close relationship that connects worship and ministry. The writers state: "Worship is adoration, reverence, and communion. But it is, at the same time, an offering of oneself in service to God. It is identification with God through the Spirit for *maturity* in love and for the *ministry* of love to mankind."²

Worship is ministry to God. The Bible indicates that He is worthy to be worshiped. He deserves to be worshiped. Many well-qualified theologians have written, at considerable length, about the nature of God as revealed to us in the Scriptures and in Jesus, the Son of God. We believe

that God and only God is to receive the worship of the people of the earth. As the people of God come into His presence with songs of praise and adoration, focusing their minds on His majesty, power, wisdom, and knowledge, worship takes place. But during the course of worship, change comes about within the worshiper. The focus of attention switches from the person who is worshiping to God, the Object of our worship. There is a softening of willfulness and an increasing of tenderness and openness. As the people of God spend time thinking about Him and expressing their adoration, awe, and love to Him, a marvelous communion takes place between the Spirit of God and the people who are assembled before Him. When authentic worship occurs, the worshipers offer themselves to God in the spirit of surrender and submission. This attitude is, in itself, ministry—ministry to Him.

Purkiser, Taylor, and Taylor underscore this truth when they point out: "Worship is the joyful celebration of Christ's presence. . . . This activity is not a self-serving activity, but rather a witness to the world that the Church's commitment to her Lord is 'a service to God.'"³

There is a sense in which the worship of God is our "reason for being." He created us in the first place in order that He might enjoy fellowship with us. In light of the majesty and awesomeness of God, worship is the natural response of those who are relating to Him.

The glimpses into heaven afforded by the Scriptures show the heavenly beings completely focused on God and giving themselves in worship as their practical demonstration of that focus. Their worship does not seem to be a fringe activity, entered into either before or after they have accomplished all that needs to be done in their service of God. Worship is central to what takes place in heaven.

The Book of Revelation describes what was revealed to the apostle



John concerning heaven's throne room. It was apparent to John that whether the inhabitants were familiar looking or so unusual in their appearance that they defied easy description, everyone was preoccupied with worship. John reports:

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (4:6-8).

The worship activities of some of those in the throne room, rather than satisfying the desire of the rest of those present to worship God, seemed to ignite their desire. John goes on to say:

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (vv. 9-11).

The worship of God brings meaning and a sense of fulfillment to the hearts of heaven's inhabitants because, when they are worshipping, they are offering ministry or service to Him.

We who are still on our way to becoming citizens of the heavenly realm might do well to reflect upon what goes on in heaven. We seem to have some difficulty, at times, convincing ourselves that worship is worthy of our time or our energy. Why should we spend time actually worshipping God, let alone thinking about worship in order to learn to worship well?

If we understood that worship is a major component of our fellowship with God, we would not be so tempted to consider it incidental or a waste of time.

When we offer ourselves to God in worship, we are doing what He dreamed of when He created us. We are serving Him. We are ministering to Him. Time spent in worship is not time spent in a manner other than in a useful way. When we give ourselves to worship, we are giving ourselves to Him in the most worthy of occupations.

II. MINISTRY IS WORSHIP

The awareness of God's presence seems to draw worshipers to desire to give themselves to Him, to serve Him in whatever manner He sees fit.

The primary meaning of ministry is "to serve." A life-style that revolves around worship automatically includes the idea of ministry, in which the element of submission to God's will is central. There is an earnest desire to bring glory and honor to Him by what we *say* in our praise and adoration of God and by what we *do* in offering ourselves for His service.



During the course
of worship,
change comes
about within the
worshiper.



Jesus demonstrated what it means to be involved in ministry. The Gospel of Mark includes an interchange between Jesus and two of His disciples in which He underscores His commitment to a life of ministry. He says: "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

Worship and ministry are inextricably intertwined in the mind of Jesus. He seems to have had no thought of attempting to separate the one from the other. Jesus spent time worshipping His Father on a regular basis. A reading of the Gospels suggests that it was customary for Jesus to attend the

synagogues and to participate in the worship activities carried on at the Temple in Jerusalem. A study of the life of Jesus leaves us with the certainty that He enthusiastically participated in public worship of God. As a discipline, He practiced private devotion and worship as well. Permeating His teaching and preaching was the idea that participation in the rituals of worship, regardless of how elaborate those rituals or how meticulously they were followed, was not sufficient in and of itself. Worship devoid of practical service to others was not worship at all.

Jesus will have nothing to do with a proclamation of our love of God, no matter how earnestly that proclamation is made, if it is made in the absence of any ministry or service offered to people with whom God has brought us into contact. This thought is surely included in what Jesus was saying in His conversation with the "rich young man" of Matthew 19. Not only was the wealthy person instructed to give his wealth away as a demonstration of his utter trust in God, but also he was to give his wealth to the poor, so that their difficult lot in life would be eased somewhat by these additional resources. The worship of God and devotion to Him was to be demonstrated in acts of practical ministry. Jesus helped us see the need to focus both on God and on other persons.

Matthew 15 pictures Jesus in conversation with some Pharisees. These people were experts at worship in the sense that they knew the rituals and were careful to keep them. Their problem was that they failed to recognize the relationship between their worship activities and how they lived, or more specifically, how they treated other people. The Gospel account shows a vehement response from Jesus: "You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men'" (vv. 7-9).

Jesus was questioned by another Pharisee one day, this time concerning the greatest or most important commandment. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all

your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt. 22:37-40).



Worship is the natural response for those who are relating to God.



Worship and ministry go together in the mind of our Lord. He does not make allowance for us to come before God with words and feelings of adoration and praise while, at the same time, being unresponsive to people and their needs.

The Bible reminds us that God knows our motives and is not impressed by words alone. In teaching that our faith is given credence by the deeds that accompany our declaration of faith, the Book of James uses the illustration of one who, when faced with a person who is hungry and cold, simply encourages the person to be warmed and fed. The words of encouragement and comfort, however well intentioned, are of questionable value unless accompanied by practical assistance. Similarly, we lend credence to what we say to God during our times of worship by what we say to and do for each other in terms of practical ministry.

The intertwining of these two aspects of our relationship to God is quite obvious when we consider Jesus' life-style. The worship of God took a place of prominence in His life on the one hand, yet He was totally committed to a ministry to the whole person on the other hand. One day while preaching to the people, in response to their spiritual needs, Jesus was aware of their physical hunger and He refused to send them away until they had been fed.

God is our Heavenly Father. When we confess our sins to Him and ask

for His forgiveness, the Bible clearly teaches us that He forgives our sins and adopts us into His family. He is looking for close relationships. He is not content with "arm's length" relationships. He does not settle for being the figurehead to whom we give a respectful nod but do not include in the details of our days. Meeting the needs of His people, whether emotional, material, spiritual, or physical, remains in His thoughts.

The Old Testament gives abundant examples of God's provision for the practical needs of His people. He took an interest in the people of Israel. They could call on Him during times of hunger or thirst. Even their footwear lasted longer than might have been expected as they wandered in the wilderness prior to crossing the Jordan and taking possession of the land He had promised them. This detailed involvement by God on behalf of His people set Him apart from the gods of other nations. The God of Israel was the God who answered the prayers of His people, even when those prayers had to do with daily needs.

This precedent is carried on in the ministry of Jesus and by the people of the Early Church. The Book of Acts clearly implies that concern for the hungry among the people of the Church was considered normal and right. The Church gave itself, not only to singing songs of praise and to the work of prayer, but also to the distribution of food to the needy. Practical care for the needs of people was seen as worthy of being offered to God as a part of worship.

Jesus himself taught that service to people in such mundane ways as a cup of water or visits to the sick or imprisoned, if offered in the name of Jesus, was considered by God as service to Him.

III. WORSHIP ENHANCES MINISTRY

As the people of God come into His presence, focusing our minds on Him, offering praise and adoration to Him, we are equipped for ministry to other people. During a time of authentic worship, not only do we express our love for God, but the Holy Spirit ministers to us as well. God speaks of His love for us. He uplifts us, imparting an assurance of His presence, His power, and His provi-

sion for us. He also confirms to us His call to ministry.

The reality of touching God in worship assures us that we are important to Him, that He is watching over us and has our well-being at heart. The often-present barriers to ministry are broken down as we give ourselves to the worship of God.

Self-centeredness seems to form the foundation of that which keeps us from effective ministry. The need to keep ourselves "front and center" fades, and God is able to help us focus our minds on other people as we commune with Him. With the fading self-centeredness go other attitudes that preclude His work through us. Defensiveness, selfishness, joylessness, and other attitudes that block the free flow of God's love and mercy through us to others are removed. God is able then to do His work in the world through His people.



The worship of God is to be demonstrated in acts of practical ministry.



Spending time in the presence of God and opening our hearts to His fellowship enhances our desire to be used by Him to minister to others. When we have been worshipping God, we tend to see people in the same light that He sees them. The deep awareness that He loves the peoples of the world is the natural result of time spent with Him. As we worship Him, there is a transference of that love to the worshiper. The desire to participate in the work and purposes of God becomes a familiar and welcome compulsion within the hearts of His people. The more deeply we commune with God, the more difficult it is for us to isolate ourselves from others and to insulate ourselves from their needs. The social con-

science is awakened within us. We sense a need to become pro-active in response to the issues of society and the needs of individuals.

The strong temptation for the people of the church is to be overwhelmed by a feeling of inadequacy and fear in light of the magnitude of the problems people face. We know we ought to be working redemptively in the world, but where do we begin and how can we possibly be effective? Satan knows that if he can keep God's people focused on the problems of the world rather than on the One who has the power to bring solutions to those problems, his work of destruction will go on unabated.

The church at worship provides God with an effective "equipping time" as He leads His Church in ministry. Out of the experience of fellowship with God through worship, the Holy Spirit places a particular burden for ministry in the mind of the believer. Not only is there a general concern for people and problems around us, but also specific issues and specific people are brought to the forefront of our minds during the course of intimate communion with God.



The more deeply
we commune with
God, the more
difficult it is to
isolate ourselves
from others.



Commitment to regular worship, which actually opens up channels of communication between ourselves and God, makes it possible for the redemptive work of God to be managed by Him. Certain people are led to respond to certain challenges and problems, while others are led in different directions. In this way, God's work force is mobilized under His direction.

The problems that rightfully overwhelm us due to their seeming insurmountability are brought into proper perspective as the worshiper thinks about God rather than focusing exclusively on the problem. The power of God, by which He was able to call the universe into existence, gives us a sense that the problems of people are manageable. The sovereignty of God, which reminds us that He is still in charge, renews our courage. The ongoing presence of God reminds us that whatever work we are called to do will be done with Him beside us. The wisdom and knowledge of God assure us that we will not simply be shooting in the dark, but rather will be disseminating light into the darkness. The Bible reminds us that no matter how black and impenetrable the darkness of the world, it is no match for the light of God, which shines through the lives of those who have been in the presence of God in worship and who have been called by Him to ministry.

Through authentic worship the scenario of the church riding off in all directions at once in an ill-equipped, ill-prepared, and ineffective response to pressing needs is prevented. The coming of the church before God in worship enables the church to be prepared, equipped, and directed by God himself in accord with His purposes and His timing.

The Bible provides a widely celebrated example of this principle (albeit many years prior to the beginnings of the Church) in the case of Solomon. Early in his reign as king of Israel, Solomon recognized that his task of serving as the leader of the nation was a formidable responsibility. During the course of Solomon's habitually spending time before God in worship, God was able to speak to him and ask if there was anything he needed in order to accomplish his work. Solomon spoke in terms we can relate to, and God responded:

"Now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.

For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "... I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be" (*1 Kings 3:7-12*).



No matter how
black and
impenetrable the
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match for the light
of God.



Worship results in a deep desire to give ourselves to God through ministry to the people of His world. Worship also enhances any efforts we put forward in response to the needs we see around us.

CONCLUSION

The church gives itself to a great many activities and projects, desiring to be involved in ministry—and rightly so. Worship, however, ought to occupy a position of central importance for God's people. Worship ought to be recognized as having a relevance, in and of itself, as ministry to God.

Everyday activities of ministry to others ought to rise to the level of the sacred as we realize that this work is considered worship by God.

Putting worship in its rightful place of prominence in all that we do insures an effective and productive ministry to those around us that will bring joy to the heart of God. ■

1. Judson Cornwall, Th.D., *Elements of Worship* (South Plainfield, N.J.: Bridge Publishing, 1985), 11.

2. W. T. Purkiser, Ph.D., Richard S. Taylor, Th.D., and Willard H. Taylor, Ph.D., *God, Man, and Salvation: A Biblical Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 579.

3. *Ibid.*, 578.

Worship:

Where Do You Go for Lessons?

by Kenneth Fach
Sherwood Park, Alta.

Pastors and worship leaders are like photographers. The Object of our attention is in full view. Our task is to come up with some clear pictures. If the people don't see Him, it may mean that we are slightly out of focus. Or a lot.

The Great Need

It's possible to succeed in leaving would-be worshipers "gasping with pleasure in their personal enjoyment of the music,"¹ but not, in fact, actually leading them in worship.

Harry Blamires describes the fuzziness: "We hear a worship service praised because it 'made me feel good.' . . . But anything which twists the purpose of worship back into self-improvement is alien to that bounding outgoingness represented by the Psalmist's shouts of delight."²

Many will agree with Martin Thielien's remark that "worship education" is "one of the great needs in our churches today."³ Robert Rayburn, chairman of the Department of Practical Theology at Covenant Seminary, observes, "In the majority of the evangelical churches of our day there has been little or no instruction in worship. Believers," he thinks, "do not generally understand the significance and special meaning of corporate worship."⁴ Later, he emphasizes this by saying, "Faithful worship is not easy. Our people need to be instructed."⁵

The need cannot be overstated when it becomes more and more apparent that "we have taken what was once the altar of God, and turned it into a stage for man."⁶ If churchgoers are the main actors, as Kierkegaard's analogy suggests, and it appears that too many of them have begun playing to the wrong audience, it is definitely time for some direction.

Who Will Lead the Way?

When pastors were called to "equip God's people for work in his service" (Eph. 4:12, NEB), this surely included some instruction in worship. Because worship is considered by many to be our "primary activity" in the Christian Church, leadership in worship will be high on the pastor's list of responsibilities. Some feel that "worship leadership is the pastor's highest calling."⁷

In a conference held to discuss ministerial preparation for the new century, Dennis Bratcher of Southern Nazarene University stated it well: "Our primary responsibility for ministry," he said, "includes the proper training . . . to call and guide the people of God into faithful response to Him. *The most important thing a minister should do is to lead the people in authentic worship/service to God*"⁸ (italics added). This being the case, where do we begin?

Going by the Book

The day I decided to improve my tennis game, I made a choice between taking lessons or reading a book. I chose the latter. It made a world of difference.

Many new resources are available for instruction on meaningful worship. However, the best one has been around for a long time. No doubt you have it in more than one translation.



Dennis Kinlaw refers to the first seven chapters of Leviticus as "A Manual for Worship."⁹ The ancient hymnal or Psalter is another book containing a wealth of information. Isa. 6:1-8; Gen. 8:13-9:1; Exod. 3:1-6; Exod. 33:18-23; and 2 Sam. 24:18-25 are a few examples of the endless number of Old Testament scriptures dealing with this subject.

Robert Rayburn believes "a . . . good place to begin in giving church members instruction in worship is a study of the early assemblies of Christians as they are recorded for us in the New Testament."¹⁰ He cites the first Sunday service of the Christian Church (John 20:19 ff.):

The disciples were assembled.
Jesus kept His promise and came to them.
They were glad to see Him.
He spoke to them.
He encouraged them.
He breathed on them.
He offered them His Holy Spirit.
They went away with a renewed sense of mission.

That must have been some service! Working from a scriptural base, we can move beyond the level of worship found in either of the Old or New Testament records:

If the psalmists of the Old Testament felt the compulsive urge to praise God, how much more ought we to feel it. The ebullient cries of admiration for God's majesty and lovingkindness came before God's Son was sent to earth to die for us, to win forgiveness for us. . . . They came before the blind and crippled had been healed . . . before the Son of God was raised from the dead, before the Holy Spirit was promised and descended among us.¹¹

Learning by Observation

While the Scriptures stand as the ultimate resource on how to approach our God, most of our initial knowledge comes from personal experience. "To worship effectively," confides Joseph Aldrich, "I need exposure to God's word and God's people."¹²

Martin Thielen adds, "While there may be many ways to teach people about worship—seminars, workshops, etc.—the best way is through the worship event itself."¹³

Not everyone is able to learn from his own worship patterns as objectively as Max Harris, who admits to the pragmatism (if it increases attendance, it must be right) that is lurking on his own doorstep.¹⁴

If our experience is limited to only one tradition, especially if that tradition has been unwilling "to pay the price of effective worship planning so that the riches of the church's calendar and of her worship resources are pushed aside,"¹⁵ it might be profitable to visit other services. My wife and I often spend our vacation Sundays in this way. We return refreshed, usually stimulated, and always with a greater appreciation for our own church family. In the process, we have learned something more about worship that we could not have taught to ourselves.

The late Nazarene General Superintendent Edward Lawlor was always a student of ritual. Even in the midst of his busy schedule, as a pastor he made a point of slipping into a funeral chapel every Tuesday to observe how others conducted their worship in times of separation and bereavement.

Resources Within the Fellowship

Most congregations will attract people from a variety of church backgrounds. They bring their own histories and traditions with them. We will do well to tap their views and insights.

With the use of the "Church Self-study Instrument," prepared by District Superintendent Glenn Follis, we have encouraged input from everyone who worships with us. We have also used the "Questionnaire on Worship and Preaching."¹⁶

Various church boards and committees are invaluable sounding boards for fine-tuning the services. Spending extra time with worship teams or leaders will enable the pastor to learn

with and learn from them. Mutual respect, sensitivity, and openness are the major ingredients.

In-the-Pew Training

Every time we come together for worship is a learning opportunity. Martin Thielen writes,

Another way to teach your congregation about worship is by interpreting the worship outline at the beginning of the service. Have a place in your order of worship called "Worship Theme Interpretation." Explain the direction of the service. Discuss the various movements of the worship outline for that service. Just a brief time of explanation can teach much about worship.¹⁷

Because Christians do not automatically know how to worship, one pastor takes a few minutes just before the call to worship to teach some concept of worship. He calls it "Worship 101: In-the-Pew Training."¹⁸ Some of his themes have been:

1. A worship experience is not what you get, but what you give.
2. How to *prepare* for worship—privately during the week.
3. The importance of Scripture reading in a public service.
4. The reason for a sermon.

Other topics could be an explanation of each part of the service (prelude, call to worship, the invocation, the postlude, etc.) or the meaning of such concepts as praise, confession, intercession, petition, and surrender.¹⁹

Because there is a natural tendency to attend worship services for our own benefit, the one who is leading us must continually remind us to concentrate our attention upon the Object of our gathering.

Teaching by Example

Standing on the platform one day during worship, I looked out to see one member of the congregation singing the Doxology with her eyes closed. You could tell that her heart was really into it. She was indeed praising the God from whom all blessings flow. Seeing her do this each week has helped me fix my thoughts upon God during that part of the service.

This experience has helped me realize that people may be observing me as well. This means that my behavior is crucial. If I sing heartily, perhaps

others will be encouraged to sing. If, on the other hand, I am spending those precious moments in my own little world of announcements and sermon notes, oblivious to what the congregation is doing, attempting to get a glimpse of a holy God, I will be cheating both myself and those who are following my bad example.

It is well said that "the pastor can do more to influence the participation of the congregation than can the orchestra, choir, and worship leader combined!"²⁰

Starting out, many of us had no time to let our thoughts wander during worship. We prayed, led the songs, took the offering, sang the special, and then preached another page of our seminary notes. As we grew wiser and began seeking the help of others, we may have overlooked an important fact: we are still leading in worship no matter how many are up there sharing the platform duties with us. Bob Sorge puts it bluntly: "If the pastor is too casual, he can communicate through body language that the worship time is not too terribly important. . . . Conversely, the pastor can show, through his posture of worship, that nothing is more important at that moment than ministering unto the Lord."²¹

Maybe I Should Take Some Lessons After All

It is one opinion that "instruction concerning . . . worship has been . . . seriously neglected in Bible schools, Christian colleges and theological seminaries."²² This may not be the case in your area. My own alma mater now offers a three-credit course on Christian worship. At this writing, we are offering a Sunday School class under the same title. It will be taught by a student who has audited the college course.

If worship is indeed our "primary activity" in the Christian Church, this magnifies the importance of doing it well. The days are past when we can settle for an "instamatic" approach toward our visits to the throne room of God. Resources abound to help us see Him high and lifted up—and that more clearly. It will be well worth the extra time and effort. ■

1. Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 127.

(Continued on page 49)

Worship and Pastoral Care

by Daniel R. Gales

Winnipeg



As I sat on the platform, facing my flock, their cares reached out and pleaded for healing. There sat Marilyn and James, recently married following two bitter divorces and in the stress of a child custody battle. To my right, John and Margaret, a couple in the prime of early retirement, have discovered the emergence of cancer. In the second row, front and center, Susan has recently experienced her second miscarriage. Frank, a single father of three, tries desperately to keep his business from sinking.

"There's not enough time to adequately shepherd and bring them comfort, let alone faith!"

"How do I care for them?"

"How can one pastor bring support to them all?"

There is a way that can assist in the pastoral care of the congregation. By recognizing and utilizing the pastoral care components of the worship service, a pastor can extend and deepen his care of his people. In a wonderful book, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, William H. Willimon brings the two concepts together. The purpose of his book is to "affirm some of the many ways in which the pastoral care disciplines can be utilized in a more integrative approach to our worship leadership."¹

From experience I offer some ways to engage the flock in pastoral care during the worship service. This subject calls for a return to an earlier pastoral care model.²

BRINGING WORSHIP AND PASTORAL CARE TOGETHER

Over the decades, our understanding of pastoral care has come to focus largely on the pastoral counseling

mode, the one-on-one work of the pastor in either his office or a home. At the same time, worship has tended to narrow to a particular kind of church service. Both have broader meanings.

The purpose of worship is to encounter and respond to God. "Any attempt to use worship to educate, manipulate, or titillate can be a serious perversion of worship."³ Yet, in that encounter, much of the healing, development, and love we often associate with the one-on-one model of pastoral care can take place.

The New Testament understanding of worship is very comprehensive. Worship is described as a Christian's total existence. "We have, in our time, made too neat a distinction between work and worship."⁴ Worship is more than "a service." The *Nazarene Manual* in Article XI also includes in its definition "ministry in His name," "obedience to Christ and mutual accountability."⁵

Earlier understandings of pastoral care referred largely to leading the flock in worship or corporate activities with the church.



A major difference in the pastoral care of previous ages of the church and that of our modern era is the switch from care that utilized mostly corporate, priestly, liturgical actions to care that increasingly limited itself to individualistic, psychologically-oriented techniques heavily influenced by prevailing secular therapies for healing, personal fulfillment, and self-help addressed to the needs [of contemporary man].⁶

True pastoral care takes place within the context of a worshiping, believing, caring, witnessing community of faith.⁷ It encompasses more than a one-on-one function.

What an enabling thought!

Here is a new breadth and depth of purpose in preparing for and leading people in worship. Why wouldn't the worship service include an experience of pastoral care? God's people, together with a caring pastor, enjoy their unique experience of God where the transfer of inner strength to face the harder events of life takes place.

THE PREPARATION

Personal Planning

The pastor's preparation for the service is both personal and corporate.

As one who not only plans and leads the service, he also acts as a model who knows "how to behave . . . in the presence of a sinless, perfect Creator God."⁸ The pastor must be comfortable personally with God and the worship experience. His purpose is to openly bring himself and his people to the Lord. To be adequate here requires a pattern of private preparation.

Building on his personal intimacy with Jesus, the pastor shifts from what is comfortable and common to him to how his people can best respond to the healing presence of the Lord. Through each movement of the service he plans how the Body of Christ will encounter the Head of the Church. Preparation for the service avoids the temptation for spectacularism and the display of talent to bringing our people face-to-face with Jesus.

Plan with Sensitivity

In order for the service to have meaning for our people, we must speak in terms they understand. The new visiting family stopped to greet the pastor following the service. The young daughter asked the pastor a deep question: "Why do you have that plus sign on the top of the church?" The symbol had little meaning for her. For our people to find strength and healing in worship, we must use music, translations of the Bible, dramas, vocabulary, and other aspects that communicate without being offensive to them.

This kind of preparation requires an understanding not only of people in general but also of the specific needs, forms, and culture of the congregation.

A particular emphasis must be placed on how we present each aspect of the worship service. Special care and understanding focuses on the transitions, the words and actions, between each element of the worship service. Sensitivity with the transitions encourages our people to draw close to Jesus and not to alienate them through the use of careless words and actions. For some congregations, making transitions too smoothly will appear like a "show," while other congregations could be inhibited in worship because the service appears too "sloppy."

A finishing step is to move yourself

through the sequence of the service. How does it flow? Do the elements follow each other comfortably and logically? Prayerfully imagine yourself as John or Margaret sitting in the pew. Will the sequence enable them to be open before Jesus? Without that comfort, the congregation will be less able to find healing through Christ.

Develop a Diagnostic Procedure

It is helpful to develop a standard to use in measuring the potential for help within the service. What enables a person to draw strength through worship? How will a person be enabled to take the strength of worship into their world of work and ministry? Willimon, drawing from Paul Pruyser's *The Minister as Diagnostician*, offers a way for diagnosing worship in order to begin to make it pastorally effective.⁹

First, understand why the people come. "Problem-laden persons," seeking comfort through worship, usually come with the desire to see themselves in relationship to God. What resources do you depend on to bring comfort and healing through the worship event? How do you apply these resources? For them, worship leaders must draw from the God-given, community-bestowed resources such as the Bible, liturgy, prayer, theology, and community. Resist the temptation to use only the resources of psychotherapy, pop psychology, process management, and so on.

Next, examine the liturgy. Evangelical tradition tends to downplay any thought of liturgy. The word tends to suggest a formality with which many are not comfortable. We want to be free, not formal. However, liturgy is not the same as formality. Liturgy describes the way we conduct our service and the form of the service. It means how we bring ourselves before God. "Liturgy is literally 'the work of the people' whether that work occurs inside or outside the temple."¹⁰ Every church has a "liturgy." Our tradition generally practices an informal or a personally directed liturgy. Does the direction of the liturgy bring people into the presence of God and support the Body of Christ? Sometimes we major on magnifying the talents and resources of the church rather than encouraging understanding and openness to Jesus Christ.

Worship must be designed to cause response from the congregation. It is not a spectator activity. In a real sense, our people are not *brought* to Christ, they "liturgize" *themselves* into the presence of Christ. It cannot be done *for* them. Frequently our services require no response at all from those attending. We enjoy wonderful music, scripture read with eloquence, and prayers masterfully and sincerely put together. Worship, however, requires a liturgy that encourages the congregation to respond to God for themselves. Hymns and spiritual songs can help. Responsive scripture reading tends to involve the person. Gathering at the altar during a pastoral prayer encourages response to Jesus. Some respond best during moments of quietness.

Helpful elements in liturgy include confession, restitution, tribute or praise, and commemoration, remembering God's events in our history. A variety of ways uses these elements to bring about true worship.

Another diagnostic process becomes aware of what is happening among the congregation as they worship—in the building and out of the building. Pruyser offers seven variables that suggest a clearer discernment of the worship event. He feels we should examine how our people respond to the following dimensions of experience:

Awareness of the holy. What is sacred and revered?

Providence. What does a person's life say about his view of God's disposition toward him?

Faith is defined as a person's "affirming or negating stance in life." What is this person committed to? Does he embrace life's experiences or shy away from them?

Grace. Can this person be forgiven and relate to the divine honestly?

Repentance is accepting personal responsibility for problems.

Communion. Does this person become "part" of the worshipers or remain isolated?

Vocation. Is there a sense of purpose? What meaning is attached to the activities?

ELEMENTS OF PASTORAL CARE IN WORSHIP

One can readily identify many aspects where pastoral care can be focused upon the worshipping congre-

gation. There are some obvious aspects such as the pastoral prayer and the sermon. There are less obvious elements. Sometimes the less obvious carry extremely effective aspects.

Entrance and Exit Experiences

Most of us plan with great diligence how we greet people as they enter and leave the building. But what about entering and exiting the worship experience? How do our activities before and following the service bring people into contact with Jesus? A call to worship abruptly given can distance our people from the caring Christ or be so irrelevant that the pressured person is lost.

your blessing ring in the hearts of the congregation as they leave to do their liturgy through their work.

The Offering

Another often-neglected area of pastoral care in worship can be the offering. Have you ever thought, Why do we have to have an offering? In my early ministry, I dreamed of having a strong financial church that would just "have enough money" without spending time "taking up the offering." I was missing an opportunity for pastoral care.

The offering becomes more than a desperate attempt to finance our programs. This wonderful opportunity helps us practice vital dimensions of

thoritarian, know-it-all image on the other.

Begin with the Leader

As you lead, you worship also. The pastor must also seek God. Here are some suggestions on how to worship while you lead. Prepare yourself throughout the week, especially Saturday evening and Sunday morning.


Schedule a quiet time prior to the service. Withdraw from your activities about 10 minutes prior to the beginning of the service. Shut yourself away with Jesus, and allow Him to prepare you to lead in worship. If you use a worship team or choir, invite them into this meditation also. Rushing in from greeting, teaching, putting out fires, last-minute announcements, and choir rehearsals does not help to set an attitude of worship. Ask a layman or staff person to assist you in protecting this time so that you can calmly and adequately guide worship.

When in the service, expect Jesus to be there. Look for Him. He promised, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20). Jesus will keep His promise even when you don't feel like He's there. Believe His word. Some find it helpful to visualize Jesus actually present somewhere in the sanctuary. Then, sing the hymns looking into His eyes, and pray directly into His face. It is a profound worship experience to look into the eyes of Jesus and sing, "And can it be that I should gain / An int'rest in the Savior's blood!" (Charles Wesley). This attitude in the worship leader will guide the congregation into a meaningful worship. If the worship leader follows the order of worship by rote, it is unlikely that the people will do anything differently.


CORPORATENESS IN WORSHIP

Our modern worship practice seems to lack an emphasis on corporate worship. The worship emphasis for the individual is very helpful, but both pastoral care and worship are enhanced within the context of the believing, caring, corporate community of faith. The corporate aspect of our worship is vital.

After the death of his wife, a close friend confided in me that a period of time came when he was unable to find God by himself. He said, "I had



Through each movement of the service the pastor plans how the Body of Christ will encounter the Head of the Church.



Last week one of our greeters for the worship service told me, "I am enjoying greeting the people, but I miss my time of meditation during the prelude music." For this one, my plan for entrance into worship was not adequate for her to experience worship, let alone the godly care of a pastor. Ben Patterson suggests: "After welcome and before the service, I hold a quiet time for preparation."¹¹ Whether you hold a quiet time, or something else, many people cannot enter worship abruptly. They need the pastor's coaching to enter meaningful worship.

And how do we exit? The benediction offers a wonderful opportunity for the pastor to draw his people to Jesus. As an expression of his own experience of God's providence extended to his people, the pastor can give the benediction as a strong reminder of the providence of God. Rather than reciting one of the great historical benedictions, view it as coming from the heart of a pastor empowered by God to bless his people. Let

spiritual experience. Ask some questions. Why do we give money? Money is the main commodity for which we trade our time. Time represents life. How does the offering symbolize the investment of a person's life? What does the liturgy surrounding your offering indicate about your own belief and faith? Is the faith of your church board and Finance Committee in the providence of God? By teaching people to give out of a sense of gratitude, faith, and obedience, we contribute to building healthy Christians who learn to trust Christ for all areas of life.

LEADING THE SERVICE

Not everything that takes place in a worship service helps everyone. We hope that the service will be helpful to as many as possible. It is tragic when worship hinders healthy spiritual and psychological development. The pastor's attitude has great importance. Frequently the leader projects either a smothering, too-personal attitude on one hand or a judgmental, au-

to depend upon the prayers of the people to carry me during that period of time."

Many in our services seem unable to find God for one reason or another. Here is our opportunity for them to experience "the godly care of pastors . . . and the helpful inspiration of social worship."¹² Surrounding them with loving people and an atmosphere of care, we can lift them to God who loves and can heal them.

The worship service must transcend individuals worshipping at the same time in the same place. We are to become "one" together with Jesus. The Scriptures place a strong emphasis on gathering together on a regular basis. Heb. 10:19-25 provides a foundation for corporateness in worship. Worship can result when our people "hold unswervingly to the hope we profess" (v. 23), "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (v. 24), and are encouraged (v. 25). These are some of the goals we hold in both pastoral care and worship!

If you paint verses 19-25 on a background of corporate worship, you have a picture that looks like this. A caring pastor, spiritually confident himself, draws his people together to enter the holy place. He knows that entry occurs only because of Jesus and His work in us. That creates in the leader and the people a penitent spirit. As they journey to the place where Jesus awaits, the holy place, they reach out arms of support and care to each other. Each lifting the other, they allow Jesus to bring encouragement through them to each other.



What enables a person to draw strength through worship?



The scripture also gives clues how to provide a foundation out of which corporate worship can develop into

a deeper and richer time than worshiping as isolated persons. Most of us have either preached on or heard sermons relating to verse 25: "Let us not give up meeting together." Often the emphasis given rests on the "meeting." For pastoral care and worship, focus on the "together." Develop the practice of togetherness in worship.

The passage emphasizes the idea of valuing the other person. As you plan, think specifically of how they can be encouraged and what will "spur" this person "on toward love and good deeds." Is there a way to encourage this kind of interaction in action and thought through our worship?

Many churches have a "welcome" time during the service, during which people shake hands. With a little thought and creativity, concern and encouragement can be expressed to one another: "This morning, as you shake hands with each other, place a spark of love from your heart in the palm of your hand. Press it into the palm of one or two persons sitting around you."

In the morning prayer, I have often encouraged my people to pray silently for one another. I urge them to "take a thread of love from your heart and wrap it around the shoulders of the person sitting on your right. Do the same for the person sitting on your left. Do the same for the person sitting directly in front of you. Now in your mind's eye, look at our congregation. We are connected by a strong web of love and concern."

For that "web of love and concern" to be real, it must extend itself into the congregation throughout the week. Fellowship initiated in worship can be reinforced through lay visitation and times of fellowship throughout the week. These acts of love and concern make the worship service truly corporate, thus truly pastoral.

Heavily personalized worship forms tend to create barriers that could prevent corporateness in worship. I call them "secret" and "scary." "Secret" worship elements refer to those in which you must be a member in order to know what's happening. Introduce your liturgy clearly, with common, easy words. Avoid short forms. Fill your cultural clichés with contemporary meaning.

"Scary" forms refer to those events that tend to give an unsafe feeling to the uninitiated. Without jumping on the "seeker service" wagon, worship leaders should strive to make the service visitor sensitive. This enhances the corporate aspect of our worship. Each person is more likely to become part of the worship with us.



Is there a way to encourage interaction during worship?



The worship service stands as the most powerful and likely opportunities for pastoral care. By recognizing this opportunity with prayerful, careful, and sensitive planning, strength can move from God's great heart to the heart of our people. By making the most of our worship time, we pastors open new gates of hope for our people. God blesses every initiative we take in His name. We pastors can find new depths and satisfactions in our pastoral care. ■

1. William H. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1979), 12.
2. *Ibid.*, 35.
3. *Ibid.*, 47.
4. *Ibid.*, 48.
5. Article XI, *Manual, Church of the Nazarene*, 1989, 35.
6. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, 35.
7. *Ibid.*, 12.
8. Terry C. Muck, "From the Editor," *Leadership* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 3.
9. Willimon, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, 42 ff.
10. *Ibid.*, 48.
11. Ben Patterson, "Can Worship Leaders Worship?" *Leadership* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 35.
12. "Ritual for the Reception of Church Members," in *Manual, Church of the Nazarene*, 1989, par. 801.

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A Theology of Worship

by Wesley G. Campbell

Richmond, B.C.

It was a church schools conference. The featured leader, minus his Bible, appeared with his guitar to lead a workshop on worship. He informed us about the "neat" choruses that he had discovered and would play for us on his guitar, inviting us to "get into worship." For that leader, worship consisted of the singing of scripture songs that were new and different. I sat thinking, There surely must be more to worship than this! I believe there is more to worship—much more!

If, as the Westminster Catechism suggests, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever," then, in worship, we find our reason for being. In order to worship, I must have a philosophy or theology of worship. I require an understanding of what worship consists of, of whom I am worshipping, and of some logical manner by which I am to carry out my worship.

At the heart of any theology of worship, there must be a God encounter. Worship is an uplifting encounter with Him. I am created to worship and to enjoy my Creator. Consequently worship moves far beyond the songs we sing or the way we sing them. Worship exists for God. He stands at the center of our praise, thanksgiving, and adoration. While given for God, worship also includes His taking pleasure in our offerings. The Bible states, "The Lord takes pleasure in his people" (Ps. 149:4, RSV). We may give joy to God! This aspect of the theology of worship we overlook—that offering our praise, adoration, thanksgiving, and honor can truly bring joy and pleasure to the Lord of the universe.

If worship is our reason for being,



if a God encounter is essential for true worship, and if His people bring joy to the Lord, I asked myself, "Why was no course taught on this subject while I attended college?" Only recently have we seen a proliferation of books, courses, conferences, and seminars on the worshipping church. What factors have precipitated the recent rise of the church's concern to discover the reality of worship?

It is partially a reaction to decades of church services and believers' gatherings at which the central emphases were proclamation of the gospel and attempts to elicit the response of unbelievers to that proclamation. Other services consisted mainly of presenting biblical truth for believers along with encouragement to "hearken and do." Church services were gatherings where "sinners got converted" and "believers got deepened." We were evangelicals and

proud of it! Our central thrust focused on getting more people saved and settled in the Christian way. Because of that, we didn't "do worship" very well if, in fact, we did it at all.

Decades of "saving sinners" and "entertaining saints" created a vacuum of genuine God-centered, love-driven, devotional response to the Lord, purely for His own sake. Those who sat through services con-

taining three hymns, a prayer, a "special," and a sermon began to look longingly for that which would take them beyond acting out the spectators' role at a "songfest," topped off by a message designed to bring a response of the will to exhortation or propositional truth.

While completing my master's program, I was taking an evening graduate class called Contemporary Christian Renewal Movements. The Presbyterian professor of church history placed his cassette player on the table in the seminar room. Pushing the play button, he said, "This is a sample of what is happening in worship and praise in New Zealand." The less-than-high-quality voices of a group filled the small room. Accompanied by guitars, keyboards, and strings, they sang songs taken directly from the Scriptures. But they sang in a way that I had not heard previously. I listened to the simple, yet profound, singing of praise to God in the words of the psalmists and prophets. I began to think, That is right and fitting! that is worship. That is a response to God. Worship is my heart responding to His heart.

That was 1977. The wave of emphasis upon discovering the intimacy of worship as a God encounter was beginning to touch other Christian



bodies outside the charismatic movement. My own theology of worship began to form. I became more convinced that our encounter with God is simple, yet profound. Worship must ultimately contain the love response of one who deeply desires to tell Another of his devotion and adoration. Opportunities must be included that provide for the release of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and celebration of that which God has done in Jesus Christ.

A theology of worship must be based, not upon what I want nor upon what I like, but upon whatever God wants. My personal perceptions alone cannot mold my theology of worship. I may not superimpose my cultural "givens" upon Him but rather ask, "What does His revealed Word declare are essential elements of worship?"

Robert Webber proposes that "Christian worship is like Hebrew worship. In worship, God renews His covenant with us. In worship, our relationship to God is deepened and strengthened when the order itself represents God's speaking to us and God's saving us through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son."

If Christian worship parallels Hebrew worship, and the form represents God's communicating with us and saving us through Christ, then our worship must have patterns either set down or alluded to in Scripture. The progressive pattern of Tabernacle worship in the Old Testament gives some guidance. Glimpses of heavenly worship in the Book of Revelation also help us understand what God is calling us to discover. In addition, the Acts of the Apostles, along with Paul's Epistles, while giving only scant information on form, do list some elements present in early Christian worship. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42, RSV). Since Hebrew worship is progressive, especially that of the Tabernacle worship of the Old Testament, Christian worship also should be progressive. It should flow and lead us to God.

The very plan of the Tabernacle suggests progressiveness in worship. Outside of the surrounding fence resided God's people in their work-

day world. Inside the fence, the courtyard containing altar and laver was accessible by curtained gates. Inside the fence, beyond altar and laver, stood the Tabernacle itself. Its two chambers were (1) the holy place, containing table, candlestand, and altar of incense; and (2) the holy of holies, containing the ark of the covenant, the residing place of the presence of the living God.

Coming to worship as the Hebrews did, we come from the world outside the "Tabernacle fence." This world of ours contains both the legitimate and the illegitimate, the important and unimportant. This world calls for our energies at the same time God's Spirit calls us to have an encounter with Him. We cannot "leap the fence" and find ourselves immediately in the holy of holies! There is a way into that holy place whereby we encounter the presence of God. The work of worship must proceed by steps. We might look at the process and try to incorporate the general principles into our private and corporate worship times.

When the Hebrews came to the Tabernacle to worship, they came from a secular world of business and work, of social and relational contacts. At the outset, there exists a festive, social, relational atmosphere as the group gathers and friend meets friend, family joins family, and all interact with each other. No doubt some, more aware and prepared for the reason for gathering, will admonish and encourage others to begin to focus more on worship as together they approach the place of God's dwelling.

What can assist us in our progress toward God? As the Hebrews sang songs of ascent, encouragement, and admonishment to one another, we might do also. Calls to worship, greetings, words and songs that encourage our focusing on God are appropriate at this point in the worship service as we "come inside the fence." Songs such as "Come, Christians, Join to Sing," "Come Bless the Lord," "Come into His Presence," "Let's Just Praise the Lord," or "Come and Let Us Go Up to the Mountain of the Lord" may be used to help the initial transition from the world outside to the world inside the "fence" of the inner court.

Hebrews in the Old Testament were no different in many respects from us. They needed help in setting daily routine aside, in changing focus from the creature to the Creator, in being directed gently but certainly from "self-awe" to "God-awe."

In our humanity, this quantum leap from self-focus to God-focus does not occur easily. However, God provides the pattern of progressive worship to help us come to Him. That is precisely where the flow of worship must lead: to God. When He gave Moses the plan and procedures of the Tabernacle, He intended to bring the people to himself. Our worship is a journey from outside the fence to our destination—the holy of holies. We are being called to an encounter with the Lord.

Meeting God occurs on purpose. If we would worship, we must do so with intention. We cannot be dragged—even by the Holy Spirit—into the holy of holies. We enter deliberately and by degrees. While we cannot be coerced, we can be helped by a number of means to discover God's reality. The Tabernacle, the priests, and procedures were full of beauty and symbolism. The visual may draw me to a new God-awareness. Listening to the spoken or sung Word of God, and having the love, deeds, and characteristics of God rehearsed and demonstrated in symbol, story, testimony, drama, and song draws me progressively toward an encounter in the holy of holies.

The evangelical church has ignored the obvious too long. We have moved from an audio era to a visual era, from radio to television. This generation, fortunately or unfortunately, is stimulated more by what it sees than by what it hears. However, the elements of our services of worship tend almost exclusively to be audible, i.e., the spoken or sung word, congregational song, "special" singer, or choir. Surely there is a place, as in Tabernacle worship, for symbol, sacrament, movement, drama, and gesture to heighten our sense of God's reality and deepen our devotion to Him.

While not all Old Testament people of God could enter the holy place and the holy of holies, now each believer may. We have access to the holy of holies by the blood of Jesus Christ. Through the veil of His flesh, we

have access to that place where once only special priests could enter. We, a generation of priests, are being invited into the presence of God each time we worship.

Speaking again of the Tabernacle pattern, the outer court contained the altar of burnt offering and the laver for washing. These implements symbolize the need for worshipers to *bring an offering* and to undergo *personal spiritual cleansing* at altar and laver. David said, "I wash my hands in innocence, and go about thy altar, O Lord, singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all thy wondrous deeds" (Ps. 26:6-7, RSV). "And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies round about me; and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord" (27:6, RSV).

Part of the process of our worship are elements that call us to bring sacrifice and seek cleansing before proceeding further. A call to individual and corporate *confession* and a prayer for the *cleansing* and *refreshing* of the Holy Spirit become essential steps to worshiping in spirit and in truth. Banners, hangings, symbols, drama, and lead prayers of confession help that process. Songs that aid our focus might be "We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise," "I Give Myself to Thee as a Living Sacrifice," and "Cleanse Me."

Having moved in our worship past thanksgiving, praise, confession, and cleansing, we may now step within the holy place. Remember, we are on a journey. Our destination is intimacy with God. In the holy place we are reminded by symbols of that which we need for our journey: nourishment, illumination, and prayer. The table of shewbread emphasizes the necessity of the spiritual Bread from heaven, the living Word. We may not neglect the Word. We do so at our peril. Jesus offers His broken body for our spiritual sustenance.

The candlestand speaks to us of the illuminating wisdom and power of the Spirit that enlightens the Word and enlivens each worshiper as we move toward God. Songs and hymns that give praise for the Bread of Heaven, for the light and love of the Spirit, and for God's grace, salvation, and Word are most appropriate here.

We are praising and praying in the

holy place before the veil. Smoke from the altar of incense before that veil reminds us that prayer is essential for our journey. Prayer that is intercessory, humble, meditative, and sincerely God-directed becomes an essential part of our worship. An open altar for intercessory, individual, personal, and corporate prayer can be of great help in our services. Songs that remind us that we are about to enter the presence of God, not by our merits but by His grace, will be appropriate here: "Into Thy Presence We Come."

In worship, God renews His covenant with us.

Moments of silence with encouragement to reflect upon God's love, grace, and goodness have almost become a forgotten step in preparing worshipers to step through the veil into the holy of holies. We fear silence in our worship services, but let us relearn the art of listening in those quiet moments. As the priests entering the holy of holies, we move from the noise of the world to jubilation and praise, from thanksgiving for God's provision to reverence, awe, and adoration. We move from speaking and singing *about* God to speaking and singing *to* Him. The holy of holies is the place of the Presence, the mercy seat, the hovering "cherubim of glory" (Heb. 9:5, RSV) and the Shekinah glory of God resting over the mercy seat. Here the ancient high priest communed with God for the people of God. But here we believers may have an encounter with Him ourselves, for He invites us personally into His presence. Songs such as "I Love You, Lord, and I Lift My Voice," "Into Thy Presence I Come," "Commune with Me, Between the Wings of

the Cherubim," and "Holy, Holy, Holy" are all appropriate here. Moments of meditation, quiet prayer, whispered affirmation of love for God, and simply waiting before Him to listen for His direction serve these times of worship. The holy of holies is a place of rest and contemplation, of trust and empowerment, of listening and transformation. This is our destination in worship.

It is true that not every worship service, even the most sensitively prepared, may achieve the ultimate end of bringing individual worshipers into an encounter with God. Often our progress falls short of the holy of holies and we stop spontaneously at jubilation, proclamation, or exhortation. Yet we need be clear that our purposeful destination in worship is always a God encounter.

I do not propose this Tabernacle pattern as the only way to plan a worship service. But I offer it as a guideline to assist in better understanding worship as progressive and as having a clear goal.

Worship, says Robert Webber, is a verb. Worship is something I do, not something I watch being done for me. True worship, offering worthship to God, is participatory. Philip Yancey, speaking of a recent visit to an Orthodox worship service in Russia, told how the congregation had little participation. People tended to stand and watch the priests—the professionals—"do it" for them.² To some extent, this typifies worship in many of our churches—the professionals do it for us. We measure the service qualitatively on a scale of 1 to 10 as to whether or not it "passed muster." However, as Ben Patterson suggests, we are in worship not to get but to give. I should not ask, "What did I get out of it?" but, rather, "How did I do?"³

In Revelation 5, we get a glimpse of the participatory worship pattern of heaven. The living creatures, the elders, and many, many angels sang a new song in a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (v. 12, RSV). How did they do? They participated and they focused upon the encounter with the Lamb of God.

A theology of worship must in-

clude progression and encourage participation. In the debate between those persons calling for spontaneity and those calling for form, between exuberance and reverence, there is a picture of balance set out in Acts 2:42-47. John Stott comments on the verses, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people" (vv. 46-47, RSV). He concludes that "every worship service should be a joyful celebration of the mighty acts of God through Jesus Christ. It is right in public worship to be dignified; it is unforgivable to be dull."⁴

Pattern and form in worship that take me to an appropriate destination need not be dull and devoid of spontaneity. In fact, it can be quite the opposite if we are sensitive to the God-given invitation to worship in spirit and in truth. We will discover that the joyful result is worship that is a dialogue—responding, listening, responding, listening, and responding to the living God. We will discover that worship calls us, involves us, moves us, changes us, and sends us to those who have yet to know God in a personal encounter.

Christian worship has its roots in the pattern of Hebrew worship in the Old Testament. For the Hebrew, worship was more than an attitude. It was an attitude expressed. One Hebrew word is used in the Old Testament for worship, *shachab*. In the King James Version, the translators used nine words to translate this one word. It is rendered "worship," "bow down," "make obeisance," "fall down," "stoop," "crouch," "beseech humbly," and "do reverence." For the Hebrews, worship was something done by the worshiper. In the New Testament, we see Spirit-filled Christians discovering a deeper level of God encounter because of their newly found intimate faith in Jesus. The Greek word for worship, *proskuneō*, is used nearly 60 times. While *shachab* implies reverence, obeisance, and worship at a distance, *proskuneō* contains the element of the intimacy of a kiss. We cannot kiss one whom we love from afar!⁵ For the New Testament worshiper, and for us, proximity to, intimacy with,

and desire for God are essential facets of our worship.

Indeed, a new, yet old, image of worship as intimacy with God is introduced in the New Testament. It is the image of the Church as the Bride of Christ and carries vivid implications for our theology of worship. When two persons become one in mind, body, spirit, and intention, this is both a beautiful and mysterious phenomenon. In both Old and New Testaments, the relationship of the worshiper to God is unabashedly set forward in the intimate terms and symbols of Bride, Bridegroom, and marriage. However, the joyful pleasure of the intimate relationship of wife and husband (quite acceptable to us in Scripture) tends to be viewed by many Christian believers as being too sensual when applied to our worship of God. However, it is interesting and extremely illuminating to discover that numerous devoted men and women of God seem to dwell at length in their private and corporate devotion upon the thought that worship is the *deep intimacy of two persons who passionately love each other*: Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross, to mention a few.

The plan of the Tabernacle suggests progressiveness in worship.

Perhaps our oversensitivity toward avoidance of fleshly sensuality and illicit lust has taken us to an opposite extreme. Perhaps we exhibit a "prudery" in our worship and a "frigidity" in our God encounters that result in them being nonencounters.

My mother's Presbyterian background has probably influenced my general attitude of reserve in what I

feel comfortable with in worship style. Yet, I cannot deny the number of those persons whose deep devotion to God is a matter of historic record, who spent much time meditating, reading, and commenting on the "Canticle of Canticles," the Song of Solomon. That book and other references in Scripture become the accepted pattern of their worship. They saw worshiper and Creator as the bride and Bridegroom discovering a deep level of intimate love for each other.

When I speak of that aspect of worship that expresses itself as intimacy with God, I am simply wondering out loud if we need to rediscover the deep abandonment of lover to be loved in our worship encounters.

Much too sensate, you say? Permissible only in legitimate human relationships? But, why not then to be sought after in the greatest relationship possible—our worship and enjoyment of the living, loving God?

I confess that it has been some time since I truly have found myself "lost in wonder, love, and praise"! Yet I believe I am not alone in this desire to discover the "missing jewel" of worship, as A. W. Tozer put it. The missing jewel of deep devotion and abandonment to God needs to be restored to its rightful place in the center of the crowns we cast before God's throne.

Our theology of worship, if credible and scriptural, must result in believers being brought gently, yet certainly, to a deep encounter with God—an encounter where we can express ourselves with joy, as the living creatures and the elders of Revelation do when they "fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created'" (Rev. 4:10-11, RSV). Come, let us worship! ■

1. Robert Webber, *Worship Is a Verb* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1985), 130.

2. Philip Yancey, "Praying with the KGB," *Christianity Today* 36, no. 1 (Jan. 13, 1992): 22.

3. Ben Patterson, "Worship as Performance," *Leadership* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 52.

4. John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 85.

5. Graham Kendrick, *Learning to Worship as a Way of Life* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 23.

The Challenges of Multicultural Worship

by Carlton F. Harvey

St. Laurent, Que.

On any given Sunday morning I am faced with the challenge of ministry to people from many different parts of the world. The membership of my congregation hails from diverse origins such as the Philippines, India, Burundi, Ethiopia, Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, Armenia, Italy, Chile, United States, several Caribbean islands—each with a unique culture—and, don't forget Canada!

Multicultural worship is no option for me. I am surrounded by a multicultural city and a congregation that reflects the many ethnic groups of our community. Although Montreal is rich with multiple cultures and traditions, it is not unlike many other North American cities. With fresh waves of immigrants flooding into Canadian and American cities each year, local churches must address the problems and possibilities of multicultural worship.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP

A discussion with some of my students at Quebec Nazarene Bible Institute, a multicultural school for ministerial preparation located in Montreal, revealed five critical issues in multicultural worship.

1. The center of worship must be Jesus Christ.

E. Stanley Jones wrote that we do not need to preach Christ against the backdrop of Western civilization, but that Christ is relevant for any people, and He fits into any culture. The gleaming message of Christianity is Jesus, not a culture or tradition or system of behavior. Salvation comes, not by adherence to a style of living, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The beauty of Jesus is that He transcends culture. I can quickly lose my congregation by an attempt to fine-tune their understanding of Western religious practices. But, when I focus worship on Jesus, then faces light up, eyes register understanding, and the miracle of spiritual awakening takes place. The stories of Jesus that show His love and compassion for humanity translate beautifully into all cultures. The glorious story of His death and resurrection is an unequaled masterpiece suited for all peoples.

Effective multicultural worship begins by centering on Jesus Christ. As Jesus is lifted up in our worship, He draws all men to himself (John 12:32).

2. Knowledge of cultures is important.

A Jewess was recently converted at the altar of our church during the closing of a Sunday morning worship service. She later confided that one of her greatest struggles in becoming a Christian was at the point of being asked to kneel and pray. She reminded us that a Jew always stands to pray. Therefore, it was difficult to accept the pastor's invitation to come forward, kneel at the altar, and pray.

On another occasion, I was challenged by a man from a Middle East-

ern country, urgently demanding that the music be turned down and that I put a stop to the tambourines being played in the service. He insisted that Sunday morning worship should include only the sacred hymns of the church accompanied by piano and organ. That week in a Bible study group a Canadian remarked that she thoroughly enjoyed the music each week, and particularly the tambourine. For her, it was a new experience to sing lively choruses. She thought the tambourine added a wonderful festiveness to the service. The irony of the whole episode was that the tambourine was being played by a Caribbean for whom it was a natural part of worship!

An endless number of stories could be told by veterans of multicultural ministries. Some of the stories have a happy ending, such as the Jewess mentioned above. For others, it is a heart-wrenching disappointment when tolerance and understanding between cultures cannot be achieved.

The challenge facing ministers and laypersons is that multicultural worship demands an understanding of cultures. Issues such as length of service, style of preaching, dress codes, symbols of worship, and regulations regarding the sacraments have a great variety of expressions in the different cultures of the world. Dialogue between cultures is essential to gaining an understanding of the expectations represented in a multicultural setting.

3. Music must be adapted for multicultural worship.

A sharp young businessman, whose cultural background is Orthodox from the Middle East, asked me why



we didn't have a pipe organ in our church. It had not occurred to him that there would be significant logistical problems lugging a pipe organ in and out of the school gymnasium where we worship each Sunday. He simply was accustomed to the sound of a pipe organ as the accompaniment for music in worship.

No one disputes the principle that music is a vital part of worship. However, hot debate rages on over what type of music is appropriate for worship. Not even North Americans can agree on styles of music and instruments for worship. More than one church has suffered a split over something as basic as musical taste and expression in worship.

Despite all arguments to the contrary, the choice of worship music is influenced primarily by culture and is therefore *not a spiritual issue*. A shallow and narrow viewpoint would insist that one style of worship music is spiritually superior to another.

The critical issue is that worship leaders must learn the musical vernacular of the people to whom they are ministering. Musical styles that are strange and peculiar to other cultures can be as frustrating as trying to listen to a foreign language. Multicultural worship must cross the boundaries of numerous musical styles in order to touch the hearts of the participants.

4. Worship facilities play a role in multicultural worship.

The same businessman who inquired about the pipe organ also asked where we stored our religious symbols. In particular he wondered why we had no icons. To him the bare walls of the gymnasium were a stark contrast to the richly adorned worship facilities of his Orthodox tradition.

Cultural diversity affects expectations of worship facilities. North Americans are accustomed to more open space. The usual rule is that a North American congregation will not continue to grow past 80% of the capacity of the building. By contrast, my Haitian brothers don't feel as though they've got much of a crowd unless they are at about 110% capacity!

Much of our ministry to multiple cultures will be seeking to reach immigrants. Sensitivity to their needs in-

cludes positioning facilities near public transportation. Another issue is the need to furnish the facility in a way that is culturally acceptable to those who are attending. The idea of owning a building will likely be unthinkable in urban areas where real estate costs are exorbitant. When an immigrant family is struggling to adjust to a new culture and is barely able to adequately feed and clothe themselves, a substantial mortgage payment on a church building is not likely to be a high priority.

5. Attitude is ultimately the key to effective multicultural worship.

There is a long-standing tradition of welcome and acceptance at the borders of the United States and Canada. These proud nations have opened the way for millions to find a new life and hope for the future. An attitude prevalent among government and the populations says in effect, "You are wanted and accepted here."

That same attitude must capture the heart and will of the church if multicultural worship is to become reality. Pastor and congregation must make the choice to *want* to exist in harmony with diverse cultures.

The choice of open acceptance of "outsiders" has always been difficult in the church. We are so deeply convinced that our ways are right and just and holy. God's blessing on our lives and ministries in the past make it obvious that we are doing something right. The natural deduction is that our way must become right for anyone else that wants to enjoy God's blessing and become a part of our group.

Exposure to godly people of other cultures strikes at the heart of the "one way: my way" mind-set. The ultimate test of a person's Christian experience is not based on how well he expresses his faith in terms of Western culture and tradition. The true test of Christianity is how well one's life measures up to the standards set by the example of Christ: "Love one another" (John 13:35).

The choice of accepting other cultures must become a commitment to reach out to people of differing ethnic origins and encourage them to sit in our pews. The choice must further be reflected by encouraging others to participate in the experience of worship.

STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE MULTICULTURAL WORSHIP

To help persons of other cultures feel comfortable and a part of the local church requires efforts that go beyond a handshake and smile. Though an initial greeting at the door and a farewell at the close of worship cannot be overlooked, they are but the starting point for building strong relationships. An effort must be made to recognize and publicly esteem the cultural traditions of those with whom we worship.

Once again I looked to my students at Quebec Nazarene Bible Institute for their input. Their suggestions for strategies to enhance multicultural worship were especially helpful in light of the fact that they themselves represent several countries of the world.

1. Advertise the multicultural nature of a local church.

Rather than waiting for some unsuspecting ethnic to wander in the door and discover there are many nations present in the service, publicize the international character of the church. Use newspaper advertisements and editorial articles to highlight the presence of many nationalities within the congregation. Encourage members of the congregation to speak with friends within their culture group and emphasize the benefits of meeting with a multicultural congregation.

Advertising experts tell us that today's consumer is interested in personal benefits, not special features. If no benefits are readily visible, then a discussion among members of the congregation should take place. An exchange of ideas will be sparked with questions such as "Why do you like coming here?" "What makes you feel comfortable in our worship service?" and "How do you personally benefit from being involved in our church?" The goal of asking these questions is to discover the specific, understandable benefits of being a part of a particular congregation. The local church will receive an added bonus of building its own morale and self-esteem by talking about the value and benefit of that church's ministry. Churches that have long struggled with paying the bills and questioning their reason for existence can reverse their defeated spirits by simply ac-

knowledging that positive help is being received by members of the congregation.

Following a year of remarkable growth and development, our church had skidded to a halt on a plateau. After several months of frustrating attempts to get moving again, we stepped back to ask, "Just exactly what are we doing that has some worth?" A deep and soul-searching discussion among board members ensued and with exhilarating results. We discovered that while we had been targeting a baby boomer audience, those people were not responding to our church. Instead, we had enjoyed substantial success in reaching immigrants from a wide variety of cultures. Interestingly, with the exception of myself as pastor having been born in a baby boom country, no one else in the congregation had been born in association with the baby boom. Even my wife was born in a Caribbean country that was not affected by the baby boom.

Once we had discovered our strength in multicultural ministry, it gave new focus and energy to our church. We now talk about our international congregation and highlight the benefits of our unique ministry. Our advertising emphasizes the joy of coming together with people of many lands and worshipping God in wonderful harmony. We even tell people to come to our church because they'll likely find someone with whom they can relate and talk in their own native languages. The multicultural diversity of our congregation has become a powerful advertising advantage.

2. Regularly feature culture groups in worship services and activities.

Each year in the Sundays preceding Christmas we take time in our worship services to feature different cultural groups. One year we asked people to tell us what their favorite Christmas carols were and what carols were traditional in their countries. Another year we asked what a traditional Christmas meal would be in the different countries. That produced a lively discussion! I'm still not convinced that I could get used to eating octopus and squid on Christmas Eve like some of my Italian friends are accustomed to doing.

The point is that we do not expect everyone will do the same things as

we will for Christmas. We are taking delight in the diversity, making people feel good about their cultural traditions. As Easter approaches, we will take time in our services to recognize the variety of ways Jesus' resurrection will be celebrated in other parts of the world.

Some other suggestions for featuring culture groups are to set a day when people will be encouraged to wear their native dress to church. And don't just ignore them once they arrive all decked out in their country's finest! Make over each outfit, admire the craftsmanship and function of the garment, and talk with each individual about what they are wearing. In so doing, you will show appreciation for their cultures and thus build better relationships among those with whom you worship.

Food is always a grand way to feature different cultures. Perhaps a potluck meal featuring native foods can be combined with the day for wearing native dress. Actually, though, an international dinner on a quarterly basis would be well worth consideration. It is a tremendous experience to see people from all over the world sitting together and sharing one another's food. You can be sure that when people have shared each other's food, they will feel closer when they next gather for worship.


Another idea for featuring cultural groups is to designate various groups to sponsor and plan worship services. A regular schedule of services in which different groups select music, plan the order, and actually lead worship will enhance worship for everyone. As pastor, I even ask the groups to coach me on how I should preach in order to fit as best as I can into their cultures. I'm not always successful in crossing cultures, but at least the people know that I am interested in trying to relate to them. I convey to them the attitude that I really want to know and understand them, with the result that they are much more open to my ministry.

One final tip is to invite different cultural groups to assist in Scripture reading from their own language or dialect. I occasionally like to ask a husband and wife to read the Scripture lesson before my sermon. The first one reads from the Bible in his or her own tongue and then is followed


by the other reading the same passage in English.

3. Adjust vocabulary to reach a multicultural audience.

Effective preachers make a life-long habit of developing their skills in communication. John Maxwell likes to talk about how educators take the simple and make it complicated. By contrast, Maxwell says that communicators take the complicated and make it simple. While no preacher should be allowed to slide into habits of sloppy grammar, mush diction, and vocabulary the meaning for which even theological scholars cannot agree, these problems border on outright sin in a multicultural, multilingual setting.



The stories of Jesus' love and compassion translate beautifully into all cultures.



Clarity and ease of understanding must be the criteria by which we evaluate vocabulary used in worship. One of my preaching professors, Dr. Kenneth Pearsall, said that if we stay simple enough for the children to understand, then we will certainly reach the comprehension level of adults. For those for whom English is a second language, our worship vocabulary and communication must be simplified in order to be understood. That takes a lot of hard work!

A helpful discipline to insure effective communication is to labor through preparation of a full manuscript of all remarks, prayers, and the sermon. Though I doubt that many will want to practice the discipline of

a full manuscript for very long, even a few weeks will cement the principle into the mind. Soon it will become a natural part of communication.

The essential idea is that vocabulary used in a multicultural setting must be simple and clearly enunciated. Practice and coaching by an informed listener will help to perfect these important skills.

4. Develop small groups centered around cultural groups.

A basic principle of church growth insists that the small group is the building block of a great church. Churches are encouraged to increase the number of entry points by way of additional small groups. Groups are most effective when they are need-based and centered on specific groups. Even Sunday School experts assert that growth will happen when new classes are created on a regular basis.

An important facet of developing small groups is a willingness on the part of leadership to (a) allow the small groups to form without feeling a threat to the total program of the church, and (b) to allow a strong degree of autonomy among small groups so that the pastor or another church leader need not be present at all meetings.

The principle of developing small groups that are largely self-governing can be applied to creation of ethnic ministry groups. Ethnic groups flourish when encouraged to maintain ties to their culture while also adapting to a new culture.

One church I know has a thriving class of Filipinos meeting during the Sunday School hour. They speak in their native dialect and enjoy fellowship together. Their Bible study is addressed to their specific needs. Then, when they go into worship, they gladly accept a unified service conducted in English.

Other churches have developed a home Bible study ministry focused on different ethnic groups. Still others teach English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) classes and use these classes as an introduction to Christ and the church.

There are those who insist on a philosophy of absorption. They demand that all ethnic groups shed their cultural roots and traditions and become lost in a new culture. Others

see beauty in a mosaic of unique cultures existing in harmony together. My preference is for ethnic groups to be encouraged to maintain their cultural identity through small groups. Worship among combined groups then takes on a beautiful flavor enhanced by the contribution of each cultural group.

5. Staffing should reflect a multicultural approach.

A starting point is to invite members of other cultures to join the staff of Sunday School teachers and small-group leaders. As persons grow and mature in their faith and leadership abilities, positions on committees and the church board should be opened to them. It is also important to find ways of incorporating ethnics into leading worship services.

Opening staff positions to people from different ethnic backgrounds presents certain problems. We found that Sunday School literature and Vacation Bible School materials had to be modified for E.S.L. teachers and learners. Our church board meetings move slower at times while we educate new members to the organizational structures of a North American church. And sometimes we have needed translation to be certain that communication was adequate.

To incorporate other cultural groups into leading worship also means that occasionally it is a strain to understand their English. Further, worship practices from other world areas can sometimes be uncomfortable for worshippers unaccustomed to changes in style and tradition.

The benefits of multicultural staffing exceed the liabilities. One benefit is exposure to new ways of expressing our faith through worship and education. Life is richer when we become familiar with a broad range of experiences. A second benefit is based on another principle of church growth. The principle states that the greater the number of persons involved in the leadership of the church, the greater the likelihood newcomers will find a personal point of identification. When an African visits my church and sees another African serving in a position of leadership, he or she will likely think, Maybe there is a place here for me.

A further benefit to using a multicultural staff is that it communicates

in clear terms that all ethnic groups are wanted and welcome in the church. They will not be treated as outsiders but will be urged to become a full part of the church's ministry. Sharing leadership positions with different cultures signals the attitude that the church is committed to multicultural ministry.

Perhaps this is nowhere more evident than when pastoral staff and senior pastor positions reflect the multicultural commitment of the church. At times, it is difficult for North American congregations to surrender their pulpits to nonwhites.

A large church in a metropolitan downtown location has gone through significant change in the makeup of the congregation. As with most urban areas, the affluent whites have moved to the suburbs and were replaced with ethnic groups. The church, once a powerhouse of white affluence and leadership, has shifted to where it is now dominated by ethnics. Pastoral estimates are that two-thirds of the congregation are Caribbean blacks.

The decision-making power of the church, however, continues to rest in the hands of a small white minority. Consequently, when a recent pastoral change was made, the ruling minority selected another white pastor.

We must realize that some of the brightest, most capable, most spiritually sensitive leaders will be found among ethnics who had the necessary drive to leave their home countries in search of a better way of life. These dynamic leaders must not be set on a shelf and refused opportunity to become involved in directing the affairs of the church. Indeed, many of them have been severely tested because of their faith and can teach North Americans important lessons in spirituality. The church that is sincerely committed to multicultural worship and ministry will find ways of capitalizing on the strengths of its congregants, regardless of their ethnic origin.

Multicultural worship challenges me every Sunday. Increasingly it will become a challenge for churches all across North America. As the world comes streaming into our cities and towns, our mandate will remain—to share the good news of Jesus with people of every tribe and nation. ■

Communicator's Sermon Contest

Editorial Note:

Presenting the winning sermons of the Communicator's Sermon Contest. The editorial staff thanks our judges: Ron Benefiel, pastor; C. Neil Strait, district superintendent; and C. William Ellwanger, professor of preaching.

A Specific Prayer for You

by Fred G. Prince

West Bloomfield, Mich.

John 17:6-20



The company was very large, one of the electric power companies down south. They began to develop security problems. Though surrounded by a high, chain-link fence, every night the alarms went off. They were certain someone was trying to break in. Located in a high crime area well known for gang problems, that conclusion came very easy.

First, they hired more security guards and made more patrols. They reasoned that just the sight of armed guards would scare off any would-be intruders. But the alarms kept going off each night. The security people, even with more help, did not catch the intruders. In fact, they kept insisting that they didn't even see anyone. But the alarms kept going off each night and only at night.

Of course, they had the security system checked. They were assured that nothing was wrong with the system. It worked perfectly. "Someone,"

they said, "is triggering the alarm each night."

As the next step, at some expense, the company installed floodlights. This lit up the entire fenced-in area. No one would be able to lurk in the shadows and get away with it. With the newly installed lights and the strengthened security, they expected to catch the intruders. But even with all of these precautions, it didn't work. Each night the alarms were still set off, and the intruders were not seen, let alone caught.

The corporate executives then took one further step, this time at great expense to the company. They installed numerous surveillance cameras. Now the entire fenced-in area would be captured on film. They would surely find out who the intruders were.

The very night after the cameras had been installed, the alarms went off again. The security people gathered around the VCR television. They began to watch what each camera had captured on film. Finally, one camera had caught the intruders. There was no doubt. Their faces were captured on film. They would be very easy to apprehend because they were all recognized for who they were. Well, maybe it would be better to say, "what they were."

A family of raccoons had discovered the company's garbage dumpster. Each night this family of raccoons came to enjoy their supper and

then left. In the process, they set off the alarms.

What had happened? The garbage service that used to pick up in the evening, leaving the dumpsters empty at night, changed its schedule. Garbagemen had begun to pick up early in the morning. That left the previous day's garbage sitting there overnight. The raccoons, being night creatures, evidently smelled it. They took advantage of what seemed to them a new fast-food restaurant in the neighborhood that rang bells every time they came—and they enjoyed it.¹

By now you're probably thinking, Nice story, Pastor. What's the point? The company had a problem. The alarms were being set off each night, indicating that someone was trying to break in. They went to great lengths and great expense to solve the problem. They hired more security guards, installed floodlights, and installed surveillance cameras. None of those things took care of the problem. They either had to move the dumpster or get the garbage service to pick up the garbage in the evening again.

A very simple solution. A solution that would have cost them nothing. A solution that was there if someone had only recognized that the problem started when the garbage pickup time changed. A solution that would have saved much time, expense, and aggravation if someone would have gone back to the source of the problem.

By now you're thinking, Nice explanation, Pastor. What's the point? Simply this: I often think we spend much time, energy, and even money trying to take care of the problems of life.

They may be problems in a marriage or another relationship.

They may be habits that are destroying you.

They may be mind-sets and attitudes that are destructive.

But the alarms keep ringing!

We earnestly try our best to take care of the problem, to find a solution, but it keeps coming back and it continues to defeat us! So we read books about our kind of problems. We listen to what others say, and we think, If I only had more money, I know the problems would be gone. Or, If I had a different job! Yes. That's what I need. Or, If this person wasn't around . . . Or, Maybe if I went to church more. That's what I really need to do. I'll pray more and read my Bible more and go to church more. That will take care of my problem. So you go to church. You begin to hear from somebody like me about a deep joy and contentment and an incredible peace and a power to handle the problems—and you say to yourself, I think I've found the solution to my problems. So you start going to church, believing, This is what I need.

But the alarms keep ringing; the problems keep coming. The promise of joy and peace and power isn't a reality in your life. The reality is that you are continually being defeated by the same problems over and over again. Every time you are defeated, you feel more guilt. The more guilt you feel, the less you feel like being in church. The less you feel like being in church, the more guilty you feel.

What's going on?

You haven't really gotten back to the source of the problem. Simply coming to church would be like the company watching the surveillance film of the raccoons over and over and over again, but doing nothing about the source of the problem—the garbage dumpster.

I want you to realize there is a solution to the problems plaguing you, the attitudes defeating you, and the habits destroying you. I want you to realize those promises of joy and

power and peace for your life and your marriage are real. You can experience the reality of them. Those are not distant goals you are shooting for or striving for. They can be a present-day reality, a "today" reality in your life.

But I need to tell you as emphatically as I can, you will not find it in a job, or a career, in money, not in your marriage or other relationships, or even by simply going to church. You must get back to the source of the problem and take care of that. This is the very thing Jesus prayed would happen in His disciples and in you.

There was a very simple solution to the problem that would have cost them nothing.

In John 17, I want us to read part of a prayer that Jesus prayed. As soon as Jesus had finished this prayer, He and His disciples walk across the Kidron Valley and enter into a garden on the Mount of Olives. They remain only a short time when Temple soldiers come, with Judas leading the way, to arrest Jesus. Jesus is taken away. He goes through the trials, the beatings, the mockings. He is nailed to the cross and dies. This prayer is the last prayer the disciples will hear Jesus pray until He is hanging on the Cross. In the moments preceding this prayer, Jesus had told them some incredible things—incredible things they needed to do, like love one another and lay down their rights. He has told them the incredible promises of joy and power and peace. But what Jesus prays now is very, very revealing.

Jesus is really praying that they won't try to take care of their problems themselves, that they won't try to do all these things He had told them by themselves. He is praying that they won't try to manufacture the promises in their own lives through their own strength in their own way. He is praying that they will get to the source of the problem.

Let's read part of this prayer that Jesus prayed moments before His arrest. (Read John 17:6-20.)

From this prayer and a couple of other passages of Scripture that relate to it, I want to point out three specific things:

First, this was a specific prayer for Christians.

Second, there was a specific answer.

Third, there were specific results.

I

This was a specific prayer for Christians.

Jesus was praying for something very specific to happen in the lives of Christians.

These 11 fellows who are left are genuine disciples. They weren't called Christians. That tag had not yet been placed on the followers of Christ. But they were genuine Christians. They had accepted Jesus as Lord. They had put their faith in Him. They had been forgiven of sins. Oh, we know they had their problems and personality quirks. We know that sometimes they fought with each other and argued. But in spite of all that, we know they were genuine. We know that because of what Jesus said in His prayer: "For I gave them the words you gave me and they *accepted* them. They *knew* with certainty that I came from you, and they *believed* that you sent me" (v. 8, italics added).

And so there isn't a bit of doubt, Jesus says: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, *for they are yours*" (v. 9, italics added).

In Jesus' own words, He said that the disciples were God's. In today's language, we would say, "Those men are saved. They have been converted. They are Christian. They are genuine disciples."

They are Christians. This is important for our understanding. Jesus was

praying specifically for Christians, and He prayed for something very specific to happen to them.

First, Jesus prays, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me" (v. 11). Then He prays, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (v. 15). Jesus wasn't asking God the Father that we not have problems. He wasn't requesting that God make the Christian's life easy. Jesus was saying, "They need to live in the world and be in the world and face all the problems of life that come from living in the world, just as I did!" Once again Jesus prayed specifically for our protection from Satan, the evil one.

That helps me! Just to know that when Satan bombards me with all he's got and I'm tempted to be discouraged and give up and quit, it really helps to know that Jesus prayed for my protection. And because He did, I'm going to be protected. The temptations will come. The battles will come. The problems will come. But I will come out unharmed and victorious because Jesus prayed for me. That helps!

Not only did Jesus pray specifically for my protection, but also He prayed that His disciples and all Christians who came to believe in Him after the disciples would be sanctified: "Sanctify them by the truth" (v. 17). "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (v. 19). Friends, Jesus was praying for something very specific to happen in the Christian. He is not praying for the non-Christian. This prayer is for the disciples who were Christians and for every other person who would become Christian after the disciples. He prayed for them to be sanctified.

The term may be vague to you, but it wasn't vague to Jesus. It wasn't vague to John or Peter or James or the other disciples. It wasn't vague to Paul. In fact, Paul uses it over and over again throughout his letter to the Romans. To the Thessalonians he wrote: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified" (1 Thess. 4:3). It wasn't vague to them, and it should not be for you.

What is this sanctification? For what was Jesus praying? What does it mean to be sanctified?

It is a definite work of God that occurs in the life of the believer.

It is when you are set apart for service.

It is when you are empowered by the Spirit.

It is when you are made pure and holy by a holy God!

It is getting to the core of the problem, the source of the problem—that disposition toward sinning, that attitude of selfishness, of wanting things your own way—and crucifying it.

It is allowing the Holy Spirit to do a definite, decisive work in your life.

The alarms keep ringing; the problems keep coming.

You may say, "Pastor, isn't that what happened when I was saved?" No! That's when you placed your faith in Jesus. That's when you confessed and repented of sins and were forgiven. That's when you became a Christian. Jesus prayed this sanctification for the Christian. To be sanctified is something that occurs in your Christian life after you have accepted the Lord. It happens at a specific time. It happens when you realize there are things within you literally warring against your following Christ. Part of you wants what Jesus wants, but part of you wants what you want. You seem to have one spiritual defeat after another.

This is exactly where the disciples were spiritually when Jesus prayed this important prayer. I am convinced this is right where many people are today. They are Christians, but they don't know the power, the joy, the peace that is promised. They are busy trying to take care of this problem or that problem, but they never get to the core or the source of the problem.

You try to live a holy life by keeping a list of rules, only to fail.

You try to forgive, but you can't. Or it seems to work for a while, but

all the old hatred and unforgiveness comes raging back.

You try to lay down your rights—but you can't.

You try to fix the marriage—but you can't.

You try to change attitudes—but you can't.

You try to refrain from gossip. You try to quit destructive habits.

You try to be completely committed and overcome defeats and be all that Christ would have you to be—but you can't!

Do you see what you are doing? You're trying on your own to take care of all the problems. You're giving it your best shot. You're expending all that time and energy, only to fail. Why? Because you're not getting to the source of the problem. You need to be sanctified! You need God's Spirit to do a work that is decisive and definite. You need selfishness crucified. You need to be made pure and holy. That only comes by the work of the Holy Spirit.

So, Jesus prayed for something specific to happen in the life of the Christian—that you may be sanctified.

II

There was a specific answer to that prayer.

After the Resurrection, Jesus had told His disciples, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus' prayer had not been answered at that point. But the disciples did what Jesus said. They went to Jerusalem. They waited. They prayed. They waited and prayed some more. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:1-4).

At that very definite moment, the prayer that Jesus had prayed 51 days earlier was specifically answered. The disciples were sanctified. It occurred in an instant, in a moment.

Not only did the specific answer occur for them, but also the Book of Acts tells us of when it occurred for others. Church history, from then until now, tells us of men and women who quit trying to solve the many problems of life and simply allowed the Holy Spirit to fill them and cleanse them and empower them. They got right to the root of the source of the problem. Then they were able to handle the problems of life, empowered by the Spirit, in answer to the very prayer Jesus prayed.

III

There were specific results.

The specific prayer—that they may be sanctified—had a specific answer. As a result, a specific thing took place. All the things Jesus had told them to do about forgiving and loving one another and laying down one's rights and serving, suddenly the disciples were able to do those things of which they had been incapable. All the promises Jesus had made about peace and joy and power were now a reality in their lives.

Look at Peter. Before being empowered by the Spirit, he was afraid to tell even a little servant girl that he knew Jesus. Afterward, he stood on the steps of the Temple and preached Christ crucified and resurrected and that people needed to repent. In one day 3,000 people accepted Jesus as Savior. Talk about power!

When Peter and John were arrested for healing a crippled man and telling others of Jesus Christ, Jewish leaders threatened them, saying, "Don't talk about Jesus anymore."

They replied: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). I think they said it with a smile on their faces. That was unbridled joy, completed joy, something not affected by circumstances or threats. Talk about joy!

When Paul was arrested, thrown into jail, and put into stocks, he was chained—hands, neck, and feet—to a wall. What did he do? He sang! That's the kind of peace that Jesus had promised: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (John 14:27). Talk about peace!

There are specific results when Jesus' prayer is answered in your life. In fact, this is the only way you will know the reality of those promises. It

is the only way you will ever be able to do what Jesus has asked of you. It is the only way you won't be consumed with taking care of one problem after another, only to have them raise their ugly heads to defeat you again. You need to get to the source, the core of the problem.

Sanctification is a definite work of God in the life of the believer.

Christian, this prayer uttered by Jesus moments before He was arrested was for you: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message" (v. 20). That is you! A specific prayer prayed for you!

Suddenly the disciples were able to do those things of which they had been incapable.

The question is this: has that prayer been answered specifically in your life? This is the move you've been searching for. You're so tired of trying to put out one fire after another, trying to fix one problem after another,

trying to be supermom or superdad, superworker, superparent, super-Christian, but all in your own efforts. And you're tired of it. You're tired of the failure. You're tired of not knowing and not experiencing the power and the joy and the peace. This is the move for which you're looking.

Perhaps you remember the story of the Faust painting.

Faust, in the old story, gambled with his soul. An artist has painted the picture—a game of chess, with Faust on one side, Satan on the other. The game in the picture is almost over, and Faust has only a few pieces left—a king, a knight, and one or two pawns; and on his face is a look of blank despair. On the other side of the board the devil leers in anticipation of triumph (his face is dripping with satisfaction and smugness). Many a chess player has looked at the picture and has agreed that the position is hopeless; it is checkmate.

But one day in the picture gallery a great master of the game stood gazing at the picture. He was fascinated by the look of terrible despair on the face of Faust. Then his gaze went to the pieces on the board. He stared at them absorbed. Other visitors in the gallery came and went, and still he studied the board, lost in contemplation. And then suddenly the gallery was startled by a ringing shout: "It's a lie! The king has another move, the king has another move!"²

Christian, I want you to understand that when you're in that position of despair, when you don't know the reality of the peace or joy or power promised, and it seems like you're not making it, there is another move. In fact, Jesus prayed specifically that you would be sanctified. Paul told us it was God's will for you to be sanctified. My question is this: has that prayer been answered in your life? If not, will you allow the Holy Spirit to fill you, cleanse you, empower you, and crucify the selfishness within? Will you get to the root and source of the problem? Will you allow Jesus' prayer to be answered in your life? ■

1. Curtis Williams, telephone conversation with author.

2. Wesley Tracy, "Rings of Truth," in *The Redeemed Will Walk There* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983), 144.

The God Who Changes His Mind

by George Lyons

Nampa, Idaho

Exod. 32:1-14

2 Cor. 1:12-22



Please accept my invitation to join me on a thinking expedition into uncharted territory. The journey is not for the fainthearted. I'd like you to think with me about the most important subject a human being can think about and the most difficult—**God**. Be forewarned, this is "Mission: Impossible!" Scripture says that "God's wisdom and knowledge have no end! No one can explain the things God decides. No one can understand God's ways" (Rom. 11:33, NCV). God is awesome!

It boggles our minds to think of a Being who was not created but is the Creator of all that exists—to think of One who has no beginning and who will never die; to think of One who never gets tired or depressed; who is all-powerful and yet infinitely patient; who knows all that is knowable, yet whose mind is not polluted by evil; who is perfectly loving and yet absolutely holy; who unreservedly loves even those who hate Him and defy His laws. God is awesome!

I am not a theologian nor the son of a theologian, but it is the duty of lowly Bible teachers to present theologians with the fruit of their studies calling for theological reflection. In the fulfillment of my assignment, I have come

across a number of apparently contradictory passages of scripture that speak about God. On the one hand, there are a few passages that insist, "God is not a man, that He should lie. He is not a human being, that He should repent or change His mind. When God speaks, He does what He says. When He makes a promise, He keeps it" (paraphrased).¹ On the other hand, I have found two dozen verses that insist God does indeed repent—He changes His mind.² How do we reconcile these apparent tensions? Join me on my thinking expedition.

Let's start our expedition in 2 Corinthians, where the issue seems to be, not God changing His mind, but the apostle Paul changing his travel plans. So who cares about Corinth or Troas, Asia Minor or Macedonia, Achaia or Judea—unless, of course, you're into "Carmen San Diego"? Grasping the significance of this rather mundane problem is complicated by the fact that we are reading someone else's mail and are more familiar with the geography of the Pacific Northwest than of the ancient Near East.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in Asia Minor, from where he planned to go directly to Macedonia, forgoing a necessarily brief stop in Corinth en route in favor of an extended visit there upon his return from Macedonia on his way to Judea.³ To uncomplicate matters, let's say that Ephesus is Nampa; Corinth is Portland; Macedonia is Seattle; and Judea is Kansas City. Paul wrote to the folks in Portland First Church that he was going from Nampa to Seattle but would *not* take time to stop in Portland until his return trip, which would take him to Headquarters in Kansas City. Subsequently, he changed his mind and decided to give

the Portland crowd a pleasant surprise by visiting them on both legs of his journey—on the way to and from Seattle.⁴ But the first of these planned visits turned out to be a fiasco—or as Paul described it, a "painful visit."⁵

From 2 Corinthians, it is not clear precisely what happened to Paul in Portland.⁶ Both he and they knew all too well, and he seems reluctant to open old wounds by picking at the painful details. Apparently, he needed to engage in some extremely unpleasant disciplinary action against wrongdoers in First Church.⁷ But perhaps he was not as forceful in doing so as his written threats had suggested he might be.⁸ It also appears that someone greatly wronged Paul during this visit, causing him severe emotional pain, and that no one came to his defense.⁹

Once away from Portland, Paul changed his travel plans again and did not make the previously announced visit to Portland on his return from Seattle.¹⁰ Instead, he returned to Nampa, from where he sent Titus with a "sorrowful letter" to Portland¹¹—sorrowful in several respects. Paul wrote this stringent letter "out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2 Cor. 2:4, RSV). Once he had sent it on its way with Titus, he was sorry he had done so.¹² This set of circumstances seems to have plunged Paul into deep depression and despair.¹³

He reports in 2 Corinthians 2 and 7 that he was so distracted by his anxiety about the outcome of Titus' mission to Portland that he cut short a successful evangelistic campaign in Weiser¹⁴ and headed for Seattle in search of Titus. Once reunited with his young colleague, Paul was overjoyed by the good news.¹⁵ Although Paul's now lost, "sorrowful letter" at first caused the folks in Portland

(Corinth) great sorrow, it succeeded in achieving its desired result—their repentance.¹⁶ This repentance led them to demonstrate their loyalty to Paul and to vindicate themselves by severely punishing the one responsible for offending Paul on his most recent visit.¹⁷ Too severely, perhaps.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in part to urge the Corinthians to forgive and restore this wrongdoer.¹⁸ Second Corinthians celebrates Paul's overwhelming joy at the news Titus brought him¹⁹ and his renewed confidence in his converts. The letter begins, as it should, with praise to God for the comfort he brought Paul during the weary weeks of waiting for word from Corinth (1:3-11).

The worst of the rebellion resolved, Paul could breathe a sigh of relief and at last explain why he had changed his plans about the two-part visit that didn't materialize. He insisted that his conscience was clear, his motives sincere, and his behavior pure (vv. 12-14). Nevertheless, his changed travel plans opened him up to questions about his integrity. Paul denied that he made his plans like a fickle man of the world (vv. 15-17). But his thoughts quickly turned from a vindication of *his* character to the foundation of his integrity—the character of God (vv. 18-22).

What does Paul say about the character of God?

Paul insisted that his "change of plans was not due to a defect in his personal integrity, but rather to his deep concern" for the Corinthians (1:23-2:4).²⁰ Far from slighting them by his change of plans, Paul had decided to *spare* them another painful visit by writing instead. His integrity was not inflexible but tempered by the undergirding motive of love and the desire that their mutual sorrow might be replaced by mutual joy. Paul's conduct was consistent with that of God the Father. Paul's underlying assumption throughout is that our

character is transformed by that to which we give our lives.²¹ Paul claimed that his integrity, which seemed to be challenged by his change of plans, was nonetheless consistent with the integrity of his Lord.

And what does Paul say about the character of God? He insists, first, that "God is faithful" (2 Cor. 1:18, RSV). He is absolutely trustworthy. In a political year, we become all too aware of those who modify their message to fit their audience, whose convictions seem to be determined by the latest opinion poll. Not so with God. He does not speak out of both sides of His mouth at once. He does not say yes and no at the same time. He is absolutely reliable. And by derivation, so are His messengers. When Paul denies that his changed plans implied that he was "vacillating" (v. 17, RSV), that he made his plans "lightly," he uses a word that was applied in his day to a ship without ballast—the stuff that gave it stability. On the contrary, Paul's character and conduct were not unprincipled, but stabilized. Like God, he was trustworthy—faithful, not fickle.

Second, Paul asserts that God fulfills His promises (vv. 19-20). By the Old Testament "promises" of God, Paul meant primarily His gracious announcement to Abraham that in him and his offspring all the nations of the world would be blessed. He read this promise with the conviction that was being fulfilled in the great offspring of Abraham—Jesus Christ. "All the promises of God find their Yes" in Christ (v. 20, RSV). One who has faith in Christ, no matter what his heredity, is Abraham's child and a rightful heir of the promised blessing. The unbelief of the majority of Abraham's physical descendants has not voided the promise; it has only focused it on the faithful. The unbelief of Israel is not a failure on God's part, nor is His apparent change of plans in turning to believing Gentiles a challenge to His faithfulness (chap. 3).

When the writer of Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8, NRSV), he is not affirming divine inflexibility. Because God is God, He is free to change His mind, to modify His plans. Exodus 32 is not an exceptional passage; the Old Testament frequently refers to God's repenting. Not only is God theoretically free to change His

plans, but also there is ample evidence that He actually does so. If God is not free to change His mind, He is not God. Still God is not fickle. He is definitely dependable. Because He keeps His promises, He can always be counted on to act graciously, redemptively, with dynamic integrity.

Like God, Paul was faithful, not fickle.

What happens if we take God's freedom seriously? If we admit that the Old Testament reports that He "repents" on occasion? Do not misunderstand "divine repentance." The Hebrew word translated "repent" in the golden calf incident and elsewhere in the Old Testament as applied to God's activity does not mean a turning from sin. It refers instead to His reluctance to follow through on His threats of judgment, to His change of attitude and behavior.²²

The Book of Jonah contains only one prophecy: "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!" (3:4, paraphrase). There is *no* explicit condition attached—"unless the people of Nineveh repent of their sins." But because they *do* repent, and because God is faithful to His character of redemptive love, He repents—He relents and changes His mind. Nineveh is spared, to Jonah's dismay. The reluctant prophet is scandalized by this "gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil" (4:2, RSV). This is no exception, but the norm. The Bible suggests that God consistently "changes His mind" about threatened judgment in response to people who repent of their sinful ways.

But if God's people turn from obedience to rebellion, God is also free to change His mind about the blessings of salvation He has promised them. Despite His gracious deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, despite the miraculous victory at the Red Sea, and despite the covenant established at Mount Sinai, Exodus 32

suggests that God was prepared to destroy His unfaithful people. He is a God of uncompromising holiness. There is no reason to believe that He was only joking when He urged Moses to get out of His way so that His wrath could burn hot against rebellious Israel to consume them and establish a new people with Moses as the founding father (v. 10). God was prepared to begin again with Moses as the faithful remnant of this faithless and fickle people of promise.

The unbelief of Israel is not a failure on God's part.

And yet the golden calf incident is ultimately a reminder that God also repents in response to the prayers of the righteous in behalf of unrepentant sinners. His threatened judgment on rebellious Israel is assuaged by Moses' intercession: "O Lord . . . Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people" (Exod. 32:11-12, NRSV). Remember Your promises to Abraham and his descendants (see v. 13). "And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people" (v. 14, NRSV). In response to Moses' intercession, God revealed His glorious character to Moses: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing" the unrepentant (34:6-7, NRSV).

All this suggests that God does things in response to prayer that He would not otherwise do. And if He is genuinely free to change His mind in response to our prayers, the implications are mind-boggling. If He had granted us the freedom to persist in rebellion or to repent of our sins, many popular notions about God are in need of revision. If changing one's

mind is authentically possible—whether God's mind or ours—then the future is not a finished script written in timeless eternity and only played out in time. Popular ideas about divine foreknowledge seem to be challenged.

If God is free to change His mind, if He does graciously change His mind in response to humans, which future did He foreknow? A future with Nineveh destroyed or spared? A future with Israelites or "Mosesites"? Were God's threats of judgment empty promises? Or was He genuinely prepared to do what He said? What if Jonah had not preached in Nineveh, however reluctantly? What if the Ninevites had not repented? What if Israel had not made the golden calf? What if Moses had not interceded when they did? Did Moses' prayers genuinely change the mind of God? Does human perversity or human prayer actually reshape the course of history? Unless God only pretends to change His mind, unless prayers of repentance and intercession are only perfunctory exercises, even God does not fully determine the future.

What happens if we take God's freedom seriously?

This is not to deny God's omniscience, only popular notions of what it must involve. God knows all that is knowable. But there are some things that are unknowable, because an all-knowing, omnipotent God has chosen to limit himself by granting His creatures the freedom to choose rightly or wrongly. God prefers to act, not by coercion, but by persuasion.

This is not to deny God's omnipotence. In giving human beings real freedom, God chose to surrender the possibility of determining the future fully. Does this restrict His power? Can God create a rock so big He can't move it? Of course not! His inability to perform a ridiculous task does not

suggest that His power is limited. Isn't it equally ridiculous to expect God to know fully a future that depends, in part, on the free decisions of others and on His own freedom to change His mind? God is not limited in His ability to know; He knows all that is knowable. But a genuinely free future is unknowable. The future is open to change, because an almighty, holy, infinitely patient God chooses to be redemptive!

The popular view that God is somehow in the eternal past and the eternal future simultaneously makes absolutely no sense, if we take seriously the constraints of historical existence. This is not to deny the eternity of God—by His very nature as God, He has always been and always will be. He is not subject to the limits we know—we are born and we will die. Only His gracious love assures us that we will live eternally.

God freely chose to limit himself by creating. All that exists that is not God is His creation. Creation has a beginning and will have an end. God did not have to create; He chose to do so. He did not have to give human beings freedom; He chose to do so. But God's choices, like ours, bring with them inevitable consequences that even He must live with. Even God cannot have His cake and eat it too. Even God cannot grant humans authentic freedom and still determine the future absolutely. But that's His choice. He didn't have to limit himself. But the Bible suggests that He did, freely, graciously.

God does things in response to prayer that He would not otherwise do.

The Bible implies that God is not pleased with the way most of us have misused our freedom. His heart is broken by the inevitable consequences we set in motion by our re-

bellion and our vacillation. But He has not yet given up on us nor on His dangerous experiment with freedom. He has not ceased to be God because His creation has not turned out as He would have preferred.

God is omnipotent; He can do all that He chooses to do. He is omniscient; He knows all that He chooses to know. What God chooses not to know is not knowable. God is eternal; He can wait as long as it takes to accomplish His purposes. God is redemptive; He is absolutely free to be responsive to His creation. He is free to change His mind without being fickle.

Creatures live within the bounds we call history. The Bible witnesses to God's free choice to make himself known in redemption and judgment within the events of human history. The Exodus events happened at a particular point in time—not in some timeless eternity—and to a particular people. God the Son became incarnate at a particular time, in a particular place, as a particular person.

Because God chooses to involve himself in human history, even He must accept the fact that history is played out one event after another. Consider these simple observations: What hasn't happened yet hasn't happened yet. What has happened in the past is done—it cannot be changed. We must not allow Jules Verne and other science-fiction writers' notions of "time travel" to determine our views of God and eternity. Will it be "back to the future" or "back to the Bible"? You can't have it both ways.

The future is not written in granite.

Apparently, names can be both added to and blotted from the Book of Life.²³ People once saved can be lost; and those once lost can be saved.²⁴ We are not simply playing out some eternally prescribed and divinely fore-known script. Because God has determined that His ultimate purposes for this world will be achieved by persuasion—or coercion if necessary, predictive prophecy is possible. But virtually every prophecy about the future comes with an explicit or implicit asterisk attached—"unless."

God has chosen to act in ways that are responsive to what His creatures choose to do. Since He knows us fully and intimately, He knows everything we are capable of doing and probably will do. But since He has given us genuine freedom, even He does not determine which "likely" option we ultimately "will" choose. Of course, He knows what He will do in response to our choices. He is never taken by surprise. And because He is faithful to His character, because He keeps His promises, even He is, to a certain extent, *predictable*.

So we have come full circle back to Paul's affirmations in 2 Corinthians:

As surely as God is faithful, our

God is not
subject
to limits.

word to you has not been Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ . . . was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God. But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has commissioned us; he has put his seal [of ownership] upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee [that he keeps all his promises] (1:18-22, RSV).

And all the people said, "Amen." May God be praised! Thank You, Lord, for changing Your mind! ■

1. E.g., Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; see also Ps. 110:4; Jer. 4:28; 15:6; Ezek. 24:14; cf. Hos. 13:14; Zech. 8:14-15.

2. Gen. 6:6; Exod. 32:12, 14; Deut. 32:36; Judg. 2:18; 1 Sam. 15:11, 35; 2 Sam. 24:16; 1 Chron. 21:15; Pss. 90:13; 106:45; Jer. 18:8, 10; 26:13, 19; 42:10; Hos. 11:8; Joel 2:13-14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9-10; 4:2.

3. 1 Cor. 16:5-7; 2 Cor. 1:16.

4. 2 Cor. 1:15.

5. 2 Cor. 2:1.

6. See 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1.

7. See 1 Cor. 4:17-21; 2 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; 12:20-21; 13:1-2, 10.

8. See 2 Cor. 10:1-11; 11:21a; 12:19-21; 13:1-4, 10.

9. 2 Cor. 2:3, 5; 7:11-12.

10. 2 Cor. 1:15-17; 2:1-2.

11. 2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12.

12. 2 Cor. 7:8.

13. See 2 Cor. 1:8-10.

14. I.e., Troas.

15. 2 Cor. 7:6, 13.

16. 2 Cor. 7:9.

17. 2 Cor. 2:6, 9; 7:11-12.

18. 2 Cor. 2:6-11; 7:11-12.

19. 2 Cor. 7:4, 6-7, 13-16; 1:7.

20. Frank G. Carver, "The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians," in *Beacon Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1968), 512.

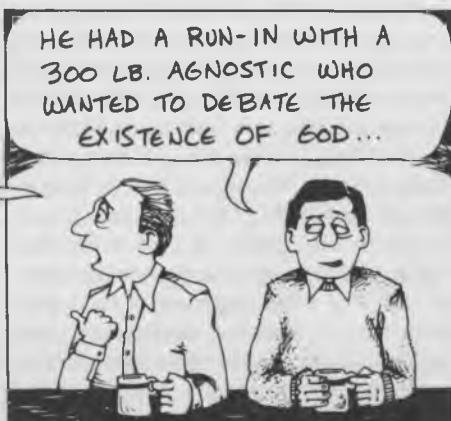
21. Ibid., 510.

22. See Exod. 32:12, 14; Num. 23:19; Deut. 32:36; 1 Sam. 15:29; Pss. 90:13; 135:14; Jer. 18:8, 10; 26:3, 13; 42:10; Joel 2:14; Amos 7:3, 6; Jonah 3:9; 4:2.

23. Exod. 32:32; Rev. 3:5; 22:19.

24. Ezekiel 18.

Beyond Belief



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Called unto Holiness

by Ronald David Bloomfield

Central, Ind.

1 Thess. 3:10—4:8



The subject of today's message is "Called unto Holiness." The One who is calling is God, those being called are Christians, and the calling to which Christians are all being called is holiness. We must have a clear understanding of all three components—the caller, those being called, and the call itself—for this biblical truth to have full effect on our lives.

In our key verse (4:7), the Greek word for holiness (or "holy life") comes from the verb meaning "to set apart as sacred" or "to make holy." The same Greek word is found in verse 3 and is translated "sanctification" in all major versions (or "be sanctified"). Thus we may properly speak of holiness and sanctification as the same thing.

Nearly all denominations and doctrinal persuasions teach sanctification. If they are to be biblical, they must. But *how* are they teaching it? Unfortunately, some are not willing, it seems, to accept the fullness of the biblical teaching on the subject. The sharpest point of departure among those who debate the subject of sanctification is probably to be found in the question, "When does sanctification take place and how?" Most will

agree that holiness is required for entrance into heaven, as attested by verses like, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The disagreement usually arises when the discussion gets to the point of asking *when* holiness or sanctification occurs.¹ Does it happen in this life? Or does it happen after death? Or is it both? Let us look at these following three views, which we believe are unbiblical.

1. The first is the view that one is sanctified simultaneously with justification. This is partly true, and therein lies the danger. The error that must be avoided here is a misconception of the nature of sin. We must first clearly understand that sin is twofold: we are sinners by *choice* and we are sinners by *condition*. Once this is understood—and who could deny it?—then it is a reasonably safe step to go on and say that the cure for sin is also twofold: we are forgiven for our sinful choices, and we are cleansed from our sinful condition. This is really what those in the holiness tradition have always meant when they said, "saved and sanctified."

To say that we are sanctified simultaneously with justification is partly true in that we are forgiven for our sins, and, as regenerate persons, we are no longer sinners by choice. In this sense, we are "set apart," which is the basic meaning of the word "sanctified." We are made new creations in Christ; "the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17). But what is often overlooked or ignored is that the Bible repeatedly calls persons such as this to a deeper life, variously known as sanctification, perfection, holiness, purity, perfect love, heart cleansing, etc. The context of

such calls almost invariably speaks of such as an event, or what theologians like to call a "crisis experience." If this line of reasoning is valid, then it follows that there must be a "second definite work of grace" in the believer's life. This is what we call "sanctification," or perhaps better, "entire sanctification."

The danger in this first position, besides being false, is that one who has been saved may be led to believe his sin *condition* has been cured, when, in fact, it has not. That person needs to understand that God's call to holiness goes out to those who are already saved. Otherwise, that person will fall into many snares and pitfalls, when he or she discovers rudely that sin is still the condition of the heart. A terrible inner conflict will be the result. With proper discipleship, this need not be the case. A new convert should be nurtured into the knowledge of God's call to holiness.

An appeal to Rom. 12:1 is sufficient to refute this first view. There Paul urges the Romans to present their bodies as *living* sacrifices to God. Knowing that an unregenerate person is "dead in . . . transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1), it becomes completely unbiblical and illogical to think that an unregenerate person can make a living sacrifice. This is essentially what proponents of the simultaneous view must assert: namely, that a spiritually dead person can make a living sacrifice. This cannot be.²

2. The second is the view that one is sanctified after death. Some would say that death becomes a sort of "second work of grace" for the Christian. That is, the departure from the *presence* of sin in this world has the effect of sanctifying one, as the person enters the holiness of the world be-

yond. These proponents would want to say that you can be saved from the *power* of sin in this life, but not from its *presence*. Roman Catholic theology speaks of purgatory as the agency of sanctification. Supposedly, this fiery realm "purges" out the sin nature and purifies the individual for heaven. But there is no scriptural support for this outside the Apocrypha.³

We are sinners by choice and by condition.

This view must be rejected because it contradicts the plain teaching of the New Testament that the atonement of Christ can cleanse the heart from all sin, from its power and its presence! One only need look as far as Acts 15:9 or 1 John 1:7 to see this.

"He made no distinction between us and them, for he *purified their hearts* by faith" (Acts 15:9, italics added).

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, *purifies us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7, italics added).

3. The third is the view that one grows into sanctification. This is comparable to the first view, in that its proponents would argue that justification is the only crisis experience one can expect in this life. It is also comparable to the second view, in that its proponents would argue that "entire" sanctification cannot be imagined until after death, due to the presence of sin. According to this view, the best one can hope for is a constant striving, or growing in grace, drawing nearer and nearer to God all the time. As far as sin is concerned, those who hold this view will sometimes argue that the best one can hope for on earth is to keep the sin condition in check, suppressed, tamed.

This, however, contradicts the plain teaching of the New Testament, that such sanctification not only is

possible in this life but also is an event that occurs in the life of the fully consecrated believer. One only need look as far as Rom. 6:6 or Heb. 10:14 in this case.

"For we know that our old self was *crucified* with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Rom. 6:6, italics added).

"Because by one sacrifice he has *made perfect* forever those who are being made holy" (Heb. 10:14, italics added).

This last reference is especially significant. In one sweep the Hebrews writer clarifies the nature of the case. We are made perfect (i.e., complete)—this is the event; and we are being made holy—this is the growth process. So the fallacy of this position becomes apparent. It is not that we grow *into* sanctification, but that we grow *in* sanctification. There is a big difference!

Answering Common Objections

1. Corresponding to the first view, namely, that we are saved and sanctified simultaneously, the protest is often raised, "Cannot God do it all at once?"

Answer: The question focuses on something which is not at issue. The fact is, God did do it all at once, in Jesus Christ on Calvary. The atonement of Christ is all-sufficient to forgive and to cleanse from sin. But that's the point. We need both!

Because our wills are involved, God performs in us only what we by faith ask Him to do. To work salvation in someone's heart, God brings the shed blood of Christ into effect to the extent that a person asks for it by faith. We must ask for God's forgiveness with a full heart of faith and repentance, receiving Jesus Christ as our Savior. This is being saved! The usual experience of Christians is to come to an awareness of the need for heart cleansing or entire sanctification at a later time, though the interval need not be long. At that time, the person should ask God to meet that need, also by faith in the shed blood of Christ, with a full heart of consecration to the Lordship of Christ. This is being entirely sanctified!

This is the biblical view!

2. Corresponding to the second view, namely, that we are sanctified after death, the objection is lodged,

"You have not yet considered how great the weight of sin is" (Anselm of Canterbury).⁴

Answer: You have not yet considered how great the atonement of Christ is! Rom. 5:20 says, "But where sin increased, grace increased all the more."

3. Corresponding to the third view, namely, that we grow into sanctification, the objection is often raised, "If one is *entirely* sanctified in this life, where is the need for growth?"

Answer: The wholly sanctified person is the one most cognizant of the need for growth. Furthermore, this person is the one most likely to experience dynamic spiritual growth, as the Holy Spirit in all His fullness inhabits each part of that person's life. Entire sanctification does not remove our humanity. That is, the experience does not perfect our humanity, but our hearts in love toward God. As long as we are human, we may be entirely sanctified but are still not entirely glorified like as Christ. First John 3:2-3 says, "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." Do not confuse entire sanctification with glorification.

A spiritually dead person cannot make a living sacrifice.

Illustration: The best metaphor I know of to illustrate the correct view of sanctification is marriage. The same metaphor is used throughout the Old and New Testaments. Just as in a marriage, there is an event, at which time one becomes *entirely* married, so it is with sanctification. Likewise, just as there is a growth process both before and after marriage, so it is with sanctification. In fact, this metaphor is used for sanctification in an important biblical text: "Husbands, love your wives, just as

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word* (Eph. 5:25-26, italics added).

Having now dealt with some erroneous views of sanctification, let us now proceed to the heart of the message. We will examine three points:

1. The **Prescription** for Holiness
2. The **Provision** for Holiness
3. The **Possession** of Holiness

We do not grow into sanctification, we grow in sanctification.

First, there is *the Prescription for Holiness* (1 Thess. 4:3, 7-8).

For a proper understanding of this subject as it applies to us, it is crucial that we are aware of the prescribed nature of holiness. It is God's will! He has called us unto holiness! Our Scripture reading for today makes this abundantly clear.

"It is God's will that you should be sanctified . . . For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thess. 4:3a, 7).

Also 1 Pet. 1:15-16 says, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

As a physician who prescribes the medicine one needs for an illness, so God, the Divine Physician, has prescribed holiness as the cure for our sin disease. It is firmly rooted in the personal holiness of God himself. If we are to be God's people, we must be holy. To rebel against personal holiness is to rebel against the holiness of God. This is not a "take it or leave it" proposition. *We need* holiness, and God has commanded it.

In addition to this, I need to say that we should *desire* holiness. To desire God is to desire holiness. We must hunger and thirst for holiness. This is synonymous with desiring to

be filled with the *Holy Spirit*. He is the Sanctifier!

Since God has prescribed holiness, it only makes sense that what He has prescribed, He also will provide. Why prescribe the impossible? Why prescribe a cure that cannot be had? Or, why prescribe a cure that can only be partially had? This would be completely contrary to the nature of God as a holy God, as well as being contrary to the teaching of the Bible.

Second, there is *the Provision for Holiness* (1 Thess. 3:12-13).

It is just as crucial that we understand God's provision as it is to understand His prescription. This will eliminate any doubts as to whether or not this holiness to which God has called us is attainable in this life. *God's provision is far greater than our problem!* P. P. Bliss put it so eloquently when he penned these words to a great hymn:

*"Man of sorrows," what a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! what a Savior!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood;
Sealed my pardon with His blood.
Hallelujah! what a Savior!*

*Guilty, vile, and helpless we;
Spotless Lamb of God was He.
"Full atonement!" Can it be?
Hallelujah! what a Savior!*

One should not interpret what I am saying here to mean that our sin problem is not utterly deplorable. It is. We are totally depraved. However, the emphasis here is on God's provision in Jesus Christ. Paul said: "May *the Lord make your love increase* and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May *he strengthen your hearts* so that *you will be blameless and holy* in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones" (1 Thess. 3:12-13, italics added). Notice here that Paul emphasizes the Lord's ability to do a work of holiness in our hearts, which involves overflowing love, strengthened hearts, and blameless holiness. This is heart holiness! In our hearts we can be perfect in God's eyes, that is, without blame! How? God's wondrous provision! What God has prescribed for His people He has also provided. This makes us all inexcusable for not possessing a holy heart and holy life.

Third, there is *the Possession of Holiness* (1 Thess. 4:3-10; 5:23-24).

It is vitally important at this juncture to realize that God's work of sanctification in us works from the inside out. He wants to start with your heart. He wants to cleanse your heart from its original sin condition. He wants to make you holy in heart—pure in heart. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). He wants you to *be* holy and is able to make you so.

From a holy heart comes a holy life in all its conduct. This is where a holy "body" enters the picture. Paul said, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should *avoid sexual immorality*; that each of you should learn to *control his own body* in a way that is holy and honorable, . . . and that in this matter *no one should wrong his brother* or take advantage of him" (1 Thess. 4:3-4, 6). He said further, "Now about *brotherly love* we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been *taught by God to love each other*" (v. 9, all italics added).

So, in the immediate context, we are made aware of at least three areas in which holiness of heart impacts our life's conduct—or our "body":

1. Sexual purity/self-control (as opposed to self-indulgence).
2. Not doing wrong to another (this is especially linked to sexual immorality!).
3. Loving our neighbors (which is God-taught, meaning that it flows forth from a holy heart).

God performs in us only what we ask Him to do by faith.

In the broader context of 1 Thessalonians, we find more on this matter. With respect to God's provision and our possession of holiness, it is important to note 5:23-24: "May *God*

himself, the God of peace, sanctify you *through and through*. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The *one who calls you* is faithful and he *will do it*" (italics added).

Entire sanctification does not remove our humanity.

If there is a definitive verse in the Bible that teaches the doctrine of "entire" sanctification, then 1 Thess. 5:23 must be it. God is the Subject of sanctification. The Christians are the objects of sanctification. The sanctification itself is "through and through," that is, whole, complete, entire, total, full. Consequently, our total being—spirit, soul, and body—may be kept blameless until Jesus returns. Notice the ordering: first the spirit and soul, and then the body.⁵

Finally, lest there be any doubts as to whether this is attainable or possessable in this life, Paul tacks on the strong assertion that "the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." Again, this sets forth the importance of the Caller and the calling. The Caller is faithful to provide what He has prescribed! The calling is entire sanctification, and it is possessable!

We are also given more specifics as to how this work of God should affect our daily living. Notice the following words: "Live in *peace with each other*. . . . *be patient with everyone*. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be *kind to each other* and to everyone else. *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances*, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. *Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil*" (1 Thess. 5:13b-22, italics added).

The emphasis in these verses is on virtues of a holy heart. There is peace, patience, kindness, joy, goodness (thus far one may find a remarkable parallel with the fruit of the Spirit listed in Gal. 5:22-23, especially when the virtues of love and self-control found in 1 Thess. 4:4, 9, are added to those found here), and also prayer and thanksgiving. Also, quite emphatic in these verses is the completely saturating nature these virtues are to take in one's life. The following words make frequent appearances in these verses: "everyone," "always," "all," "continually," "everything," and "every." The Holy Spirit, who has purified our hearts by faith, should be the all-consuming passion of our lives. His fruit should be reflected in our lives. Once the sin condition has been expelled, the pure love of God fills the heart, making all this possible.

God, the Divine Physician, has prescribed holiness as the cure for our sin disease.

"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7, KJV). This one verse identifies the Caller, those being called, and the call itself. Once you realize that a holy God is calling you (a Christian) to be holy, that He has made provision for you to be holy, and that you may possess holiness here and now, there is nothing left for you to do but obey God with a full heart of faith.⁶ You must believe that Christ's shed blood is sufficient to sanctify you. You must consecrate your whole heart and life to God as you ask His Holy Spirit to cleanse you from all your sin condition and fill you with His very life and power.

He must be absolute Lord of your life.

The Christian should be quick to obey God! Will you obey Him now? ■

1. Perhaps the best presentation of the various views is given by Donald S. Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1971), 147-73.

2. I am aware of the danger of using these citations as proof texts. However, in this case, I believe them to be representative of the teaching of the whole Bible on the subject in question. The same is true for the references listed below.

3. They may wish to argue that 1 Cor. 3:13-15 supports it, but the passage cannot be twisted to support the notion of purgatory, because its clear reference is to the judgment of people's *works*, not of the people themselves. See Metz, *Studies in Biblical Holiness*, 149-50.

4. Quoted by Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Christian Spirituality*, ed. Donald Alexander (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 125.

5. Ferguson, 124, representing the Reformed view, argues that 1 Thess. 5:23 should not be taken to teach entire sanctification in this life, but rather that it speaks of the sanctification that will occur at the return of Christ. His basis for this is that Paul includes complete sanctification of the *body* in his concern. However, there seems to me no good reason not to take the passage at face value. The whole tenor of the passage suggests actions that are expected to happen now, in this life, e.g., "Be joyful always; pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances . . . Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (vv. 16-18, 21-22). These are present-tense verbs, indicating ongoing action, as the accompanying adverbs also attest. In verse 23, the verbs are aorist, "sanctify" and "be kept," indicating completed action. This fact alone would not settle the argument; however, the tense usually indicates a completed event. This, combined with the plain sense of the context, shows that this "entire sanctification" is to be expected in this life. The *parousia* (which Ferguson feels is decisive here) is mentioned because that is when being "wholly blameless" will be most meaningful. Meanwhile we need to "be kept" in this condition. The *parousia* does not effect entire sanctification; the atonement of Christ does! And it does so now, for those who will believe!

6. Ferguson, 124, states, "Although Paul does speak about being sanctified 'through and through' (1 Thess. 5:23-24), he does not regard this as an experience to be received *by a specific act of faith*" (italics mine). It seems apparent, however, that his Reformed presuppositions have blinded him to the biblical facts, in his efforts to explain away the obvious implications of this verse. For example, in Paul's address to Agrippa in Acts 26:17-18, he recites Jesus' words to him to the effect that, "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive *forgiveness of sins and* a place among those who are *sanctified by faith* in me" (italics added). Paul was also present at the council of Jerusalem and certainly agreed wholeheartedly when Peter said, "He made no distinction between us and them, for he *purified their hearts by faith*" (15:9).

God wants to start with your heart.

Seven Blunders of the World

by Bob Haslam

Indianapolis

History does repeat itself—but this time man's great achievements are his *deceivements*. Are we working to change the course of lives?

The seven wonders of the ancient world pale into insignificance when you consider seven *blunders* of the modern world. The situation is serious. These blunders could prove fatal to North American society as we now know it.

The first blunder the world makes is simply to ignore our Creator. I'm not speaking of philosophical atheism or even of agnosticism. I'm referring to the practical atheism of our time—the total disregard of God. It is manifest in humanism and the flagrant neglect of moral and spiritual values. It is fundamental to all that's wrong in society.

A second blunder of the world is the erroneous belief that this life is all there is. At least in action and attitude, people live as though this notion is true, giving no thought to an impending eternity somewhere following death.

Arising out of the second blunder is **the third**—pleasure is the highest good (hedonism). If we only go around once, then we should grab all the gusto we can, according to a former beer commercial. Thus, the unbelieving world seeks meaning in pleasure, not in God.

A fourth blunder is a consequence of these—a denial that Satan or hell exists. With God not in the picture, there are no moral laws, and thus no consequences for immoral behavior. And, they insist, even if by some outside chance there is a loving God out there somewhere, He wouldn't create a place like hell and send even the worst of people there.

A fifth blunder is to not take seri-

ously the Bible, the church, and individual Christians. Without a concept of God, a book purporting to be God's Word to man is irrelevant. And when that is the case, no justification exists for the validity of the church or of believers who base their entire lives upon that book.

Do we understand the emptiness, the frantic grasping for pleasure and meaning?

A sixth blunder of the world is the failure to pass along to children moral and spiritual values. Those who have, to all practical purposes, excommunicated God from their lives have no values to take the place of God and His Word. Thus, the new generation arising in such nuclear and single-parent families is spiritually bankrupt by default.



A seventh blunder is a complete contradiction to the other six: If I'm good enough, I'll go to heaven. This shows that, deep down inside themselves, the practical atheists in our society know there *is* a God, and that there *are* moral values, and that there *is* moral accountability. But that vague, almost subconscious knowledge is not allowed to surface to the extent that it drives them toward God. Thus, the weak assertion is made that if there is a heaven, and if my life is not totally depraved, I'll go to that heaven on the merits of my being "OK."

We need to know these things—to recognize these blunders, this false sense of no accountability to a God who is a myth, or, at best, is far away somewhere and irrelevant to us.

Are we on target with our approach to deliver the Good News in today's society? Do we understand the mind-set, the emptiness, the frantic grasping for pleasure and meaning where there is no meaning?

Let's do our homework. Let's understand the impoverishment of today's worldview and live and speak within that context in ways that will communicate the truth. The world that makes these blunders consists of people who, if they only knew what Christ could mean in their lives, would eagerly reach out and take His extended hand.

Sure, it's tough out there. It was tough for Jesus too. Let's help turn the blunders of the world into the wonders of God's grace. ■

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The Pastor as a Leader

by Ross W. Hayslip

Tucson, Ariz.

While a pastor must realize that he is the servant of Christ, he likewise must know that he is a leader of men. A pastor will not succeed in seeing his people climb to great spiritual heights unless he precedes them on their journey. Discovery of great spiritual experiences must go on in the pastor contemporaneously with his people's search. Leadership that does not inspire does not lead.

The pastor who leads is one who is always digging. Old sermons, frequent repetition of clichés, and no reading program mark the pastor as one who has either lost the zest for learning or else he never had it. Freshness in the pulpit commands listening in the pews.

The pastor who is a leader is always running. He must have some planned objectives that stand before him. These plans are not to make him a great preacher or an ecclesiastical leader, but to permit him to be the best possible minister of God's Word with the abilities that God has given him. To keep on the run, he is constantly "looking it up," "writing it down," and "sticking to it." He has to learn to work in short stretches. Many little jobs must get done regardless of how busy the pastor gets. Big jobs often have to be done in small units. Always the sense of immediacy

motivates the pastor as he moves toward his goals. He often must keep comfort at a minimum, for the delights of the life of the spirit mean far more than those of the sensual. Conservation of accomplishments can be learned by keeping accurate records of efforts and results. Life is always too short for the pastor. He rejoices as a strong man running a race that has new goals each time one is reached.

who hear us should leave the Sunday morning service pondering the message, unable to put it aside.

The day after Toscanini died, the *Chicago Sun-Times* carried a cartoon showing a group of angels in one part of heaven getting ready to play a harp concert. Before them stands a director with baton poised, ready to begin. To the angelic players, the director says, "Everybody on their toes! Toscanini just arrived."

The pastor keeps his people on their toes in the presence of the great God whose eye is always upon us.

The pastor who leads is one with his hat off. Humility before God and his fellowmen becomes the pastor who is a leader. Courteous respect for those whose attainments lie over the fence in neighboring fields also belongs to him. A smug presumption that he is setting the world afire and that his brethren are far behind him always sounds hollow. A pastor who refuses to take off his hat to another pastor makes himself small trying to be big in the eyes of his people. A pastor needs often to take off his hat to his ecclesiastical

leaders, ministerial colleagues, and the laymen in his pastoral care.

Pastoral leadership is rewarded by seeing his people growing in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This compensates for time and eternity. ■



The pastor is one directing. He must have a figurative baton always in his hand. He is giving instruction in the symphonies of the spirit to those under his responsibility. Like the concertgoer who returns home humming the tune of the symphony, the people

Increase Your Outreach Through Writing

by Muriel Larson
Greenville, S.C.

How many persons do you influence for the Lord when you preach or teach—a handful, a hundred, or several hundred? Have you ever wished you could reach more with your knowledge of God's Word and enthusiasm for His way of life?

You can do it through writing. In fact, you can reach up to a million persons, perhaps, just through having articles published in several of the hundreds of Christian periodicals that go forth to minister regularly across the land.

I have sold articles to more than 200 such publications, so I know the potential. Through the printed page we can teach, we can help thousands of persons come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, and we can influence multitudes of Christians to live for their Lord. Truly this is a thrilling and challenging outreach!

A spoken message is good when it's spoken! However, a written message can lay dormant for months or years and then be used by God for His glory. Consider how you are still getting blessed through the writings of Matthew Henry and John Bunyan.

SOME TIPS ON WRITING BASICS

Reading is one of the best preparations toward becoming a writer. As we read, we subconsciously pick up styles, methods of writing, correct spelling, English usage, ways of presenting conversations, characterizations, scenes, descriptions, and plot formation. When we sit down to do our own original writing, all we have read will provide grist for our mills.

When people ask me what is the best way to become a good writer, I say this: "Write, write, write!" Try to set aside some time each day when you can write something.

Most persons interested in writing did well in English in high school and, therefore, have some of the basic qualities to write for publication. Many of us also have taken typing or computer courses. Those people lacking these skills can usually take home courses or evening adult courses at a local school. Some, however, may prefer to write out their articles in longhand—as Zane Grey did—and hire a typist or delegate this part of the chore to a secretary.

For years I used a typewriter. In recent years, however, the advantages of using a word processor came to my attention. So I bought one with a double-disk drive for \$895. With the help of the salesman and the instruction books that came with it, I learned how to use this marvelous invention. It was like moving from the horse-and-buggy days to the jet age!

The manuscript should be typed and double-spaced. Single-space your name, address, and social security number in the upper left-hand corner. In the upper right corner, type the approximate number of words like this: Approximately 800 words. Skip six spaces and center your title in caps. Skip a space and type your byline: by Muriel Larson, for example. Skip two spaces and start the article. All borders should be about an inch wide.

Write simply and clearly. Keep your paragraphs fairly short. A small book I highly recommend to ministerial writers is Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*.

When submitting an article, I file my original copy and send a good photocopy. I came to this decision the hard way: after editors celebrated coffee breaks over my manuscripts or went clip- or date-stamp happy with

them, I had to retype them! I make a card for each article I send out, recording each periodical to which I send it, along with the date, followed by this information: "Rejected 7/14/91" or "Accepted 7/14/91—Received \$59.62."

Usually a writer only sends an unpublished article to one periodical at a time, specifying "First right" under the word count. After it is published, you are free to sell reprints to other publishers. I have resold a number of articles 10 to 15 times, sometimes receiving more remuneration for the reprint.

Where can you send your articles, stories, and poems? The *Christian Writers' Market Guide*, which is published yearly, provides more than 800 markets with comprehensive information about them. The 1991-92 Guide is available for \$18.95, plus \$1.75 postage, from Joy Publishing, P.O. Box 827, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675.

Don't let your manuscripts waste away in a bottom drawer! Study the markets. Adjust your word count to what some of the periodicals list. Type the article or story in proper form and send it out to a publication that uses that particular kind of material with a self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed. If you think something is good, keep sending it out until you sell it. I have sold some articles on their 18th or 24th time out in 15 years. Then, after being published, I resold them to periodicals that had rejected them the first time around.

JOYS AND PROBLEMS

One of my happiest accomplishments through writing has been the salvation of lost people. I know of

(Continued on page 49)

Revitalizing the Rural Church

by Jim Oliphant

Holyoke, Colo.

WHOA! Why the apparent rush to bid a long farewell to the rural church in favor of the megalopolis?

In Missouri, there are only seven cities with a population of over 50,000. These seven cities constitute 27 percent of the state population. From 1980 to 1988, Missouri's population living outside town and city limits increased by 10 percent, while the total population living in towns and cities increased by less than 2 percent.

Six Clues to Revitalizing the Rural Church

A strong vision. There is an old saying that goes, "Failing to plan is planning to fail." Vision necessitates planning. Having a vision for your church means having a dream and a road map to take you there. It is a deliberate choice to be God-centered, positive, and forward looking. It means avoiding certifiable idea killers like, "It's been done that way before" or "The last guy who thought that way isn't here anymore."

Vision is a willingness to invest in the future. Not brick-and-mortar investments, but concerning ourselves with how what we are doing today will impact the lives of our children and grandchildren in the future. Vision involves building on your strengths and minimizing your weaknesses.

Emphasis on leadership. A spiritually and intellectually developed leadership is essential for revitalizing the rural church. It has been said that no congregation can outgrow its leadership. Likewise, to give new life to

the rural church requires new life in its leadership.

One way of accomplishing this is the deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders. Also crucial is the strong biblical development and fulfillment of those leadership roles. Passive involvement won't work. The least we should expect of those who would lead us is that they be given to prayer, Bible study, and an active involvement in the church and her ministries.

Attention to ministry. In ministry, bringing new life to the rural church means taking a people-serving and a problem-solving approach.

Rural communities are family-oriented communities. Activities should be built around family needs and family ties. A good working definition of family includes younger as well as older people and people new to the community.

Programs that no longer serve their purpose should be allowed to die a natural death in order to allow room for pacesetting, effective ministries.

Continuing changes in rural life present many opportunities to the church disguised as problems. The sensitivity the church demonstrates in responding to these problems will

determine her impact on the rural community.

Emphasis on evangelism. An effective model in the rural church is friendship evangelism. Invitation is the key.

Rural communities have a strong tradition of faith. If people aren't involved in a local church, they know they should be. Outreach programs such as weekly volleyball and basketball get-togethers provide essential points of contact with the unchurched. Expect decisions. Give every activity of the church an evangelistic flavor.

Stewardship. Creative and innovative approaches are key to the stewardship program. These range from direct mail memorial programs to insurance policy gifts.

Expenditures are made carefully in rural communities. It's not that people are afraid to spend money; when they believe in a cause, they support it with their checkbook. Prudent use of fiscal resources is vital. Expenditures need to be seen as investments in the future.

A sound and well-maintained infrastructure. The physical property of the church must be maintained and developed in a way that is conducive to growth.

In many rural communities the church building is one of the largest facilities in the area. This provides the church opportunity to become the hub of community activity by opening her doors to civic groups, clubs, and organizations. A sound, well-maintained infrastructure can be a helpful step to revitalizing the rural church. ■



Living with Dying: Helping Parents Whose Child Has Died

by Victor M. Parachin

Elk Grove, Ill.

In June of 1983, Eric Wolterstorff, a 25-year-old mountain climber with considerable experience, fell to his death. Four years later, his father, Nicholas Wolterstorff, wrote a book titled *Lament for a Son*. There he states eloquently the emotional pain and philosophical turmoil he and every parent experiences when a child dies:

It's so wrong, so profoundly wrong, for a child to die before its parents. It's hard enough to bury our parents. But that we expect. Our parents belong to our past, our children belong to our future. We do not visualize our future without them. How can I bury my son, my future, one of the next in line? He was meant to bury me!

According to the Census Bureau of the United States, nearly 100,000 children and youths under 24 die every year in this country from illness, accident, and suicide. It is a staggering figure. The impact upon family integrity and unity is enormous. While there are no definitive studies, it is estimated that up to 70 percent of parents suffer serious marital problems when a child dies.

Parents who lose children will need the compassionate guidance of their clergy, funeral directors, churches, family, and friends. Here are effective suggestions or strategies to recommend for parents who must live with the death of a child.

FIND FRIENDLY LISTENERS

It is important to seek and establish an informal support system as quickly as possible. Bereaved parents need a variety of people who will hear their

pain but not offer empty platitudes such as: "You'll get over it." "Time will heal." "It happened for the best." "This too shall pass." "You can have other children." Such remarks, while not necessarily false, can be harmful to the bereaved because the comments block emotional release, effectively forcing the bereaved to stop the grieving process.



In spite of the fact that some people will not respond appropriately, bereaved parents must be relentless in their pursuit of support. It is vital to survival.

For example, Robert DiGiulio, whose wife and daughter were killed in an automobile accident, has authored a booklet, *Losing Someone Close*. He makes this recommendation:

Treasure your relationships. I know that many people who lose

someone very close feel abandoned and alone—as if they have no one or nothing to live for. The only solace I can offer, the only advice I can give, is to really make an effort to reach out to other people. Find people to laugh and cry and share with. They will help you to mend your shattered life. My family and my friends have been priceless. I have thrived, not on their words of sympathy, but simply on the fact that they have been there for me.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE FACT THAT GRIEF AND FAITH COEXIST

Parents need to be gently reminded that they are not lacking in faith because they feel sorrow. The truth is that grief and faith teach each other. The blow of bereavement is cushioned by belief, while faith is often deepened as a result of grief.

What follows is a profound expression of the impact between faith and grief. It comes via a family whose 23-year-old daughter died. Their initial struggle was expressed this way:

We knew we could survive. Could we, however, survive in a way that would do credit to our God, our faith, and our daughter?

Much later, they were able to make these statements:

We are better Christians now that she has died, for we have learned something about how others also suffer. The power we have to communicate the comfort that comes from God has increased. We are more useful to God than we were because we are better able to speak of the comfort He offers the wounded.

JOIN A SUPPORT GROUP

There is possibly no greater source of consolation and support for a bereaved parent than that of a support group made up of other fathers and mothers who have lost children. The pain of child loss is so deep that it cannot be understood and analyzed, only shared and supported.

Beverly Raphael, an Australian psychiatrist, has authored one of the most definitive books on grief titled *The Anatomy of Bereavement*. In that book, Dr. Raphael affirms the power of a self-help support group over that of therapy. She writes:

Professional support may be reasonable, although there is much to suggest that professionals find this area a painful one also. The greatest support often comes from sharing with other parents experiencing the same crisis. Such experiences have been found to be very helpful.

TAP FAITH RESOURCES

Faith can often become an important anchor in the troubled waters of child loss. In his book *Who Needs God?* Rabbi Harold Kushner makes this important observation:

Religion is first and foremost a way of seeing. It can't change the facts about the world we live in, but it can change the way we see those facts and that, in itself, can often make a real difference.

One example is that of Virginia, a mother who buried six of her sons as they died, one by one, from muscular dystrophy. She was a carrier of the disease but did not know it. While muscular dystrophy can lay dormant for as much as five generations, it can erupt suddenly in one generation. Unfortunately, in this woman's family it traveled from mother to sons.

The mother was recently interviewed for a local paper, where the reporter asked how she managed to deal with the death of six sons. To a casual observer, her answer could appear trite. But given the magnitude of her losses, Virginia's remarks demonstrate the power of her Christian faith:

"It was prayer," she replied. "If ever any hatred or anger was about to creep in, I began my prayers and these feelings just burned away like fire. I always looked at it like this—if Jesus carried His cross, I should carry mine."

SEEK HELP

Not every parent will need professional help, but some will need the guidance of a skilled counselor if other informal support is not available. One man, a Presbyterian minister in the Washington, D.C., area, experienced devastating isolation after the death of his son. Although he was able to officiate at his son's funeral, saying, "I couldn't imagine anyone else doing it," he found his pain intolerable during the weeks that followed. He reports:

As a minister we were expected to have the faith and strength to overcome our grief but as parents our grief was just as strong. We were expected to be much stronger and full of faith than we were. I cried every day for six months. For a week the phone never stopped ringing after our son died; then it never rang. I thought I'd go crazy and felt like screaming in the silence.

Recognizing that his emotional state was deteriorating rapidly without support, he wisely sought out the help of a psychiatrist.

PREPARE CAREFULLY FOR HOLIDAYS

After the death of his son, Nicholas Wolterstorff observed:

The worst days now are holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, birthdays, weddings—days meant as festivals of happiness and joy now are days of tears. The gap is too great between day and heart.

Other days that pose difficulty for bereaved parents are Mother's Day, Father's Day, and the date of the child's death. Elizabeth Estes, whose daughter, Tricia, died in 1974, offers these practical suggestions for managing difficult days:

—Seek out a special friend with whom you can talk and cry.

—Go to the cemetery and "talk" with your child.

—Memorialize your child by helping someone else—give a pie, a book, a bouquet of flowers or visit a person who is lonely.

—Offer thanks several times during the day for the gift of the child.

A final note should be encouraging for every parent who has lost a child.

People are created to heal. The healing will take a long time, but the healing will take place. One mother, five years after her seven-year-old son died, reports:

"I can now look at his picture and not cry. Believe it or not, life does get better." ■

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT RESOURCES

The following organizations will provide information specifically for bereaved parents about support groups. They can also provide helpful literature. Call or write, sending a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope.

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Box 3696
Oakbrook, IL 60522
708-990-0010

CANDLELIGHTERS

1312 18th St. N.W.
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
800-366-2223

SHARE

St. Elizabeth Hospital
211 S. 3rd
Belleville, IL 62222
618-234-2415

NATIONAL SIDS FOUNDATION

10500 Little Patuxent
Suite 420
Columbia, MD 21044
800-221-SIDS

Signposts of the Spirit

Six Guidelines for Leadership

by Betsy Schwarzentraub

Davis, Calif.

Church leadership can be a terribly costly guessing game, both to the churches we serve and also to ourselves.

We may wonder about the effectiveness of our leadership style, whether we are clergy beginning at a new church or years into the pastorate, or laity who have served in the congregation for decades. How do we know where our leadership really reflects the will of the Holy Spirit? Is it luck, personality, or something we are doing that helps bring the church to life? Which of our actions show us where the Holy Spirit would lead us, as we seek to lead others?

Leadership in the church always has been a subjective business. We cannot quantify the presence of God's guidance. Our experience of the Spirit is very personal and must be so. Yet does this mean we are condemned to our own personal eccentricities and a leadership style of whatever feels best? We know there is no magic box of personality traits that automatically gives us strength and vision. Most seminaries do not even try to teach practical church leadership skills. So where do we turn for some objective guidance?

Thankfully there are some measurable signposts along the way that tell us when we are traveling the right road. These are six ways of treating church and committee members that prompt them to respond with positive leadership of their own. These leader behaviors were discovered by Rensis' and Jane Gibson Likert in the 1940s. Since 1968 the Center for Parish Development, Chicago, has explored and tested the Likerts' findings in churches throughout North America. Personal experiences in 16 such congregations over the past four



years confirm these marks of leadership as practical fruits of the Spirit that can guide us and help us grow.

These specific leadership skills focus, in part, on the work we do together and, in part, on the relationships of the church members in the process. They are:

1. Support by leader
2. Receptivity, both to seek and use ideas and to talk freely and openly
3. Team building
4. High performance expectation
5. Work facilitation
6. Group decision making

Each of these actions must be noticed by those with whom we work as leaders, in order to encourage committee members to develop their own mutual understanding, team building, high expectations, motivation, and participation in group decisions.



Support by Leader

"Relationships occur as tasks are encountered," said one church leader. "If tasks could be seen in this light, they would be more easily accomplished, more productive, and better accepted by members." The key skill a church leader can show by actions is support: letting members know they are worthwhile persons doing useful work.

This means giving time and energy to relationships among the staff and members of the congregation—not as a means to an end, but as ends in themselves. Shared ministry is not just a helpful concept but a way of letting people know that they are an essential part of the church family and decision-making teams, not just for what they can do, but for who they are.

Supportive leaders demonstrate this support as they:

- Are seen as friendly and easy to talk to.
- Listen well to others whether they agree or not.
- Encourage others to express their ideas fully.
- Show confidence and trust in others.
- Seek solutions that are as acceptable to those with whom they disagree as they are to themselves.

Help people with their work.
 Help church teams develop and increase their work skills.
 Have high goals for all church groups and for themselves.

Receptivity

Our receptivity as leaders in the church has two dimensions: personal openness on the one hand and structured accessibility on the other. Personal openness makes it easy for members and coworkers to talk freely and openly with us, sharing their ideas. Often this is a long suit for pastors. One lay leader described his pastor this way: "I see openness, acceptance, a willingness to listen, and helpful guidance—spiritual guidance." A church officer or leader can go a long way with others by listening to their ideas and sharing them in helpful places. It is a genuine attempt to share power throughout the church's life.

One of the toughest things to do, however, is to actively seek out and use others' ideas when they do not come forward readily with their concerns. Structuring the church's life to reach out for these ideas is more complex than a simple change of personal habits, but it has a great reward. Factors may include:

The location of your office—Can people find you?

Office hours and your time schedule—Do they fit when the members are available?

Social distance and role expectations—Do they think they can approach someone in your position?

The ratio of leader to members—Are there too many of them to relate to?

Looking at accessibility from the members' point of view may point to areas for better communication.

Team Building

The Likerts discovered that each local church acts as a network of overlapping teams. These may be formal or informal groups that bond together out of common interest or task and that together get the job done.

This is both good news and bad news. The good news is that no one person can push the church in his or her own direction or be blamed for where it is going. The bad news is

that even if members are unaware of their unofficial teams (the after-meeting group, the coffee shop crowd), church leaders must still depend upon them. While we experience the Spirit individually, the Spirit insists upon working corporately through Christ's Body, often in surprising ways.

Team building, then, is both a value and a skill. Studies show that people need a full 10 hours together in order to develop as a working unit.² Here are some tips for building stronger teams:

Begin the year with a committee one-day retreat.

Chart all the teams in your congregation, and note through whom they overlap.

Gather those linking persons and ask them, "How can we improve communication and be more effective?"

Performance Expectation

Few of us respond well when we are asked to serve on a committee and we are told, "It won't take much time." This often translates into, "It's worth even less." We are far more likely to participate with interest and enthusiasm when our expectations are high: "The work is challenging but important to the purpose of the church."

Such expectations for church work bring out a positive response among church members and leaders alike. They tell us both that we are personally important to the life of the church and that our church is important in God's plan. A leadership style that emphasizes high standards may:

Encourage every group in the church to clarify and celebrate its purpose and tasks in the church life.

Help the nominating committee recruit leaders with committee job descriptions in hand.

Empower people to choose carefully where they will serve, limiting their leadership roles to what they can do in a high quality way.

High expectations help us give our best to God in all we do. As one committee member said of her pastor, "He makes people feel needed, cared for—and responsible."

Work Facilitation

Work facilitation is whatever the church leader does to help members do well what they have agreed to do. This includes:

Helping them plan and set priorities.

Providing resources to do their job well (people, materials, and space in which to work).

Offering useful information and ideas.

Such practical help increases members' motivation and encourages potential leaders to anticipate support of their future roles. Attention to this dimension helped one pastor to "become very close in a shared ministry with my church team," as they sharpened their ability to do well what they had planned together.

Decision Making

Most people do not want to buy into a plan someone else put together without them. The same is true of church programs, budgets, and dreams. When people help make the decisions that affect them, they develop more trust in the leadership, and energy is generated in all directions. They are willing to risk more of their ideas and to invest more in the outcome.

Group decision making, however, requires much more skill than does the old coercive method, or even the special task force approach. It calls for developing the team's interactive skills in order to resource one another, gradually build trust, and learn to nourish, shape and evaluate ideas. By training groups to make open, corporate decisions, the church leadership will find members more willing to participate and more positive in the process.

The road of leadership in the church is neither smooth nor easy. Yet Jesus had promised that He is with us always (Matt. 28:20), and the Spirit has given us signposts to help us steer in the right direction. Keeping in sight these six marks of leadership, we can develop our skills and move forward where God would lead us. ■

1. Director of the Institute for Social Research and professor of psychology and sociology at the University of Michigan.

2. *Leadership Skills for Church Vitalization* (Chicago: Center for Parish Development, 1976).

Prophet, Priest, and King

by Morris Chalfant

Bourbonnais, Ill.

One wonders how many who enthusiastically cried, "Hosanna!" on Palm Sunday shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" a few days later. Some people must have been disappointed, even resentful, that Jesus didn't overthrow the Romans and set up His kingdom. After all, had He not initiated a golden opportunity to do so when He rode into Jerusalem? Unlike the pattern of His earlier ministry, He made no effort to dampen this jubilant demonstration. Yet He didn't capitalize on the fervor of the crowd and call His disciples to arms. No wonder those Jews who longed only for release from foreign domination were disillusioned! The Messiah had not fulfilled their expectations.

Try to imagine that day—the large crowd in holiday mood. People spread their garments on the road—a symbolic laying down of a rug for royalty. They also placed some of their outer garments on the donkey to make a saddle. They trimmed branches from trees and spread them on the road as further "pavement for royalty."

It must have been a gala occasion. Up ahead and to the rear, crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:9, KJV).

The incident created quite a sensation in Jerusalem, for Matthew writes, "The whole city was stirred" (v. 10). Five days later they put this Man to death. But the centuries still echo their searching question, "Who is this?"

It doesn't matter much whether you know who Nero and Napoleon were, or Muhammad or Buddha. But whoever or whatever this One is whose birth divides the centuries into "Before" and "After"—this we need to know, "Who is this?" It's a decisive question.

Some called Jesus the Carpenter. So He was—a humble Tradesman from a little town in northern Palestine.

Others called Him "Rabbi, . . . a teacher come from God" (John 3:2, KJV). Earth's classrooms will never be the same since He taught the greatest truth the mind can seek and know, the saving truth of God.

Others said He was one of the prophets. The pilgrims answered their city cousins: "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee" (Matt. 21:11, KJV). His human name, Jesus, meant Joshua, Savior, "for he shall save his people from their sins" (1:21, KJV).

Peter had another answer: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16, KJV)—Messiah, the fulfillment of the hope of the ages.

But the question is not fully answered yet. In a locked room, when the risen Lord offered His nail-pierced hands and His wounded side, Thomas made the greatest confession of all: "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28, KJV).

Jesus the prophet? Yes. The Christ? Yes, but more—the Lord, one in nature with the Father God: "My Lord and my God." The prophet said, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee" (Zech. 9:9, KJV). Jesus Christ our Lord is King. So prophets predicted Him, so Matthew confessed Him, and so He identified himself to Pilate.

What does Palm Sunday mean to Christians today? Simply that Jesus came as Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, like John the Baptist, He heralded the kingdom of God. He spoke for the Father in Person and Word. As Priest, He performed the function of bringing men to God and God to men. As King, He fulfilled the prophecies of old, especially fulfilling the announcement, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6, KJV).

Because of the King of Kings' triumphant entry into the world, we have "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7, KJV). Rediscover Him, then, as man—a real, vital, flesh-and-blood man. But keep on looking until you see Him also as Son of God. As Son of Man, He understands your human predicament; but as Son of God, He can do—indeed, has done—something redemptive about it.

Are you willing to risk discovering Jesus in the meaning of what He did?

The most redemptive thing Jesus did was to die on the Cross. For Jesus died, the Bible says, "to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15, KJV). Spurgeon said that his entire theology could be compressed into four words: "Jesus died for me."

For 40 years I have seen men and women and boys and girls across America and around the world discover this Jesus and become new creations through the redemptive power of His blood.

Palm Sunday challenges all those "called to be saints" to new loyalty. Good Friday crowds still need disciples with courage enough to press through the muttering crowd and take a staunch stand by the side of the crucified Christ.

This is no time for wavering. This is not a time for halfway loyalty. As the forces of evil rally for their greatest siege of the city of God, let those who remain undecided come down from the fence and commit themselves today and forever to unre-served service in the kingdom of God.

"Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest" (Matt. 21:9, KJV). Sing the song, but serve the Savior also. ■

"Twitterpated"

by Wayne M. Warner

Three Rivers, Mich.

That was what a mutual friend called her—"twitterpated." And I humorously agreed.

Her nervous mannerisms annoyed me, although she had never done anything to me except to be the devoted wife of my neighboring pastor and a supportive friend to me.

Many a pastor's wife unfairly finds herself in this predicament. She is caught in a web of circumstance over which she has little control, and which she would not be allowed to change if she could, except at the risk of her husband's career.

Some years ago the writers Gordon and Gordon researched 200 churches and came up with an authentic novel by Doubleday called *The Tumult and the Joy*. This book focused upon conditions for ministers' wives, a condition that had not changed much in half a century.

These ladies, it seems, were expected to live in run-down parsonages, to gladly accept cast-off furniture, and to devote full time to church activities without pay.

Their research revealed parsonages where congregations refused to let the parsonage family hang pictures on the walls so that the church would not have to repaint the walls when the pastor moved. They found carpets split down the center so that they could be switched around as they wore out.

The Gordons suggested it was unfair to hire a pastor and expect his wife to work for free. They found some wives had rebelled by refusing to do anything around the church. This was, admittedly, the opposite extreme. The Gordons found no one to blame but the church.

All of this leads me to recall my friend, "twitterpated," and to consider

my own mate-in-ministry—my pastor's wife. Each of these ladies accepted a calling that was considered her husband's and not her own. Each accepted every kind of situation graciously.

Each of these ladies lived on anything and whatever without complaint. Each managed whatever she had with integrity.

These creative creatures answered the telephone day or night, even when they came in multiplied dozens. They always presented a happy appearance and never showed a mood. Each taught the unfilled Sunday School classes and took on the jobs no one else would do. They agreed with everyone else while entertaining upon demand.

Each listened to all the things the parishioners would like to say to the minister but were afraid to say to his face. Each counseled and comforted the pastor who dared not reveal himself to anyone else. All of this they did in the name of God and the church.

Some church groups still refuse to recognize any professional or preaching ministry for women. Others only allow male members to vote in church business meetings.

Few of the hundreds of wives I have known through the years have ever coveted their husbands' role. Until recent years, few even dared ask for recognition of their own. Most often they simply made the best of it and kept their tensions, troubles, and tears well hidden—until they developed a bad case of "nerves," and some well-meaning friend called them "twitterpated."

My "twitterpated" friend never got over her nerves, but long before her death I saw the beautiful person she really was. I finally recognized her for her own marvelous dignity, strength,

and wisdom. It was then that her nerves no longer annoyed me. Moreover, I began to understand others' "nerves."

Seeing my pastor's wife as the eternal resource for all the things the parishioners could not bother me with, and knowing her complete dedication to God, husband, and church, I know now that she sometimes has to feel like the most isolated person in the whole community.

Although I never agreed with the Gordons that women's liberation needed to look into the plight of pastors' wives, I did see the need for recognizing my pastor's wife and eventually initiated her ordination process myself.

Four and a half decades of ministry tell me plainly that T. R. Buzzard must have been thinking about my pastor's wife when he wrote:

The Pastor's Wife

*In the shadow of the parsonage
Stands a figure oft obscure,
Just behind the faithful pastor
Is his wife, devout and pure.
She is with him every moment
Helping make his work progress,
And you can't discount her portion
In the measure of success.
Oft behind the scene of action,
Oft never seen or heard,
Yet she stands forever ready
Just to give a helping hand.
It is not in active service
That her worth is really shown,
But in bearing heavy burdens
That to others are unknown.
With encouragement and vision
She must urge God's servant on,
When the shadows are the darkest
And his courage's almost gone.
With her home forever open
And her work quite never done,
She is ever his lieutenant
In the battles fought and won.* ■

Who Is Responsible for Payroll Taxes?

by Julie L. Bloss

Dallas

If your church has at least one paid employee who is not a minister, it may have a legal obligation to withhold payroll taxes. But who is actually responsible for payroll withholding? Is it the minister, the church treasurer, or the chairman of the church's governing board? That's the question a federal bankruptcy court recently addressed in an important case, *In re Triplett*, 115 B.R. 955 (N.D. Ill. 1990). This article will examine that case and its relevance to churches.

Background

Before looking at the court's decision in *Triplett*, we need to review the legal background of failure to withhold or pay over payroll taxes. Although the Internal Revenue Code imposes a number of penalties for violations of various provisions, one of the stiffest penalties is found in section 6672. According to section 6672, the IRS may impose a penalty of 100% of payroll taxes that are not withheld or paid over to the government by anyone who is responsible for withholding and paying over those taxes. So if an employer does not withhold or pay over, for example, \$10,000 in payroll taxes, some individual connected with the employer, perhaps an employee or officer or director, may have to cough up \$10,000 out of his or her pocket.

But what about volunteers for a nonprofit organization like an unpaid church treasurer? Surely they can't be held personally responsible for payroll taxes, can they? Yes, they can.

In 1989 a federal court in New York upheld a penalty of over \$200,000 imposed by the IRS against each of four officers of a church-operated charity that did not pay over taxes withheld from employee paychecks—*Carter v. United States*, 717 F. Supp. 188 (S.D. N.Y. 1989). In the

Carter case, the court held that the penalty was appropriate when a person had a duty to collect and/or pay over the taxes and when the failure to pay them over was "willful."

So why did these four officers have a duty to collect or pay over payroll taxes? According to the *Carter* court, there were several factors making them responsible parties despite the fact that they were unpaid volunteers of a charitable organization. First, they are board members as well as officers. Perhaps more importantly, they had authority to sign payroll checks. Finally, they also had general business responsibilities including bookkeeping and hiring and firing.

Once the court had decided that these people were responsible parties, it had to decide if their conduct in failing to withhold and pay over the taxes was willful. According to the court, "willful" didn't imply an evil motive or intent to defraud, but instead meant voluntary or conscious. In fact, the failure to investigate or correct the problem once they were aware of it meant that these officers had acted willfully. Keep in mind the *Carter* decision as we examine the more recent *Triplett* case.

The Triplett Case

The *Triplett* case involved a Baptist church member who was elected financial secretary and served as church treasurer. Mr. Triplett was paid \$100 a week for his services and also served as interim business manager for the church's private school. As church treasurer, his primary responsibility was preparing checks for the church, although he did not determine to whom to write the checks. Instead, he received bills on a weekly basis from the church clerk or chairman of the board of deacons. Af-

ter writing and signing the checks, Triplett didn't mail them himself; he returned them to the clerk or chairman of the deacons. The checks had to be signed by two people, and Triplett was one of the three people authorized to sign them.

Testimony indicated that the chairman of the board of deacons had refused to mail certain checks the treasurer had prepared on his own initiative based on the bills he thought were most important. The treasurer prepared financial statements for the church as well as the quarterly 941 forms, but he did not have much to do with the financial policies of the church, which were determined by the pastor or the chairman of the board of deacons.

In addition to his responsibilities as treasurer, Triplett served as temporary business manager of the church school for two and a half months. Although the school's regular business manager had the authority to decide which bills to pay, as interim manager, Triplett didn't have that authority. In fact, although he had possession of the school's financial records and checkbooks, he didn't even have authority to sign checks for the school.

Despite his limited authority over payment of church bills and despite the fact that he had absolutely no authority over the school's bills, the IRS imposed on Triplett a penalty of 100% of the payroll taxes that the church and school had failed to pay to the government. Basing its argument on section 6672 of the Internal Revenue Code, the IRS argued that he was personally liable for these taxes. When Triplett filed for bankruptcy, the IRS filed a claim for over \$70,000. Fortunately for Triplett, the court rejected the IRS position.

Like the court in *Carter*, the *Triplett* court recognized that an individual cannot be subject to the section 6672 penalty unless he is both a responsible person and willfully fails to pay over taxes. According to this court, control over finances is the key to determining whether an individual is a responsible person within the meaning of this law. In this case, the court found that the treasurer lacked sufficient control over the church finances to be held liable. The court noted that he could not determine which church bills were to be paid and that he had no responsibilities for day-to-day business decisions. The court recognized that he had even less control over the financial affairs of the school and therefore could not be considered a responsible person with respect to its payroll taxes regardless of the fact that the school was considered a ministry of the church. Because the court found that Triplett was not a responsible person within the meaning of the law, it did

not address the issue of whether he had acted willfully. Interestingly, the court observed that the pastor and chairman of the board of deacons would probably satisfy the definition of responsible persons.

Lessons for Churches

Although the church treasurer in the *Triplett* case was not held liable for payroll tax penalties, the case does *not* stand for the proposition that church treasurers cannot be penalized for a church's failure to withhold or pay over payroll taxes. The decision in this case turned on the issue of whether the treasurer had sufficient control over church finances to be considered a responsible person under the law. In this case, the treasurer didn't have that kind of control, but that doesn't mean that other church treasurers don't have enough control to be considered responsible persons. Additionally, the church observed that the minister and chairman of the deacons probably could have been considered responsible parties.

There is no question that volunteers as well as paid church officers and employees can be penalized for failure to withhold and pay over payroll taxes. The *Triplett* case illustrates that the IRS is serious about pursuing and penalizing individuals connected with churches that do not properly withhold or pay over payroll taxes. The court observed that payroll taxes that are generally paid only four times a year can be tempting sources of ready cash for employers, but employers must resist that temptation. Don't let your church use its payroll deposits as a way of robbing Peter to pay Paul—the consequences are severe. ■

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Worship: Where Do You Go for Lessons? (Continued from page 13)

2. Harry Blamires, *On Christian Truth* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1983), 125.
3. Martin Thielen, *Getting Ready for Sunday: A Practical Guide for Worship Planning* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1989), 231.
4. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, 127.
5. *Ibid.*, 199.
6. Carl Tuttle, *Worship Leader's Training Manual* (Anaheim, Calif.: Worship Resource Center/Vineyard Ministries International, 1987), 7.
7. Maynard Campbell, quoted in Thielen, *Getting Ready for Sunday*, 221.
8. Dennis Bratcher, "Divine-Human Synergism in

- the Ministry—The Growth of the People of God," *Grow—A Journal of Church Growth, Evangelism, and Discipleship*, Fall 1991, 40.
9. Dennis F. Kinlaw et al., *Beacon Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1969), 324.
10. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, 145.
11. Blamires, *On Christian Truth*, 125.
12. Joseph C. Aldrich, *Life-style Evangelism* (Portland, Oreg.: Multnomah Press, 1981), 112.
13. Thielen, *Getting Ready for Sunday*, 231.
14. Max Harris, "Worship as a Catalyst for Ministry," *Grow*, Fall 1991, 44.

15. *Ibid.*
16. Thielen, *Getting Ready for Sunday*, 188-95.
17. *Ibid.*, 231.
18. Dean Merrill, ed., *Fresh Ideas for Preaching, Worship and Evangelism* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1982), 46.
19. Thielen, *Getting Ready for Sunday*, 232.
20. Bob Sorge, *Exploring Worship: A Practical Guide to Praise and Worship* (Canadaigua, N.Y.: Bob Sorge, 1987), 200.
21. *Ibid.*, 201.
22. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, 144.

Increase Your Outreach Through Writing (Continued from page 40)

more than 1,500 persons who have prayed to receive Christ after reading salvation testimonies I wrote that appeared in a publication offering a free Bible course to those who have so prayed. Also I count as very important the many opportunities I have to teach and encourage Christians of all ages to live and witness for Jesus and to serve Him.

Being a writer isn't always easy! I feel as though I may have received enough rejection slips to cover Interstate 85. What do I do with rejection slips? They make neat scrap paper. I

just send the articles out to other editors who might appreciate them more. I have sold some on their 18th time out for top money.

How do I handle writer's block? I ask myself, "What great adventure have the Lord and I had lately?" Then I write it up as a personal experience or opening illustration for an article. Incidentally, this is the easiest way to get started as a writer. Many Christian periodicals use personal experience articles that include what we learned from our experience. I often use pertinent personal experiences for inter-

esting kickoff anecdotes to start my articles for Christian education and church leadership periodicals.

Rejections and disappointments seldom get me down. I trust the Lord to place the articles where He wants them. Before I write, I ask the Lord for guidance. The Lord is much wiser than we. Through His Spirit, He can pass that wisdom and insight on to us.

One last word of advice: If you want to write for the Lord, don't just talk about it, as so many people do. Get busy and do it! ■

God's Family

by Dorothy J. Downey

Weedville, Pa.

Moving to a new pastorate is not one of my favorite things to do! I am one of those people who likes stability, permanency, and the feeling of belonging and being "at home." I don't like to be the new kid on the block. I like "roots." Because I get very close to our parishioners, they become family to me. When we leave, it is like leaving our family. It hurts!

Relocating also involves finding new doctors and dentists, a new pharmacy and shoe repair store, new cleaners, barber, and beautician, new appliance repairman, and on and on the list goes. Therefore, it's much easier for me to stay put. I never get used to moving to a new area and have a tornado warning for the "following areas" flash on the television screen. I have no idea if we are in the announced direct line of the tornado or if it is headed another way entirely. This can be very unnerving!

Being married to a pastor for 34 years has made me adapt to the life of temporary houses. As time has passed, I've learned to accept transitions with grace and even excitement at getting to know new people, new customs, and new scenery. Our Bible college professor used to say, "Keep your bags packed, ready to go at the call of your Master." Even though we don't literally keep our bags packed, we do try our best to hear God's voice and listen to His leadings.

But some things I never get used to. These things happen when we leave a church where we have loved and served the people. One thing is to see elderly people leave us after our last service with tears in their eyes and handshakes that will not let go of ours. We both know that due

to their age and health and the distance between us, we may never see each other again in this life. That is hard to accept!

Or some people leave by the other door, weeping, and cannot face saying, "Good-bye." That is hard to accept!

Or the farewell card from a young person with \$1.00 enclosed with a note that says, "I love you very much. I miss you already!" We've never gotten used to that!

Or being invited out for farewell meals, the hostesses fixing our favorite foods to show their love. One church had a farewell dinner. Each lady brought what she knew we like to eat. One dear lady in her late 80s brought corn bread, her specialty. We'll never forget that!

At another church we left after seven years, three or four carloads of youth met at our house—unplanned and unorganized. They followed us about 20 miles as we departed the city. They turned around back to their homes, and we continued on to our next charge.

No, I can never get used to leaving



people so dear to us. We have only been in Weedville a few years, but already we feel the same love and warmth among the people. It would be hard to leave them.

The tie that binds Christians together is actually stronger at times than the ties in our earthly families. Paul experienced this in Acts 20. He called the elders from Ephesus to meet with him. When he left them, they wept, hugged and kissed him, and had prayer together. He also knew the deep love of Christian brothers and sisters. Our love for each other is very strong. It hurts us Christians when we are separated. But one day we will be reunited around God's throne, never again to be separated. No more good-byes, no more tears! Eternity we will spend together! What a wonderful time we will have when God's family is gathered home together!

What a blessed hope for each Christian who is separated from loved ones or friends by death or distance. This separation is only for a short while. Jesus is coming again to receive His children to be with Him forever. What a great reunion day that will be! So, "Hold on, My child. Joy comes in the morning."



Today's Books for Today's Preachers



Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question

by John Warwick Montgomery
Dallas: Probe Books, 1991
PA094-524-1151, \$14.99

Evidence for Faith is a collection of papers presented at a symposium on evidential apologetics at Cornell University in the late summer of 1986. The majority of the presenters came from the various fields of science with supportive essays being contributed from the disciplines of philosophy and logic. The target of the symposium was the American scientific community. We are fortunate that Probe Books perceived the broader benefit available and the value of providing this work to a larger audience.

This book sits comfortably and appropriately on the shelf alongside significant works in apologetics by C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and Josh McDowell. Its chief value to the Christian community is that its "arguments for the existence of God are concerned with evidence, not with philosophical or theological presuppositionalism." From the generally exalted and highly credible world of science comes the proposition that there is a Creator God who has spoken. And we are met with the challenging question, "If the evidence is so good, what are you going to do about it?"

The contributors to the volume express a desire that the hearers/readers of their work will exercise "freedom to follow the evidence where it leads." Some of those contributors themselves followed that evidence from disbelief or unbelief to faith. Justifiable certitude for the power and presence of God is possible. *Evidence for Faith* is as the title states.

—David L. Cox

Romans; in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

by Paul J. Achtemeier
Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985
PA080-423-1370, \$20.00

Achtemeier is professor of biblical interpretation at Union Theological Seminary of Richmond, Va.

This book of *Romans* is one volume of the *Interpretation* series. Achtemeier's purpose is to provide a high-cognitive-level commentary of Romans supplemented with material that can be used for teaching and preaching.

This volume is similar in some ways to the *Romans* volume in the *Beacon Bible Expositions* series from Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City. The author takes a passage of Romans, gives his commentary on the scripture, then shows how the passage could be used in preaching and teaching. On the other hand, this commentary differs from the *Beacon Bible Expositions* volume in several ways. First, it is written at a much higher cognitive level. Second, it assumes a deeper knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments. Third, the author is committed to the use of the church calendar and ties his sermon hints to the various dates of that calendar. He often uses the readings that occur in the standard church lectionaries. Fourth, this volume would not normally be used as a devotional book.

The author starts the book with a discussion of Paul's worldview, contrasting it with other views prevalent in Paul's time. Achtemeier develops a thesis for the book based on Paul's historical perspective, and then moves into the commentary, using that outline.

The outline Achtemeier uses is simple:

I. God's Lordship and the Problem of the Past (1:1—4:22)

II. God's Lordship and the Problem of the Present (4:22—8:39)

III. God's Lordship and the Problem of the Future (9:1—11:36)

IV. God's Lordship and the Problems of Daily Living (12:1—16:27)

I was impressed with the book and the depth of scholarship represented. From the Old and New Testament Scriptures the author draws connections that I never knew existed. Also, I was impressed with the author's discernment of Paul's use of language, terms, traditions, and points of view common to the people of his times and to the target readers. Much of the material that is so difficult to us would have been relatively easy for his readers to understand.

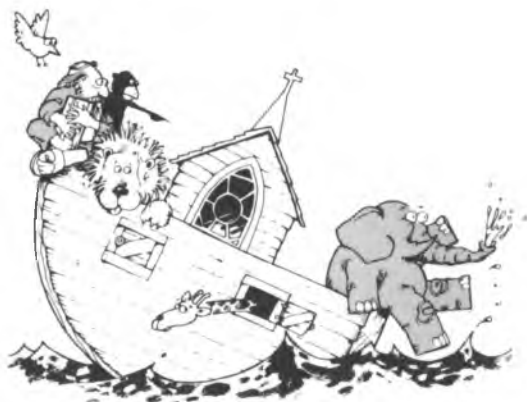
So far as I can tell, the author is not writing from a Wesleyan theological perspective. On the other hand, his interpretations of sin, law, and grace in the life of the believer would be quite acceptable to most Wesleyans. The author's interpretations of Romans 7 and 8 show that Paul believed the Christian can have a life of victory over sin.

I also especially liked Achtemeier's treatment of the last section of ethics. He gives a coherent interpretation of Paul's advice about subjugation to government. He has a strong section on the relationships of responsibility and freedom for weaker and stronger Christians.

All in all, this book is one of the better commentaries I have read. It was done with good literary style and great care for the text. One can tell that the author has a high view of Romans and the Scriptures. This book will be a standard reference in my book collection.

As a final comment, I can recommend this book for any pastor and advanced student of the Scriptures. These persons would be enriched for reading Achtemeier.

—Samuel L. Dunn



The Church Cat Committee

Back in the sticks—way back in the sticks—nestles a little white church. The stone sign out front says, "Welcome to the Backwoods Church of the Nazarene. Established by Phineas Bresee in 1910." The Backwoods Church is a concrete block structure with an open archway for a door. There is no glass in the windows. The pulpit and pews are made from hand-hewn logs that have served the congregation just fine for the last 80-some years, thank you. The pews are so hard they are practically petrified, but so are most of the members—so no one complains. The congregation's approach to church management, however, is downright modern, as can be seen by this most recent example.

Several months back the service was going along well enough when a curious cat jumped into the window sill nearest the front left altar log. The cat saw nothing happening inside animated enough to scare it off, so it sat and watched the proceedings. In a few

minutes, it got even bolder. It jumped down to the floor, walked to the altar, and jumped on top of it. Soon the cat was fast asleep, and it slept soundly through the remainder of the service. This scenario was repeated the next three Sunday mornings.

The church board, which comprised the entire congregation, met in executive session after the fourth incident to decide what should be done about the church cat. Altars are where people find God, not where a cat should sleep. The official policy manual of the church was dusted off and consulted—to no avail. There were clearly stated guidelines on subjects like renting out the church for fancy weddings, but there was no mention about dealing with a church cat.

After much prayer and fasting, the board determined it to be God's will to establish a three-member Church Cat Committee. One member of the CCC, on a rotational basis, would scoop the cat off the altar and dump it unceremoniously outside on the

front porch. Once thrown out, the church cat was always too embarrassed to attempt reentry on the same day. So it would wait until the faithful few had reassembled the next week.

Everything went swimmingly well for almost six weeks, and the Church Cat Committee was given a Distinguished Service Award for their work. But, then, the unthinkable happened. The congregation came to church on one unusually beautiful Sunday morning with joy in their hearts and Bibles in their hands. The church cat was lying on the church's front porch—stone cold dead. Service that day was a somber occasion. The pastor saved the message he had prepared on urban evangelism and delivered an impromptu address from 1 Corinthians 15. People wept. The glory came down. After the morning worship service, the Church Cat Committee met to decide what to do, now that they were out of a job. Their decision was the only logical one.

They voted to buy a new cat. ■

The Most Neglected Ministry in the Church *(Continued from page 1)*

them time and space needed for healing.

Fifth, open your church family to them. Encourage the wounded pastoral family to find and establish friendships within your healthy congregation.

Sixth, teach your congregation to minister without reservation to ministerial families.

Seventh, help them to feel loved and welcomed in your personal and ministerial life.

Eighth, use your influence to introduce them to district leaders.

Many district superintendents are overloaded with letters of application. Most of them would welcome your recommendation and personal word of introduction. I have found district leaders to be eager to help if possible.

Ninth, and most important, pray with the wounded pastor and his family—and pray for them! Jesus is the Master of new beginnings.

Last spring during the riots in the Los Angeles area there were many tragedies, but one of the bright spots was a young black man

named Greg Williams. When asked why he risked his life to save an Hispanic man from a group of black rioters, he said simply: "It wasn't a racial thing . . . it was just a matter of human dignity."

Mr. Williams went on to explain. . . . "That Hispanic man was 'me.' I could identify with him because I too know what it is like to be treated unjustly. If I am not there for him in his need, who will be there for me in my need?" (Editors, *Clergy Talk*, October 1992, 4). ■



WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS



Jarrell W. Garsee

March/April/May 1993

Prepared by Jarrell W. Garsee

INTRODUCTION

There are many good reasons to preach from the Book of Romans.

1. *Romans has furnished the impulse for spiritual revival* in many different periods of the church. In the 4th century, the Book of Romans made an impact on Augustine's conversion and subsequent evangelism; in the 16th century it influenced Martin Luther's powerful presentation of the gospel; in the 18th century it stood at the heart of John Wesley's tremendous outbreak of revival.

2. *Romans contains the message of salvation by faith.* We all understand grace better after going through Romans, God's grace at work in our lives.

3. *Romans reveals God's attitude toward sin* very clearly, an emphasis that is very much needed in our day.

4. *Romans provides an excellent and very simple approach to the scriptural plan of salvation*, one that we can easily use to witness to others.

5. *Romans answers the most difficult challenges of our present, modern day*—temptations, tests, trials, weaknesses, inner selfishness, the impact of secular society, compulsions and addictions, a self-satisfied church, or a very skillful Satan determined to destroy us.

In a Sunday morning worship service, there are six goals to achieve:

1. *To open the spirits of the people*—laying aside the outside world and focusing together. This may be done with a powerful choir number, a children's choir, a heartfelt Scripture reading, a powerful opening prayer, an unexpected but prepared testimony, an admonition or guided thought by the pastor, or some combination of these.

2. *To lift up praise.* Singing, especially a combination of traditional, well-loved hymns and new, meaningful praise choruses, helps to accomplish this.

3. *To pray with purpose.* The open altar, holding hands across the sanctuary, shared requests, guided focus—all may aid in this. It is essential to concentrate on the direction and dynamics of the prayer time in preparation.

4. *To fellowship in the family.* Recognizing accomplishments of those in the congregation, congratulating newlyweds, having visitors raise their hands for recognition-placement before the "standing fellowship time"—all create a warm sense of belonging to one another as well as to God.

5. *To share in the Word.* Preaching a series, like the accompanying sermons from Romans, gives opportunity for growing, maturing, and blessing.

6. *To respond from the heart.* This may include an opportunity to come to the altar for prayer, to raise a hand for prayer, to write out a note or prayer request to the pastor or staff, or to write an action plan at the end of the sermon note-sheet handed out, or a recommendation for homework during the week. A great worship service finds expression and blessed fulfillment of all these functions.

THE GOSPEL EXALTED

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 1:1-17

March 7, 1993

INTRO:

Romans was written by Paul from Corinth, probably in A.D. 57. It was written so that Paul could establish his credentials with the church in Rome and build a bridge for his future ministry to them.

Paul's mission was to exalt the gospel.

I. The Gospel Is Exalted by Lifting Up Christ

A. We exalt Jesus by letting people know that He was human, that He walked, He talked, He got hungry, He was one of us.

B. We exalt Jesus by saying that He is the Son of God (v. 3). Jesus is God's own Son, planned and presented through the Father's intervention.

C. We exalt Jesus as powerful. He demonstrated power by the resurrection from the dead (v. 4). Later Paul says that the gospel has nothing if it is not based on the power of Jesus' resurrection. One thing sets Christianity apart from all the other world religions: the tomb of our Founder is empty! He is not there; He is risen!

D. We exalt Jesus through the Spirit of holiness (v. 4). What does holiness mean? First of all, holiness means to arrive at and to fulfill the purpose for which we were made. That is what the gospel of Jesus is trying to do in us. It sets God's grace free in our lives so that we begin to become the persons that we were supposed to be. Wholeness! "Health" is another word for "holiness." "Purity" is another word for "holiness": pure intentions, pure motives, pure actions purified by love, propelled by love, perpetuated by love, purposed by love. We are supposed to become more and more like Jesus. Christlike! Christlikeness in attitude, in purpose, in spirit, in actions.

E. We exalt Jesus by inspiring others to the obedience of faith (v. 5). Our lifting up Jesus makes others aware that they can receive the grace that brings about the obedience of faith, a faith that makes us new, an obedience that makes us useful in the kingdom of God.

F. We exalt Jesus by fulfilling our call (v. 6). In the church everybody should understand that it is not just the pastor's job to lift up Christ to others. All of us have received the calling from Jesus Christ. We're called to lift up Jesus.

G. We exalt Jesus by receiving His grace. God gives grace to all who are involved in lifting up Jesus (v. 7). If Christ is not first in our hearts, then some other likeness comes out and is viewed by people around us. If we do not lift up Jesus, we cannot expect others to be drawn to Him. Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32, NASB).

II. The Gospel Is Exalted by Lifting Up One Another

A. We lift up one another by bragging on them (v. 8).

Paul lifts up these people of Rome, even though he hasn't seen them yet. He says, "I've heard about you. I haven't met you yet, I haven't been there yet; but I have heard about you. I know about you. You have a good reputation; you have a good report; you have good character. The people who know you brag on you. Your faith is proclaimed everywhere." So he commended them.

In the family of God we need to become more sensitive, aware, and responsive to people around us who need encouragement.

Satan sees that discouragement gets in our hearts and minds if we are not noticed and affirmed, lifted up and built up, encouraged and bragged on by those around us who love us.

B. We lift up one another by praying for one another (vv. 9-10). Praying for someone is the sign of Christian affection; praying *with* him is the sign of Christian love. Praying about the same things of which they are concerned is the sign of Christian fellowship—true *koinonia*, sharing burdens and blessings before the throne of God.

C. We lift up one another by having fellowship together. Fellowship builds a relationship of trust in which you can share hurts and joys. We have to build a relationship of trust, confidence, concern, compassion, and love before that kind of sharing can take place.

D. We lift up one another by giving to one another (v. 11). A part of lifting up one another is the spirit of giving.

E. We lift up one another by strengthening one another (v. 11). Lifting up another involves helping him put his feet down on Christ's solid rock and putting his heart down into the bedrock of Christ's grace and love and power so that he is strong, growing in Christ—established!

F. We lift up one another by sharing faith (v. 12). Each of us is encouraged by the other's faith. But it takes more than one to do that. No one should ever exist in the family of Christ alone. God doesn't ask you to bear your burdens alone. God intends that you belong to a group of people who love one another, and lift up one another, and care for one another, and pray for one another. When someone loves me unconditionally, guess what happens? Miracles happen! God seems near. People get healed!

ILLUS. In our C.A.R.E. (Caring And Reaching Everyone) groups, we have started the unique ministry of having "the empty chair." The chair represents the presence of the Holy Spirit first. Then when someone shares a hurt or a need or a concern, that person moves over into the chair. People gather around him and put their hands on

him and pray for him. People get healed! God's power comes and people are changed!

III. The Gospel Is Exalted by Lifting Up the World Around Us

A. We lift up our world by a desire to bear fruit (v. 13). Paul had fruit in Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and other places. He had seen the gospel work. He wanted some fruit in Rome also.

Do I intensely desire to obtain some fruit for Jesus in this year? Is that one of my deep, serious commitments?

B. We lift up our world by a recognition of obligation (v. 14). If we have received grace through Jesus Christ, we're obligated as debtors to give to others. This concept stands for "trustee." Another person's belongings, another person's property has been placed in my hands! I am a trustee of them. I must see that this that belongs to them, the Good News, is dispersed to them in God's time, in God's way, for God's glory. When we look around at the terrible situation of our world, it is easy to say, "Look at what the world's coming to." Moral conditions of the world when Paul lived were worse than ours. Instead of saying, "Look what the world is coming to," Paul says, "Look who has come to our world!" Look what is available for you in God's forgiving grace and power.

C. We lift up our world by an eager willingness to share (v. 16). The Church's mission is to lift up Christ and to lift up one another, but it is also to lift the world around us through the gospel, through the presentation of God's power in Jesus.

It is one thing to have an inner commitment to share Christ, but do I have an eagerness to do so? Am I willing to share Jesus with people around me?

D. We lift up our world by a pride in God's power (v. 16). Paul was proud of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Paul was *unashamed of its origin*. It came from God. It was His idea.

2. Paul was *unashamed of its operation*. Any sentence that had "power" in it would cause a Roman reader to perk up his ears and pay attention. Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it operates in power." He doesn't say the gospel *has* power. He says the gospel *is* power! The gospel works! The gospel changes! The gospel does things that cannot be explained by any circumstance. The gospel is the power of God.

3. Paul was *unashamed of its outcome*. The final effect of the good news of Jesus is salvation. The word for "salvation" in the original Greek language means two things: *safe* and *sound*! Salvation gives people a soundness for this present life, and it gives them a safety for eternity.

4. Paul was *unashamed of its outreach*. The gospel has a blessed inclusiveness. It is for everyone who believes—the Jew, the Greek, the wise, the unwise, anybody and everybody. The gospel works for anyone.

E. We lift up our world by an awareness of faith's power (v. 17). Faith keeps on triggering new faith in

Christ. The just, those who have been justified by His grace, will live by that faith that continues in obedience. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a statement. It's not a doctrine. It's not a promise. The Good News is a supernatural act of God's power, an act of redemption, an eternal work of God in Christ.

CONCLUSION:

The Church's mission is to lift up Jesus—to let people know He was one of us; He is the Son of God; He died for our sins; He rose again from the dead; and He loves them and is eager to live in them. That's the gospel—lifting up Jesus. Christians should lift up one another—in prayer and encouragement, in love and fellowship, and sharing faith with one another.

Our mission is lifting up the world around us by acknowledging our indebtedness, our trusteeship of grace to them, by allowing the Holy Spirit to make us eager and willing to share His gospel, and by knowing that when the gospel is shared, it has a power of its own.

The devil wants you to believe a lie. He wants you to think that the effect of the gospel depends upon you—your wisdom, your fluent tongue, your brilliant mind, your effective presentation. That's what Satan wants you to believe. He wants you to think that you can't share the gospel because you stammer when you try, or you cry when you try, or you get scared when you try, or you get embarrassed when you try. Satan wants you to think that the power of the gospel is in your presentation. He is wrong! The power of the gospel is *in the gospel*. The power of the gospel is in your willingness and your eagerness and your feeble effort to talk about Jesus. You don't have to impress people. You don't have to let them know how wise you are. *The gospel is the power of God.*

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	
Men's Octet	"Jesus Is the Cornerstone"
Call to Worship	Rom. 1:3-6
Hymn	"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
Hymn	"Where Jesus Is, 'Tis Heaven"
Prayer Chorus	"Thou Art Worthy"
Pastoral Prayer	
Worship in Giving	
Choir	"All That Thrills My Soul"
Message	"THE GOSPEL EXALTED"
Response	"Take My Life, and Let It Be"
Benediction	

Pastoral Prayer

Emphasize the World Day of Prayer. On this day they join Christians in every time zone, in every language, in every vital church around the world in prayer!

Begin the prayer with guided, silent praise for the person, presence, and power of Jesus. He is worthy!

Creative Worship Ideas

Benediction

May God bear His fruit in you this week as you exalt the gospel of Christ in your attitudes and activities.

A DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF UNBELIEF

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 1:18-32

March 14, 1993

INTRO:

This is a very difficult, painful, and black description of the downward spiral of sin in human hearts. This is the way that God sees sin. In verse 17 God's righteousness is revealed. In verse 18 His wrath is revealed. It takes both to understand His full nature. His righteousness is revealed to those who are receiving His Son, Jesus Christ. His wrath is revealed against the ungodly and against all unrighteousness.

Since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes, His eternal power, His divine nature have been clearly shown; we can know God. Those who refuse God refuse Him without any excuse (v. 20, NASB).

Let's look at the downward spiral of unbelief.

I. They Did Not Honor God (v. 21, NASB)

Sin begins with neglecting God. Sin is expressed when I substitute my own self, my own self-priorities, my own self-attitudes, my own self-will for God's will.

II. They Became Futile in Their Speculations (v. 21, NASB)

They began to try to figure God out. One futile speculation concerns people today. If God is really a God of love and power, why will He allow suffering in the world?

ILLUS. Why would God allow a small seven-year-old boy to be killed in a drive-by shooting? This little boy was not guilty. He was the victim of circumstances. Why would God allow that?

Futile speculation ends up saying that if God loves us, then He still doesn't have enough power to make things right. Or, if God has enough power, then He doesn't love us enough to care. That is man's way of trying to solve the dilemma. Those are futile speculations, trying to understand God in our own human wisdom. The essence of sin is revealed when I substitute my wisdom for the wisdom God reveals to me.

III. They Received Darkened Hearts (v. 21)

"Their foolish hearts were darkened." They became clouded, confused. They wandered around without any vision. They used their own wisdom and then wondered why they didn't have enough understanding of what was going on in the world.

IV. They Became Fools (v. 22)

They said they were wise. They tried to use the wisdom they possessed, but they became fools. Man sets God aside and takes over for himself. All through history man has been trying to do for himself.

ILLUS. It started with the Tower of Babel, but that didn't work too well. In the years that followed, man has tried every conceivable plan in the world. Rome thought world government would work, but it didn't do a lot of good. The Roman Empire spiraled down in sin and destroyed itself from within.

Sin always boils down to my way or God's way. The world is full of people who don't want to hear the gospel because they would much rather believe they can somehow earn eternal life. Man always bases his efforts on the idea that man is good and only needs to be improved slightly to be good,

better, best. God's Word says that there is only one way he can become good—through the blood of Jesus Christ.

V. They Made Idols (v. 23)

The next step in the downward spiral was exchanging God's invisible, powerful glory for corrupt images of things.

ILLUS. In our day a lot of people have changed the glory of God into big cars, big houses, or other things that are important to them. People have changed the incorruptible glory of God in their lives into successful business, or making a good living, or having something to pass along to their children. Nothing is wrong with any of that stuff. A thing is not sinful—unless it is something you've exchanged for the glory of God. Anything that you exchange for the glory of God in your life becomes sin. This is destructive; it is an enemy to you.

What is God's place on my altar? What have I put on my altar in the place that God should be?

VI. They Became Impure (v. 24)

Because of their selfishness, "God gave them over" in the lust of their hearts to impurity that they might dishonor their bodies among themselves. That phrase is powerful: "God gave them over." God surrendered them to their own selfishness and to their own sin. In the original Greek language, the word means that He allowed them to be taken into custody. The mental picture is that God allowed them to be placed in the jail of their own selfish, sinful making, and He refused to post bail. He let them stay in the self-made jail of their own sin. God gave man the right to choose his actions, but then He gives man the responsibility to live with the consequences of those actions.

VII. They Worshiped and Served the Creature (v. 25, NASB)

Narcissism has become a way of life in our culture today—looking good, feeling good, doing everything for yourself, making sure that your life is all in order. Self-love is another word for narcissism. These people worshipped a creature rather than the Creator.

ILLUS. God said to Adam and Eve in the Garden, "Here, I want you to have the best. Don't eat this; I have My reasons. It's for your best; I love you." God wanted the best for them. But they exchanged the truth that God had given them for the lie. And what was the lie? The lie was what the serpent told them: "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

Satan still makes every effort to bring in questions at those places where he knows we are vulnerable. He always knows how to get there at the wrong time and say, "Are you sure God knew what He was talking about? Are you sure that this is really what He meant? Are you sure this is His plan for you?" If we are not careful, it is easy to exchange God's truth for Satan's lie and begin to unravel our lives.

VIII. They Fell into Degrading Passions (v. 26)

"God gave them over to degrading passions" (NASB). This is the second time that God gave them over. He let them go; He left them in the jail of their own making. First, God gave them over to wrong living. Now He gives them over to wrong loving. Later He gave them over to wrong thinking

(v. 28). They lived in a descending spiral of losing "togetherness with God." God lets us go if we get to that place where we want our own way more than we want His.

The epidemic of AIDS and the breakdown of our Social Security system and our healthcare systems in the United States and the Western world are creating an environment that has a financial, economic, social, and moral negative impact on society. We must not become offensive, but we must stop letting the world tell the Church what is right and what is wrong.

IX. They Developed a Depraved Mind (v. 28)

Once the body is depraved, the mind becomes depraved also. They didn't want to acknowledge God. They didn't have any place for Him. They didn't want to talk about Him. They removed Him from the schools in prayer. They removed Him from all the public places. They didn't see fit to honor God, so He let them do things that weren't fit for human beings. Again, "God gave them over" (NASB). Think about that: by this time, these people are inside three cages of self-imprisonment. God gave them over to wrong living; He gave them over to wrong loving; and He gave them over to wrong thinking! Mentally, physically, and spiritually they are imprisoned by their own lust, by their own sin, by their own selfishness, by their own will, by their own wisdom, by their own ways. They remain on a collision course of total destruction.

Let's remind ourselves of the Good News at this point, because God has the answer to the sin problem. Even if a person is already imprisoned by three tiers of self-wisdom and self-righteousness—depraved mind, depraved heart, depraved body—God the Holy Spirit is still able to break through to that person. God the Holy Spirit is still able to bring peace and power to that person. The gospel of Jesus Christ is still able to change that person and make him new by the power of God's grace.

In three ways we must be a part of that process. (1) We must pray for people who are bound by their own sins. (2) We must give them the gospel in some way. (3) We must continue to water our prayers and our presentation of the gospel with the tears of concerned hearts.

X. They Were Filled with All Unrighteousness (v. 29, NASB)

Their actions and attitudes damage and destroy themselves and damage and destroy others around them. There is a long list—anger, hostility, disobedience, untrustworthiness. They hate God; they hate others; they hate themselves.

XI. They Rejected God (v. 32)

They know God's laws, and they know that those who break God's laws deserve to die, but they do so just the same. They reject God's Word, His law, and His plan.

ILLUS. A convicted serial killer appeared on television. He had killed a number of people. The only reason they had him on the show was because one of his victims had not been killed. This woman, who had been his victim, whom he had kidnapped and raped, actually forgave him. At the very time of his violation, she forgave him and loved him in Jesus' name. They asked him why he didn't kill her. He said, "I couldn't."

They asked him, though, "Do you have any regrets at all about any of the other people you have killed?"

Watching him closely, as the camera showed a close-up of his eyes, one could see absolutely no feeling in his eyes or in his voice. He had rejected God and carried no sense of guilt in his heart.

XII. They Heartily Approved Evildoers (v. 32)

This is a tragic indictment. They not only know God's ordinance; they not only know that those that practice such things are worthy of death; they not only do the same; but they also give hearty approval to those who practice these things. The last step in the downward spiral of sin is protecting those who do evil.

CONCLUSION:

Sin begins with an unthankful spirit, a simple failure to put God first, an improper alignment of our priorities, a tiny selfish failure that allows sin and self and my human wisdom to get behind the wheel of my spirit and begin to drive my soul. This whole downward spiral begins simply with forgetting God.

Sin, as the Word tells us, is a terrible thing. There is only one remedy for it. It is not government, education, science, or psychology. There is only one remedy for sin, and that's the blood of Jesus Christ. Do you know that Jesus' blood has been shed for you personally? Do you know that His blood has been applied to your heart? Do you know that Jesus has come to make you a new creation? I have great news for you. The gospel is clear: Jesus' blood is available to you. His blood will reverse the downward spiral in your life.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"Amazing Grace"
Call to Worship	Rom. 4:14-15
Congregational Hymn	"Grace Greater than Our Sin"
Prayer Choruses	"There Is Power in the Name of Jesus"
	"I Bring All My Worship to You"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Wonderful Grace of Jesus"
Offertory	"The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power"
Special Song	"There Is a Stream That Flows from Calvary"
Message	"THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF UNBELIEF"
Invitation Hymn	"Only Trust Him"
Benediction	

Pastoral Prayer

Purposefully make a powerful contrast between the rampage of sin so evident in our day and the grace available in Christ.

Help your people focus on Home Mission Sunday by praying for home mission projects and pastors' families on our district.

Creative Worship Ideas

Call to Worship

Comment strongly on the fact that the message today deals with God's viewpoint on sin.

Invitation

Plan to spend some time in this part of the service so that people are not already in their minds "going home to dinner."

Sometimes I heighten people's expectancy as I start the sermon by saying: "When I finish sharing God's Word this morning, I will give you an opportunity to respond to what He says to you. If the Holy Spirit speaks to you through God's Word, be prepared to come forward for prayer when we sing at the end of the message."

THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 2:1-16

March 21, 1993

INTRO:

In the first section of Romans, Paul demonstrates the dastardly nature of sin. Romans beautifully balances and emphasizes the nature of God—His love, forgiveness, and righteousness as well as His wrath and judgment—and the eternal destiny of those who reject Him.

Paul declares that the Gentiles are terribly, grossly, sinful (chap. 1). Paul also shows that the Jews are also sinful (chap. 2). In Romans 3, we discover Paul's belief that everyone is sinful. God's judgment is always based upon the fact of sin and the potential of salvation through Jesus Christ.

God's judgment is unwelcome news. We don't want to hear about it. However, the bad news must be heard before we can be receptive to the Good News. One reason the church has not done as well stems from the fact that until people are convinced of their sin through the bad news about the reality of judgment, they cannot become receptive to the good news about Jesus' love and forgiveness.

Emphasis upon judgment is never simply a fear motivation to manipulate or trick or move people by their emotions without an understanding of the gospel. People today become so self-righteous as did the Jews, that they think the race into which they were born, or the amount of money that they have, or their educational level, or their level of civilization somehow makes them immune to God's judgments. God's Word rings clear: nothing makes us immune from His judgment except His grace offered to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no other remedy.

Paul argues that God's judgment is real and righteous, while man's judgment is superficial and inconsistent. We have no excuse to pass judgment on others. When we do, not only do we bring condemnation on ourselves from others, but also we bring ourselves under God's judgment (vv. 1-2). We must not think that we will escape the judgment of God if we pass judgment on others (v. 3). He exercises His judgment, and He is very jealous about His right to judge. He speaks here through Paul to very religious people. God's judgment may be more harsh on religious people who are inconsistent or who have not accepted the reality of His grace than on sinners outside who have never heard and never received the good news about Jesus Christ.

In this context, we find eight principles about God's judgment.

I. God's Judgment Is Based on Truth (v. 2)

God's judgment is based on what He knows to be real truth.

ILLUS. In a court of law, the jurors or the judge must be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt. With God, it goes far beyond that; it is based upon the truth that only He can know.

II. God's Judgment Is Inescapable (v. 3)

Sometimes lawbreakers expect to escape from the penalty of the law.

ILLUS. Lawbreakers in our society have a lot of hopes.

First, they hope they are never discovered. Second, many of them hope to escape beyond the bounds of the jurisdiction where their offense took place. Third, if they are captured and apprehended, they hope to get a smart, inexpensive lawyer. Those two qualities rarely go together. Fourth, if they are actually apprehended and convicted, they hope to get time off for good behavior. Or they may hope that somehow their prison sentences are going to be commuted. They may hope to escape to freedom. Lawbreakers expect all kinds of breaks in their favor.

In dealing with God's judgment, His superior knowledge and power make it absurd to believe we will get a break on the basis of being unknown, or not being found, or not being brought to justice. His judgment is inescapable.

III. God's Judgment Is Delayed (v. 4)

We can be fooled when God does not pronounce His judgment now. We find it difficult to believe in His judgment when He doesn't hit us when we deserve it. We may become presumptuous because His judgment is not instantaneous.

Does God's delay in judgment encourage you to sin as it did the people of Rome? Or does His patience cause you to repent?

God's forbearance leads to repentance. Too easily people believe that He does not mean what He said because He doesn't punish instantaneously.

ILLUS. A famous German philosopher, grossly sinful, was confronted by his priest. The philosopher said, "Well, God will forgive me."

The priest said, "Why?"

In presumption, the philosopher explained, "Because that's God's business."

Repentance means an honest, total, inner, contrite willingness to turn away from all the things that hurt God, hurt you, and hurt others.

IV. God's Judgment Is Inevitable (v. 5)

A presumptuous, stubborn, hardhearted person continually puts deposits into the savings account of God's wrath. The hardhearted, unrepentant spirit, the stubborn will, goes to the First Bank of God's Wrath every day and makes a deposit. However, only He decides when that account is going to be drawn and how it will impact and affect you.

In our culture people gloss over the idea of God's judgment, either because of their unbelief or their belief that He is too good to judge anybody. Deception is at work: He is too good to send anybody to hell; He is too good to make anybody suffer. That is true: He does not send people to hell; the people themselves, by their hard hearts, stubborn wills, and unrepentant spirits, choose to go to hell.

In our society people do wrong and expect to get away with it. So many times people say, "Well, I thought it only happened to other people."

ILLUS. On a television program featuring drunk drivers,

one man who twice lost his license had a number of accidents, and he continued to drive without a license. On this program he proclaimed proudly that he had never killed anybody through driving drunk.

Time after time people in the audience stood up and told him that it was only a matter of time until he would kill someone if he continued. At the end of the program, the man said, "Well, I know that happens to other people who drive drunk, but it couldn't happen to me."

V. God's Judgment Is Based on My Actions (vv. 6-10)

God will absolutely render judgment to every person according to his deeds. The more privileged the person, the more responsibility he faces in judgment. We will be judged on the basis of our light, influence, and privilege.

Eternal life is given to people who persevere in good (v. 7). Those persons who are trying to make a difference in the lives of people that will last a hundred years from now receive eternal life.

God's indignation falls on persons whose selfish ambitions cause them to follow unrighteousness. Distress awaits everyone who does evil, whether Jew, Greek, or Gentile. The gospel is good for everyone, the Jew first and also the Greek (Rom. 1:16, NASB). Also, God's judgment is for everyone, the Jew first and also the Greek.

We live in a world where people want to believe that they will naturally escape God's negative judgment or receive His positive judgment by simply trying to be a good neighbor. If we allow them to continue to believe that, then we don't believe His truth in Romans. His Word says that His judgment comes upon everyone who rejects His good news about Jesus Christ.

VI. God's Judgment Is Impartial (vv. 11-15)

God plays no favorites; there is no partiality with Him. The judgment we receive is based upon our opportunity to know, upon the light that He gives us. The law doesn't make any difference; people who sinned under it or people who sinned away from the law are still going to be judged.

Several civilizations highlight the fact that God has written into our world certain laws of human health and human morality.

ILLUS. Nearly every civilization has a proscription against murder. Some people by following these laws of God are led to higher laws of His light.

Christians need to get the good news of Jesus Christ to as many people as we possibly can. Their chances for eternal life are tremendously enhanced by hearing the good news about Jesus Christ. Every person who has ever been alive in this world will stand before God. Every one will be judged according to what He knows about them. According to the Word of God, persons whose sins have been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ do not stand in this minute judgment before God, but are passed through on the basis of Jesus' shed blood. The best plea you can have in the judgment is that Jesus died for you.

VII. God's Judgment Is Operational (v. 15)

God's judgment works within us. The conscience is active, alternately accusing or defending. Our minds, our hearts, our consciences, our wills, our spirits are all at work within us, and we have a little foretaste in advance of what His judgment will be like. His Spirit uses everything in us to

make us aware. Our whole being is saturated by His Spirit at work within us. His judgment is already beginning.

VIII. God's Judgment Is Impending (v. 16)

We don't know when the day of God's judgment is coming. It could be tomorrow; it could be this week. He judges the secrets of people through Christ Jesus. God's judgment is impending and is based on truth, including the truth about our secret lives as well.

CONCLUSION:

We will all come face-to-face with Jesus Christ. The truth is that if we do not come face-to-face with Jesus Christ now and open ourselves to Him, we will come face-to-face with Jesus Christ at the judgment.

How does the "bad news" about God's judgment prepare you to believe and act on the "good news" of the gospel?

How does it make you feel to realize that Jesus died to take away the judgment we all deserve?

How would you summarize this passage of Scripture to a friend who seems concerned about his own future with God?

If you knew that you would come face-to-face with Jesus Christ in the next 24 hours, what action would you take right now?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"Sweet Will of God"
Choir	"There's a Great Day Coming"
Call to Worship	Rom. 2:4-5
Opening Prayer	
Congregational Hymn	"All for Jesus"
Chorus	"Jesus, Be the Lord"
Testimony	A New Convert
Congregational Hymn	"The Church's One Foundation"
Offertory	
Special Song	"I'd Rather Have Jesus"
Message	"THE JUDGMENT OF GOD"
Invitation	"Where He Leads Me"
Pastoral Prayer	
Closing Chorus	"He Touched Me"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Opening Prayer

Pray for the Holy Spirit to create an environment of clear choice for each worshiper; that God's Word will be loud and clear; and that each person will respond with appropriate action in view of eternity.

Testimony

Encourage a new Christian to share a victory report. Guide him or her to phrase it in terms of "release from fear, relief from the penalty of sin, and peace in the face of judgment"—because of God's forgiving grace!

Invitation

Emphasize the third verse of the invitation hymn: "I'll go with Him through the judgment." Make it plain that Jesus Christ will either be our Advocate (Defense Counsel) or our Judge, depending on what we decide regarding Him here and now!

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 2:17-29

March 28, 1993

INTRO:

An elderly lady had heard a certain distinguished guest addressed as a doctor. She found her way to his side and asked shyly, "Doctor, may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," he said.

"Lately," she said, "I have been having a funny pain in my side—"

The guest interrupted uncomfortably to say, "I'm terribly sorry, madam, but the truth is, I'm a doctor of theology."

"Oh," she said with disappointment, "I'm sorry!" She turned away, but, overcome with curiosity, she turned back. "Just one more question, Doctor. Tell me, what kind of disease is theology?"

There is a lot in common between this story and today's message: The Theology of Spirit Surgery. The truth of spiritual pain inside requires such surgery. God's analogy of that surgery points to the covenant sealed by circumcision. It also reveals the fact that human efforts cannot solve spiritual problems.

In Genesis 17, the covenant of circumcision was begun. When Abraham was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to him. God shared this covenant with him: "Walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers. . . . This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised" (vv. 1-2, 10). Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, and Ishmael, his son, was 13 when he was circumcised. This covenant that God made with Abraham was sealed with a physical, surgical operation.

Circumcision became a tradition that was a matter of pride to the whole Jewish nation. The Jews were proud traditionalists. In the progression of this tradition, they became proud legalists, in many cases blind hypocrites. Religious people tend to become hypocrites if they follow tradition to its logical extreme instead of sticking with the basic relationship that is the basis of the covenant.

Circumcision began as a covenant with God. Very simply, it meant that He was to cut these persons off and throw them away if they failed to follow, obey, respect, honor, and give Him His glory.

I. The Jews Had Obligation Without Obedience (vv. 17-18)

The Jews claimed several things. They called themselves Jews, a proud name. They boasted that they were God's chosen people. They relied upon the law and boasted in God. The Jews bragged on these things in relation to themselves. They had obligation to be Jews, but they had it without obeying what God had required them to do. They had all the privileges of being Jews without accepting the responsibilities of obedience to God. The religious works they performed were not sufficient to win His approval.

If you exchange the word "Jew" for today's title, "Christian," and rely upon baptism or church membership or anything else, yet fail to obey God in your heart, mind, and spirit, then your religion has little value. It becomes legalistic. It becomes formal without having power or grace or strength. The Jews were obligated to be Jews but lacked obedience to the God of the Jews.

II. The Jews Had Profession Without Performance (vv. 19-24)

They were claiming to be superior people: we are a guide to the blind; we bring light to the dark; we correct those who are foolish; we teach the immature. These people claimed to be superior on the basis of several distinctives; yet they professed all that without the performance of accomplishing God's will.

They had been given privileges based on their identity with God: (1) they were allowed to transmit the Temple tax every year to Jerusalem; (2) they were allowed to have their own courts and live according to their own laws; and (3) they were allowed to enjoy the freedom of their Jewish observance of the Sabbath. Paul said that they claimed all of these things but were guilty of the major sins of pride and hypocrisy. Too often they lived inconsistent lives, revealing a lack of coherence between what they said and what they did. Situational ethics and selfish morality were very much a part of their desecration of the covenant with God.

A physical examination of these proud Jews would doubtless have revealed that they were "circumcised in the flesh", but they were "uncircumcised in attitude and action." Some of them caused others to be misled and caused God's name to be blasphemed. The word *blaspheme* is closely related to the word *blame*. They were blaming God for their wrong spirit, wrong motives, and wrong actions. The penalty in the Old Testament for blasphemy was death—whether you committed the crime yourself (Lev. 24:11-16) or caused another to commit it (2 Sam. 12:14, NASB). What we say and what our life causes others to say about God are equally important to Him.

III. The Jews Had Ritual Without Reality (vv. 25-28)

They preserved the mental knowledge of God in the physical covenant of circumcision. They kept the law legalistically. They had the image of reality, but they had no reality in their rituals.

ILLUS. A man was found guilty of embezzling from the place where he worked. After they found him guilty of embezzling very large sums of money, they began to seek more explanation about how he was using the money that he had stolen. They found out that he had maintained two wives, two homes, and two families! So he had to steal money from his employer in order to make the money needed to maintain two complete families.

When he was confronted by friends in the church where he was a very zealous member, his main concern wasn't that he had stolen. His main concern was not that he had been unfaithful to God. His main concern was not that he had committed adultery and bigamy. His main concern was whether or not he should go and teach his Sunday School class the next Sunday.

That's a Pharisee! That's a man who understands the ritual but does not understand anything about the reality of God's grace in his life. That nullifies the value of the covenant by his inner attitudes and by his actions that defy the reality of the covenant's personal purpose.

A lot of people have an excess of religion that borders on superstition. They gladly engage in ritual and avidly adhere to ecclesiastical rules and regulations regarding signs and symbols without resting in the ONE to whom the rite points or committing themselves to the ONE whom the sign signifies. God's Word makes it plain that a relationship to Him must be based upon what happens inside our spirits.

IV. The Jews Needed Surgery by the Spirit (v. 29)

Circumcision of the heart is by the Spirit, not by the letter of the law. We are not made spiritual by just following tradition, just following a written covenant, just following rules, just following the laws, just going along with the procedures and rituals, and just saying the right things or doing the expected thing. When that something on the inside of our hearts has been removed in divine surgery by the Holy Spirit, we begin to see ourselves differently; we begin to see God differently; we begin to see other people differently. We begin to react differently; we begin to respond differently; we begin to become different people—real from the inside out, people whom God's Spirit has changed.

All through the Bible it talks about the spiritual application of the Old Testament symbol and covenant of circumcision. A prophet tells his people to circumcise themselves to the Lord, to take away the foreskins of their hearts, lest God's fury come forth like fire (Jer. 4:4, KJV). God's Word says that whatever hinders us from knowing Him perfectly and following Him fully and loving Him completely must be operated on by His divine Holy Spirit. Our hearts must have that Spirit surgery that enables us to see God and follow Him. Heart circumcision involves His taking away something that is not needed, something that hinders, and replacing it with His love and power. The covenant becomes real, and I want Him more than anything else.

Am I trusting in some religious rite that I went through years ago as the basis for my present relationship to God? If I am, I am missing His best for my life.

Is there stubbornness in my heart that He wants to remove so that I can follow Him with my whole heart?

Am I worthy of His praise? Does the condition of my heart stimulate me to praise Him? Does it bring glory to Him?

In what practical way can I make my own spiritual commitment to God more vital and real? What one place does He want to bring me more completely under His Lordship?

CONCLUSION:

This personalized paraphrase of verse 29 puts spiritual

surgery into powerful perspective: "The one who relates to God must do so from the inside out, inwardly cleansed by the divine supernatural surgery of the Holy Spirit. This is the circumcision of the heart, so that life reflects God's power and glory, His love and grace."

Is there something in me that needs to be cut away? Is there something in me that needs God's divine surgery by the Holy Spirit? Open yourself this moment and ask Him to remove that from your heart in such a way that it brings glory to Him and new power and victory to you.

The joy of serving God with a whole heart is often forfeited because we refuse to allow His surgery; we reject the impulse of the Spirit to get above our old nature.

ILLUS. Larry Walters, a 33-year-old truck driver, was sitting in his lawn chair in his backyard one day, wishing he could fly. For as long as he could remember, he had wanted to fly, but he'd never had the time or money or opportunity to be a pilot. Hang gliding was out because there was no good place for gliding near his home. So he spent a lot of summer afternoons sitting in his backyard in his ordinary old aluminum chair—the kind with the webbing and the rivets.

One day Larry hooked 45 helium-filled surplus weather balloons to his chair. He put on a parachute, put a CB radio in his lap, tied a paper bag full of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to his leg, and slung a BB gun over his shoulder to pop the balloons when he wanted to come down. He lifted off in his lawn chair, expecting to climb a couple of hundred feet. Instead he shot up 11,000 feet right through the approach corridor to the Los Angeles International Airport.

When asked by the press why he did it, Larry answered: "Well, you can't just *sit* there." When asked if he was scared, he answered: "Yes—wonderfully so."

Those who have yielded to God's surgery, when asked if they were scared of the process, invariably say, "Yes—wonderfully so."

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Ps. 51:7, 10
Choral Introit	"A Heart like Thine"
Congregational Hymn	"Cleanse Me"
Congregational Hymn	"It Cleanseth Me"
Prayer Choruses	"Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee"
	"Spirit of the Living God, Fall Fresh on Me"
Pastoral Prayer	
Offertory	"He Loves Me"
Solo	"I Want to Be like Jesus"
Message	"THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART"
Invitation	"O to Be like Thee"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Lenten Emphasis

During the Lenten period leading up to Easter, emphasize "what we take on for Christ" and not "what we give up for Him"! Take on the opportunity to witness, to invite a friend into your home for coffee and talk about eternal things, to pray more for an unsaved loved one, to plan a time of hospitality in your home or Sunday School class where you purposely encourage some who are having difficulty.

WE ARE ALL TOGETHER HERE

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 3:1-20

April 4, 1993

INTRO:

We are all sinful. Everyone! The first 2½ chapters of Romans deal with the problem of sin. A very deep conviction grows as we dig into the Letter to the Romans. We don't experience enough grace only because we do not acknowledge enough sin. No one is really open and receptive to the full, dominant, dynamic grace of the Lord Jesus until he becomes totally, absolutely convinced of his own sin. Paul is closing every escape route that people make so that they have to fall back on the divine, unnatural, supernatural grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul puts us all together under certain conditions of which we need to be aware and to acknowledge and to confess.

I. We Are All Together Here Under God's Privilege (vv. 1-2)

Paul's readers may say, "What advantage do we have because we are Jews? What advantage do we have because we have been circumcised? Is there no advantage? There is no advantage!" they said.

Paul answers, "You have a great advantage because in your own language you have received the divine revelation of God." What a privilege! The people have received God's Word in their own tongue, in their own time!

What advantage do we have, being a holiness church, being in the Wesleyan tradition? We have great advantage because we have freedom, the Word of God, and the things we praise God for in prayer time. We are together under the privilege of His blessings.

We are also in danger of taking those privileges for granted. God gave the Jews these privileges for a purpose—to bring them to a place of service and divine fulfillment. They had these privileges so that they could be the nation to produce the Messiah. Privilege brings responsibility. God didn't say to the Jews, "You are special, so you can do what you please!" He said, "You are special so that you can do what pleases Me!" We must look at our privileges as a platform for service to God.

ILLUS. Britishers love to harass their royalty! They love to criticize them. Because of that propensity, everyone in the media was surprised when the Queen Mother's 80th birthday provoked an unexpected outpouring of deep, loyal affection for her. Everyone wondered, why this tremendous outpouring of love?

Finally some smart newspaperman did a little research. He discovered that the Queen Mother saw the privilege of her position as a platform for service. Even though she was celebrating her 80th birthday, she had not missed one single appointment for ministry or service to others in 25 years. She had bought with her faithfulness and loyalty the affection and respect of the Commonwealth. She saw privilege as a base for service, not for selfishness or an exemption from duty.

Do I see my privileges as exemption from or responsibility to service? Am I now too good to follow the rules that everybody else follows? Am I grateful for the blessings of life that I enjoy? Am I aware of and thankful for

my privileges? Am I ready to use my privileges as a springboard to greater service?

II. We Are All Together Here Under Presumption (vv. 3-8)

A. If the Jews didn't believe, then God has failed (v. 3). That is a presumption—that God failed because the Jews failed. It's easy to blame God for my failures: He didn't give me enough grace, warning, or strength; He didn't give me enough escape routes; He didn't make me succeed!

B. There is an even greater presumption that because God so beautifully, freely, powerfully forgives sin, then I can do anything I want, and it brings glory to Him (v. 8). In other words, the more I sin, the more God is honored; the more I sin, the more He can prove His love.

The risk of teaching grace is very real, because it sounds too good to be true. When we preach grace the way God teaches it in His Word, it's not me helping God make me better. It's God doing it all as soon as I'm ready to accept His way and His will.

Paul refutes these presumptions with strong terms. May it never be! God forbid! Those who believe that the more they sin, the more they reveal the glory of God, condemn themselves.

There are two great universal truths. (1) The root of all sin is pride, man pitting his will against God's will. (2) After man has sinned, he has an amazing capacity to rationalize, giving excuses for his actions and his attitudes. We all stand in danger of being presumptive.

III. We Are All Together Here Under Sin (vv. 9-18)

That phrase—"under sin"—means many things. We are under sin's authority; we are under sin's dominion; we are under sin's power; we are under sin's influence; we are under sin's guilt; we are under sin's control. The human predicament is not so much the bad things we do as it is that we live by nature in a Christless state. We are helpless to escape from it in our own power. Any answer for the human problem that fails to deal with the root cause of sin is not a solution.

God's Word declares that men are born in sin and remain helpless to get out of it. Modern teaching insists that men are neutral. They only need education and economic advantage to become better. Paul warns that we are not capable in our human strength of ever doing anything realistic about the problem of sin. As long as we are twisted by sin, our conclusions and our reasons, our actions and attitudes are bent and biased in the wrong direction.

Paul scares us in this passage by using absolutes. *All* have sinned. There is *none* good; *no*, *not one*! Paul means that apart from God, people may do good things, but for the wrong reasons. What they consider good may be very selfish at root. No one is capable of following God's way in every situation by their own human strength or wisdom. The atoning blood of Jesus Christ is the only solution to man's sin. As Paul uses these absolutes, that is what he wants us to understand. The only way out of human sin is the grace that Jesus Christ bought for me on

the Cross. There are three reasons for this:

A. Paul says we have an unrighteous character (vv. 9-12). "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one" (vv. 10-12, RSV). These six sentences are taken from the Old Testament; Paul strung them together. Even good deeds may spring from selfish motives. Without the grace of God, there is no answer, no solution. There is an unrighteous character that shows when we are under sin.

B. Paul says we have unrighteous conduct when we are under sin (vv. 13-15). He uses four words to describe speech sins: the *throat* is full of corruption, an open tomb; the *tongue* is full of deceit; the *lips* are full of poison; the *mouth* is full of bitterness. Every part of the body that produces speech shares the sin that has affected human nature.

ILLUS. An eight-year-old girl had said something and done something that was extremely displeasing to her mother. Her mother fussed and fussed at her. She finally decided to spiritualize the whole thing by saying, "Did you tell God the terrible thing that you have done, the terrible thing that you have said?"

The little girl said, "No, Mother, I didn't think you would want this scandal known outside the family!"

C. Paul says that we have an unrighteous center (vv. 16-18). "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (v. 18, RSV). We have no awe and reverence for God; we don't spend enough time looking at God; we spend too much time looking at other things. We need to spend more time focusing our minds and our hearts and our eyes on a vision of God.

IV. We Are All Together Here Under Law (v. 19)

All have sinned; all are under the law.

A. We must fulfill God's law, and yet there is nothing I can say that will help. Every mouth will be closed; no one will have a single excuse. It is interesting to hear people's excuses.

ILLUS. Some of the most ingenious excuses are found in actual insurance claim forms:

"An individual car came out of nowhere, struck my vehicle, and vanished."

"Coming home, I drove into the wrong house and collided with a tree I don't have."

"The pedestrian had no idea which direction to run, so I ran over him."

"The telephone pole was approaching. I was attempting to swerve out of the way when it struck my front end."

"The guy was all over the road, and I had to swerve a number of times before hitting him."

"My car was legally parked when it backed into the other vehicle."

When we stand before God, no words will be powerful enough, smart enough, or wise enough to make any difference.

B. We will be accountable to God. The main item in the ledger will be what have I done with the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son.

ILLUS. In human transactions, we don't like red in the

ledger; we want to end the year in the black. When God opens His ledger to my page, there will be a lot of red there. That doesn't mean bankruptcy, default, failure, lack; that means love poured out powerfully and effectively in our behalf.

V. We Are All Together Here Under Pressure (v. 20)

Even though we work as hard as we can and keep the laws as well as we are able, no one alive will be justified through that. The law does only one thing—to make us conscious of the fact that we are sinners. That puts us under pressure. No flesh will be justified under the efforts of human endeavor. Every effort to please God will fail unless we are willing to receive the only sacrifice for sin that God has given us.

Is there any part of me still trying to make believe that Jesus' death was unnecessary? Is there any part of my actions where I think I can do it on my own? Is there any part of me that still wants to say, "I'm glad that Jesus died for others, but He didn't need to go to all that trouble for me?"

CONCLUSION:

Paul summarizes in verse 23: "All have sinned." He doesn't leave us there; he urges us to look forward to verse 24, where all who have sinned and all who have fallen short are able to be justified as a gift by God's grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus. That's the good news! The good news rests on the fact of bad news. The good news is that we are absolutely incapable of saving ourselves. The good news is that Jesus died so that we can enjoy God's grace poured out freely upon us—undeservedly, yes; but powerfully and blessedly.

On this Palm Sunday, we have much for which to praise God. It is all of Jesus Christ and none of us!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Children's Palm Procession

"Praise the Name of Jesus"

Call to Worship

John 12:12-19

Congregational Hymns

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

"Let All the People Praise Him"

Prayer Chorus

"We Are One in the Bond of Love"

Pastoral Prayer

Choir

"How Great Thou Art!"

Worship in Giving

"Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"

Solo

"I Will Sing of My Redeemer"

Message

"WE ARE ALL TOGETHER HERE"

Closing Song

"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"

Benediction

Creative Worship Ideas

Palm Sunday

You can make the sermon more Palm Sunday-effective by titling it, "Which Palm Branch Are You Under?" or making each topic, "We Are All Together Here Under the Palm Branch of . . ." If I were going to use this approach, I would take seven palm branches to the pulpit with me and use one to symbolize each of the five major points of the sermon, plus two for the conclusion. My final two would be the Palm Branch of Grace (v. 24) and the Palm Branch of Praise!

FAITH, CONFUSED OR CONFESSED?

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 4:1-17

April 11, 1993

INTRO:

An Eskimo visited New York City, then returned to the far north and brought a long, narrow package wrapped in gift paper, tied with a big ribbon. He presented it to his wife as his gift of return from his long trip. She thanked him, opened it, and found inside a 10-foot length of pipe, about 3" in diameter. She asked what it was. He said, "It's a great invention. In New York, they prop it upright in the bedroom, one end on the floor and one end on the ceiling. When you have a very cold night, you bang on it, and you get heat."

That's not faith; that's presumption. He didn't understand all that was tied to the two ends of that pipe.

Some people have no more clue about how or why God works in their lives than that Eskimo did about how heat got into his bedroom in New York City. He thought it was magic, and it wasn't at all! Faith is very real.

Paul directs us to look at Abraham for several reasons. First, Abraham was the founder of the Jewish race, the pattern for all those people who followed God. Second, he was the first specific personal example of real faith. We are going to learn on this Easter Sunday about the faith that changes lives!

I. Faith's Force Is Action (Heb. 11:8-12)

Don't confuse faith with mental assent; faith is action! Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were happy, contented, and prosperous in the land of Ur of the Chaldees. Then Abraham heard from God.

A. Faith always begins when we hear from God. Until God says something, we have nothing on which to build faith. God said to Abraham, "Pick up everything and leave!" So Abraham went to his wife, as a good man would do, and said, "Sweet wife, we are moving."

She asked, "Where are we going?"

He said, "Only God knows."

She asked, "Do they have tri-level tents where we are going?"

He shrugged, "Only God knows."

She pressed further, "Do they have hot and cold running water?"

"I don't know," he responded.

"Do they have good stores there?" she asked.

"I don't know," he admitted.

"Well, what do you know?" she questioned.

Abraham answered, "I only know one thing: God spoke to me!"

Abraham is the Father of the Faithful for this reason: Faith's force is not in hearing; it is in doing. It's not mental assent; it's action. We must not confuse faith with merely thinking about something.

B. Faith does not become real until it is acted upon. Faith causes us to do something that we would not have done if we hadn't believed something we hadn't

seen yet. Abraham was receptive to God's plan. He chose God's alternative for his life, and he took action on it!

What has God said to you? Are you still debating it? Do you need to take obedient action on it? That is faith!

II. Faith's Fruit Is Righteousness (Rom. 4:2-5)

Don't confuse faith with wages; faith is a gift!

A. Faith is not wages! Faith is not a reward for what we do. Faith is not God blessing us because we have done something for Him.

B. Faith is willingness to take God at His Word and act upon what He says. Eleven times in this chapter the word "reckon" is used (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, RSV, cf. NASB). This is an interesting word in both the original Greek language and in its many English counterparts. In the original language it comes from the word for "logic." "Reckoning" may be translated as "accounted," as "counted," as "concluded," as "judged," or as "credited to the account of."

C. "Reckoning" is a delightful way of thinking about God's grace. We have not earned it nor deserved it, but God reckoned that we needed it. God figured that we could use grace. God credited righteousness to our account.

Faith in God does not bring wages but is the only way to receive His powerful gift and receive the credit that we need with Him.

D. Faith never results in anything except the righteousness of God. The minute that my heart lifts itself up in pride because of God's great grace, love, power, or blessing, I have already begun to destroy the account of righteousness into which God places His grace.

III. Faith's Feature Is Blessing (vv. 6-9)

Don't confuse faith with drudgery; faith is joyful!

A. God's blessing comes through faith. Faith isn't drudgery or simply doing your duty. Faith does a work of joy and blessing. God gives you credit for His righteousness, even though you didn't do anything to deserve it or earn it. Along with it comes the great blessing of knowing you have been loved to the limit. You have been loved and changed, apart from any of your own doing.

ILLUS. A long time ago, when the coal mines in England were active, a minister used to go and stand at the door of the coal mine and preach to the miners. One morning he was preaching on God's grace. He said, "You didn't do anything to earn it; you can't do anything to deserve it; but God loves you and He wants you."

An old miner said, "That's not fair. What can I do to earn God's love?"

The preacher replied, "There is nothing you can do to

earn it; God's righteousness is given to those who accept the fact that they can never earn it and can never deserve it."

The miner said, "That's not fair."

The minister was suddenly inspired and said, "What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to work," the man replied; "my shift starts in just a few minutes."

The pastor said, "What's your work like?"

He answered, "I go way down in the bottom of the mine and drill places to put dynamite. I work all day down there in the dark. The only light I see is the light from this tiny candle on my helmet."

The minister asked, "How do you get down there?"

The miner explained, "On the elevator."

Then the pastor asked, "How much did you pay for the elevator?"

The miner said, "Oh, I didn't pay anything!"

The minister insisted, "That isn't fair. It's not fair for you to get down there where you work and where you earn a living and yet you didn't pay for the way you get down there."

The miner began to see, "Oh, you mean that even though it doesn't cost me anything, it cost somebody something."

The old minister said, "That is exactly right; there is nothing you can do to deserve or earn salvation. There is no way you can ever pay the price. Salvation doesn't cost you anything, but it cost Somebody a lot. It cost God's Son His life!"

David knew this blessing (v. 6).

B. Forgiveness is the basis for this blessing (v. 7). God's forgiveness that we receive is a source of blessing because it lasts forever (v. 8). Blessing is not based upon our works (v. 9). If you have been trying to earn God's grace, then you have missed everything. Until you have opened your heart, mind, spirit, and soul to Jesus Christ and invited Him to come in as the Savior and Lord, you have missed everything.

There is not one way in the world to receive forgiveness except to open yourself to Him. No one else can do that for you. Each of us stands before God. Faith brings great blessing. Faith's feature is to be blessed with spiritual joy that comes when my sins are forgiven and my guilt is removed. I can know that I am standing in the right place with God. I can know that my spirit is open to my fellowman and God's delight is at work within me.

IV. Faith's Function Is Grace (vv. 10-12)

Don't confuse faith with effect; faith is cause! In this context, the writer points out a very interesting sequence: (1) God spoke to Abraham. (2) Abraham obeyed God. (3) God promised to make him a great nation. (4) God gave him the seal of righteousness, circumcision. So it was faith working before Abraham ever received the seal of the law. God declared Abraham to be the father of those who believe and the father of the righteous long before he was under the seal of circumcision. He received grace before he was circumcised; the law of covenant came afterward as an effect and not as the cause. Faith's function is grace; don't confuse it with the law. Faith is the cause of blessing (v. 10). Faith takes steps of faithful obedience of God (v. 12).

V. Faith's Future Is Guaranteed (vv. 13-17)

Don't confuse faith with fear; faith is delight. God has promised that the future is secure to those who trust His grace. Along with Abraham, we are heirs of the world (v. 13). We have received the promise of faith (v. 14). God's grace is guaranteed to us (v. 16). We are His children (v. 17). Don't ever confuse faith with fear. Don't ever confuse faith with dread. Faith is always expressed and experienced as joyful delight in a loving Father's presence.

CONCLUSION:

We are given a very powerful double description of who God is. God gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist (v. 17). There are some questions to ask ourselves on this Easter Sunday morning.

(1) What is your God like? Is He the God who raises the dead? Is He the God who brings things into existence that have never happened before? (2) Or is your God the one who is also a victim of your circumstances? Is your God also unable to change the things that perturb and perplex you? (3) What is dead in your life to which He can give life? Do you have hopes and dreams that need to be revived and brought back to life? Is there somebody here who is reminded that God is the God who brings back the dead?

When faith simply does these things—listens to God, opens the heart to God's direction, opens the mind to God's perception, opens the will to God's will, and takes action based on what God wants me to become, good things come back to life in me! Upon the authority of God's Word, it is never too late for Him to bring back to life what He wants for you. But He requires you to take the action of obedience based on what He says. That is truly life-changing faith!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"I Know That My Redeemer Liveth"
Choral Introit	"Christ, the Lord Is Risen"
Call to Worship	Luke 24:1-8
Congregational Hymns	"My Faith Looks Up to Thee" "He Lives!"
Pastoral Prayer	Repeat Chorus of "He Lives!"
Choir	"Hallelujah! What a Savior!"
Worship in Giving	
Solo	"Christ Arose!"
Message	"FAITH, CONFUSED OR CONFESSED?"
Closing Invitation	"Because He Lives"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

If given about three weeks' notice before Easter (deadline on Palm Sunday), many in your congregation will put money in an envelope to purchase a lily to be placed in the church either in memory of a departed loved one or in honor of a living person. People are blessed in several ways. Encourage them to take the lilies after the Easter Sunday evening message and give them to a shut-in or a non-Christian friend as a witness of love. The Easter Sunday morning worship folder should have an insert or a list of names of those who purchased a lily and whom they honored or memorialized.

WE REJOICE AND EXULT

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 5:1-11

April 18, 1993

INTRO:

The word *exult* is not used very often; it is difficult to sprinkle that word into your conversation. The word *rejoice* is more common. There is much in God's Word about exulting, delighting, rejoicing, excitement, and enthusiasm.

Paul talks about those emotional dynamics that occur in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The word *exult* is repeated over and over. *Exult* relates to pleasantness and sometimes to unpleasantness. Paul wants us to understand very clearly that when we have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, everything is transformed into an opportunity to exult—to rejoice, to be thankful, and to be glad.

A favorite word for exult is *jubilation*. Jubilation comes from *jubilee*, which is based upon spiritual freedom. Spiritual freedom creates jubilation, an inward overflow of rejoicing over grace. Expressions of delight are appropriate responses to the ministering grace that Jesus Christ has given to us.

I. We Exult in Our Present Standing (vv. 1-2)

We stand in God's grace; we have good standing.

A. We have been justified. We have been freed from the penalty of sin by the sovereign act of God whereby He declares that the sinner is transformed into a believing son of God by His miraculous grace (v. 1). We have been set free from sin, given a guarantee of eternal life in heaven, and given a down payment on spiritual blessings in this present life.

B. Because of our new relationship to God, we have peace with God (v. 1). Exultation, jubilation, and peace are related in a very delightful way. Peace is jubilation at rest. Jubilation is peace dancing. When we are jubilant, open, and expressive of God's work in us, inner joy is being released into the people around us.

C. We have access into the presence of royalty (v. 2). We have come into the presence of Almighty God. This means we have been brought into a safe, sheltered haven of rest. When we have been brought into God's presence and received power from Him, the tempest-tossed lives that we had before in sin and selfishness have been changed. We enjoy God's rest.

D. When we have faith, we have the grace of God's inner power at work. So we exult about the fact that we have this relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We stand secure and are blessed in the presence of the King of the Universe.

II. We Exult in Hope for the Future (vv. 2, 9-10)

A. We expect to experience God's glory (v. 2).

ILLUS. In a men's prayer group, each fellow was asked to give a personal definition of the word *glory*. Some beautiful

expressions of what glory meant to the men were shared. One said, "Glory is the awareness of God's presence."

Another said, "Glory is the total impact of God's power on my life."

Another man had been studying Exodus with his wife. He related glory to the Shekinah presence of God—the shining, mysterious, mystical glow of God's living presence in the holy of holies. This glow of God's glorious presence enables us to exult in hope.

B. We shall be saved from judgment (v. 9). That is good news! Having been justified by Jesus' blood, we will be saved from God's wrath. We will be protected from the normal, natural consequences of our own sin. The blood of Jesus covering over our sins is the only solution to the problem of sin. His atonement enables us to have great exultation for the future.

C. We shall experience resurrection life (v. 10). We shall live forever. We shall be resurrected with Jesus. We have Christ's life in us, forever!

III. We Exult in Current Painful Processes (vv. 3-5)

Paul gets radical; he says that Christians are jubilant about their problems. Are there any "Amens"?

A. We also exult in our tribulations (v. 3). Christians have learned to be jubilant about the very fact that God is on their side, no matter what happens.

ILLUS. A pastor visited in the home of a family who came for the first time the previous Sunday, a day of special music ministry. The pastor asked, "Did you enjoy the service last Sunday?"

The father answered, "Yes, it was good. But what is going to happen tomorrow?"

The pastor said, "We are back to the preacher preaching tomorrow."

The man said, "What are you going to preach about?"

The pastor said, "I'm going to preach from that great passage that says that Christians learn to get excited about their troubles."

He said, "Boy, am I excited. I know all about tribulation. I've been there now for 19 years." As he shared his story, it wasn't gloom and doom that was coming through his spirit, his eyes, his voice. It was the awareness that God and he were in it together. There was an exciting awareness that God never allows anything to come into his life that he and God can't handle together.

Paul knew that trouble was inevitable but not insurmountable. The chain of events that begins with tribulation can bring forth good character and the glory of God. Christians aren't masochists. We don't go around seeking hurt. But we don't view pain as the end of the world either. It can signal the beginning of a purifying process.

Two words deal with tribulation. The first is a Latin word, *tribulum*. A *tribulum* is a big piece of timber

with spikes in it. Farmers dragged this through wheat stalks, and it would separate out the wheat and the chaff. The Greek word is *flipsis*, best translated as "pressure." Where is your pressure point? Your pressure is something that God has given you, or allowed to come into your life, to start the process of purifying grace.

ILLUS. At an elderly preacher's funeral, some collected wisdom recorded on the flyleaf of his Bible was read. One of the most powerful said: "The worst possible place in the world to get off a train is in the darkness of a tunnel." When you are under pressure, that is no time to quit!

B. We exult in pain's by-product, perseverance. Several words are equally powerful: *perseverance, forbearance, fortitude, endurance, patience*. They all suggest to endure, not with gritting your teeth, but with rejoicing in your heart!

ILLUS. Under the Communists, a Korean Christian was asked by his jailer, a Communist, "How do you stand the persecution?"

Humbly, but honestly, the Korean Christian answered, "You don't understand us. We Christians are like nails; the harder you hit us, the deeper you drive us."

Does my pain drive me deeper into Jesus or does Satan somehow use it to drive me away from Jesus?

C. We exult in approved character. We have pressure; we have patience; now we have character, integrity, and reality. This powerful concept of approved character means a refined, purified metal. The same word has been translated into English as "sterling"—purified, perfected, having become what it was supposed to be.

D. We exult in hope that grows strong. Hope does not disappoint us; hope has confidence; hope cannot be defeated; hope cannot be ashamed; hope provides inner reinforcement. Our hope is built upon the character of Jesus Christ, upon the integrity of God, upon our commitment of faith, upon our willingness to belong to God no matter what happens.

E. We exult in God's poured-out love. God's love allows pressure to come into our lives to start this process. However, God's Spirit also pours in love to counterbalance and provide an antidote for the hurt so that bitterness, resentment, and anger don't overwhelm us and dominate our attitudes. The Holy Spirit is the Source of our exultation, jubilation, and rejoicing (v. 5).

IV. We Exult in God Himself (vv. 6-7-8, 11)

We get excited about what God does for us. Maybe we don't put enough emphasis upon getting excited about God himself. We exult in God; we are jubilant in God!

A. Jesus came when we were helpless (v. 6). We didn't have any strength. We were ungodly. We sinners were enemies of God, yet Jesus still loved us and gave himself for us.

B. Jesus died for us (vv. 6, 7). He proved His love to us when we were most unlovable.

C. Jesus demonstrated His love to us through His death!

D. Jesus gives us reconciliation! The God against whom we rebelled in our sin and selfishness has done what was necessary to become our closest personal Friend.

CONCLUSION:

Christians believe that each person can and must have a close personal friendship with God. We have become His friends—not just for what He does for us, not just for what He gives us, not just for getting us through the tough times, but for His personal fellowship.

ILLUS. A minister traveled about, holding revivals, and was away from home for long periods. He noticed a clear distinction, after a couple of longer trips, between his children's response to his return home and his wife's response. It illustrates the difference between being jubilant about what God does for me and being jubilant about God. Every time he would come home, his two young children met him excitedly and hugged him. Then they said, "What did you bring me, Daddy?" That was normal and nice.

But sometime in those first few hours, his wife would quietly say, "I'm glad you're home!"

This week find a time away from all other interruptions. Simply say, "I am glad You are here, God!" For that one time, leave off the petitions: "Would You help me?" "Please, I need . . .," and "What are You going to bring me?" Exult in His presence. Exult in His person. Exult in His personal relationship to you in love.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Rom. 5:5
Congregational Hymn	"All That Thrills My Soul"
Prayer Chorus	"They That Wait Upon the Lord"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
Worship in Giving	"O for a Thousand Tongues!"
Quartet	"My Wonderful Lord"
Message	"WE REJOICE AND EXULT"
Closing Hymn	"Heaven Came Down"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

For Easter Sunday evening or Easter Week prayer meeting, use Rom. 4:16-25 on the topic, "Faith Faces Up to Impossibilities!"

Begin by asking two questions: (1) What would I attempt for God if I knew that I could not fail? (2) What am I doing now in God's service that requires Resurrection power to accomplish?

Emphasize that the God of our faith gives life to the dead, calls things from nowhere into existence, gives supernatural inner support, and enables us to face the impossibilities in our lives.

Close by asking people to ponder and pray about the applications for this truth: (1) Look for the impossibilities that you face in your life—physically, emotionally, relationally, spiritually. (2) Identify those things that only God can do something about. (3) Face those impossibilities with faith—with the realization that God wants to manifest His power and reveal His glory. (4) Affirm that you will not be content with "business as usual" and that you will give God the appropriate praise for His working in and through you. (5) Next Sunday night, give opportunity for witness by those who have done this. Let them know there will be that opportunity.

A SUPERABUNDANCE OF GRACE

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 5:12-21

April 25, 1993

Membership Sunday

INTRO:

The topic of Romans 5 is grace. This difficult passage goes back and forth from the man through whom sin entered the world, Adam, and the Man through whom righteousness came, Jesus. Paul clearly leads us to understand that salvation is seriously and simply a life-or-death matter. Sin entered by Adam and with it, death. Grace came through Jesus Christ and with it, salvation and life.

In every part of Romans 5 the underlying assumption is that grace more than adequately solves all the problems of man's sinful nature. Grace is God's answer for sin; it is a sufficient answer. The great adequacy of grace is underlined in the promise that where sin abounds, God's grace superabounds (v. 20).

I. Sin Is a Disgrace

The disgrace of sin shows up in our world.

A. Sin entered through Adam (v. 12). We are not sure how. We do not have a proper explanation. Some people say sin is genetic, transmitted from one generation to the next. Some people say sin entered because Adam was our representative. Some people say something happened when Adam sinned that changed the climate, environment, and nature of man. The Bible says that when Adam sinned, sin entered the world.

B. When sin entered the world, death came as a direct consequence.

C. Death spread to all people (v. 12). Sin has affected every person born into the world from the time that Adam chose to disobey God.

ILLUS. When Albert Einstein discovered the theory of relativity with his simple formula, $E=mc^2$, only five or six people in the whole world even came close to understanding what he was talking about. Even though many people did not understand it, the knowledge that was spawned from Einstein's findings resulted in the deaths of millions of people in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. As a result, fear has hung over the world since 1945. Most people today have never known a world without the atomic bomb. Einstein's discovery has profoundly affected everyone. We can't escape the influence and impact that Einstein has made. Whether we understand it or not, we are all affected by the practical implications of Einstein's theory. In a similar way, we are profoundly affected by Adam's sin.

D. Death has reigned (vv. 14, 21). Death became king; it became master over everyone. Look at today's world—business, politics, education, philosophy, culture, morality, or entertainment. The reign of death through sin has reached such proportions in our own land that most of us live with it every day without being conscious of how much we are affected. Death reigns!

ILLUS. After thousands of years, Western civilization has

advanced to where we bolt our doors and windows at night while jungle natives sleep in open huts.

E. Sin results in condemnation (vv. 16, 18). Because of sin, God has placed the world under condemnation. The context says that Adam sinned—that was an action—and the word means he missed the mark. He missed the mark because he did not choose the right target. He shot at pleasing himself instead of pleasing God. When we shoot at the mark of pleasing self rather than pleasing God, we shall miss His mark.

In this context, when it says, "Sin entered," there is another word for sin. This word for sin is "a disposition of selfishness," meaning a natural tendency to do the wrong thing, for the wrong reasons, at the wrong time. Man is in charge, and death is reigning.

F. Sin is disobedience (v. 19). Even when we try to keep the law, the transgression, guilt, and penalty increases (v. 20).

Why would God allow sin to exist in the world? He has the power to destroy sin. A day will come when He will do that. Meanwhile, He could not destroy sin without destroying all the sinners. In an act of mercy and grace, He gave time for us to fall in love with Him instead of continuing to fall in love with ourselves. Sin is a disgrace that intensifies through time.

ILLUS. In December 1985 a 70-foot-wide sinkhole in Florida swallowed a home and a carport, forcing the evacuation of four homes in a retirement community. The hole was about the size of a pickup truck when it was first discovered. Within three hours, it had grown to 30 by 40 feet and had swallowed half of a small house. Two hours later the house was gone. The owners escaped with only their coats, glad to be alive. Without Jesus Christ, the human heart is like a sinkhole—and the results are more catastrophic.

II. Salvation Is a "This Grace!"

A. This grace is a free gift (v. 15). Human effort cannot earn God's grace.

ILLUS. The pastor called a 10-year-old boy to the front of the church and held a \$5.00 bill out to show the congregation and the young lad. "Bobby," he asked, "have you done anything to earn this?"

"No, sir," the boy replied.

Again the pastor asked, "Have I promised you this \$5.00 previously?"

"No," Bobby answered.

"Have you any reason to expect that I would give you this \$5.00?"

"No, sir," the boy stated.

"Is this your birthday?" asked the pastor.

"No," the boy answered.

"If I give you this \$5.00, it would be a free gift, wouldn't it?" the pastor inquired.

"Yes, sir, it would."

That's exactly what happened: Bobby got a free gift of \$5.00 to show that our efforts or expectations are not factors in receiving God's grace.

Confusion inflicts people when you begin to talk to them about God's grace. Why? They didn't do anything to earn it. They didn't do anything to deserve grace. Why would anyone want to do that? It doesn't make any sense.

We begin to understand that God gives His love, His forgiveness, and His grace—not because we work for it, not because we earned it, not because we deserve it, but because He loves us.

ILLUS. A man's pastor asked him why he didn't receive God's grace. He said, "I'm working toward it."

The pastor said, "I have bad news for you, then. You'll never get there. There is no way you can work long enough, hard enough, or get far enough in your own strength to get God's grace. Grace comes at the end of your willingness to give up on yourself and to let go of your own efforts and let go of your own human striving and simply receive from God."

This free grace that God gives us is totally different from the disgrace that sin brings.

B. Jesus Christ is the Giver of grace (v. 15). That miracle and mystery we can't understand completely.

ILLUS. Sir Alexander Fleming, the microbiologist, discovered penicillin. The life of a pastor's dear friend was saved by massive dosages of penicillin when his appendix burst. As the pastor and his friend talked in the hospital, they realized that 20 or 30 years earlier, Alexander Fleming provided a cure for what would formerly have been certain death. He has contributed to the health and longevity of millions of people throughout the world since discovering that green mold called penicillin. Penicillin could be called a "grace." We didn't work to discover it. We didn't pay for all of the experiments that brought it into being. It was something we receive as a gift. It helps everyone. It's an abundant gift!

C. The abundant gift of grace brings righteousness (v. 17). Grace brings right-useness. Grace puts us into proper relationship with God.

ILLUS. A certain man was sitting on a tack. He was hurting. He wanted some help. So he called for a psychologist, who said, "Sir, the reason you are hurting is rooted in a childhood trauma. You need therapy."

A sociologist was called, and he suggested, "You've got a problem, and it is obviously the result of the kind of environment in which you grew up. Hurt is from an improper environment."

An economist was called next. He said, "Money is the root of all hurt. Let me help you with your portfolio."

Then a minister was called. He suggested, "If you learn to praise the Lord in all your circumstances, you won't hurt so much. Your spiritual life leaves something to be desired. Start reading your Bible and praying every day, and it will get better."

But with all this advice, the man still hurt. Then a little girl came along. She said, "Mister, why don't you get off the tack?"

For those who would receive God's grace, they must get off sin's hurt.

D. Life reigns instead of death.

E. Grace superabounds in opposition to sin (v. 20). It doesn't matter how bad your life has been; it doesn't matter how deep you might be in sin. God's grace always has more than enough power to meet your need. God's grace is strong and superabundant to meet every need.

CONCLUSION:

Grace is God's gift. You can't earn it. It is more than enough for every need. All you have to do is receive His grace.

ILLUS. Legendary Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was virtually unknown when he painted his famous portrait of American writer Gertrude Stein in 1906. Picasso gave the portrait to Miss Stein since, as the artist himself recalled with a smile, at that time in his career, "the difference between a gift and a sale was negligible." Several years later, the portrait attracted the interest of millionaire art collector Dr. Albert Barnes, who asked Miss Stein how much she had paid Picasso for it. "Nothing," she replied. "Naturally, he gave it to me." Dr. Barnes was incredulous that such a priceless work of art could have been a gift.

If you've ever thought about the good news of Jesus for very long, you can probably appreciate Dr. Barnes's incredulity. Think of what we have been given in Jesus Christ: forgiveness, eternal life, the riches of heaven, all at a cost we could have never paid! That's not all; we have the privilege of sharing this divine treasure with others.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Piano Prelude	"Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary"
Call to Worship	Rom. 5:5, 20
Choir	"His Grace Aboundeth More"
Congregational Hymn	"Amazing Grace"
Prayer Time	
Choir	"Wonderful Grace of Jesus"
Take in Members	
Worship in Giving	
Special Song	"He Giveth More Grace"
Message	"A SUPERABUNDANCE OF GRACE"
Closing Song	"Burdens Are Lifted at Calvary"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Taking In Members

Have a six-week class to prepare people for this Sunday: (1) History of the church; (2) Doctrines of the church; (3) Ministries of the church; (4) Life-style of the church; (5) Your spiritual gifts and ministry; and (6) Our church is yours too!

Communion

The message of grace and the service lend themselves easily to Communion time. Serving the Lord's Supper at the close of the message would be both fitting and effective.

Demonstration

The illustration of giving \$5.00 to a boy in the congregation works best if you actually do it at that point in the sermon. Call a boy up to the platform. Ask him the questions. Let his amazement and confusion and then obvious pleasure demonstrate the vital points in the illustration.

THE NEWNESS OF LIFE

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 6:1-11

May 2, 1993

INTRO:

Paul contrasts the old life of sin and death with the new life of grace and truth. He talks about an identification with Christ at the point of death and resurrection. New life in Christ always requires identification.

People of the world don't believe that human nature can change. Or they believe that human nature doesn't need to be changed—all we need is to correct one's environment. God's Word doesn't teach that. The Word teaches that the old person in sin must die with Christ in order that the new nature becomes our experience through the Resurrection. The Word teaches that human nature can change through identification with Christ.

I. Newness of Life Must Be Received

A. We receive newness of life through baptism (vv. 3, 4). Baptism is a vital contact with Christ. In the Early Church, baptism meant that a person publicly proclaimed his willingness to walk away from his old life to start a whole new life. When a person was baptized in Paul's time, it meant that he was ready to turn 180 degrees to begin walking in newness of life through Christ. Baptism symbolizes this identification! When we lie down, buried in the baptismal water, we act out our willingness to die to the old self. As we are raised up out of the water, we act out our desire to be made new by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. Walking out of the baptismal water, we witness to the world that we intend to walk in newness of life.

B. We receive newness of life through death to the old life (v. 4). There is only one way to enter into the new life—that is through the death of the old life! There is no way to continue in the old life of sin and selfishness while experiencing the new life of grace and peace. Death is mentioned in Romans 15 times. Paul talks about being crucified with Christ, about dying with Him in baptism—it's a death route. It's the end of something we have known and something we have been.

If you could dig a grave and place anything in there that you wanted to see dead and buried in your life, what would it be? That's practical, concrete, and specific. Paul speaks of being dead to those things so that we may come alive to Jesus.

Sometimes we try to exist as "betweeners." We are between Egypt and Canaan. We are between Good Friday and Easter Sunday morning. We are between the old life and the new life—and we are miserable. We have not arrived yet where we are willing to die to the old life.

ILLUS. A powerful personal testimony reveals this truth: I was studying Romans 6. My heart was saturated with the message as I prepared a sermon to be delivered the following Sunday. On Sunday morning as I stood before the mirror to adjust my tie before going to the pulpit, I

thought of my sermon. I began to enumerate the points, thinking of the Cross.

Then I said to myself, "Have I ever been on that Cross?" Potentially I was there with Christ, but in experience had I ever been there? My pride, my hunger for popularity, my greed—have these things ever been nailed there on the Cross by my choice with Jesus? Have I ever felt the loneliness, sorrow, and agony that Jesus felt on Calvary?

These questions humbled me, and I fell to my knees to pray, but I could not pray. Something kept asking me: Have you ever been on that Cross? I got up from my knees, went to my mirror, and said, "O God, nail my pride, my love of self, my desire for popularity, my greed, all the lusts of the flesh to the cross of Christ." Then I actually could see myself hanging there with Jesus. Instead of preaching my sermon, I told my congregation of my experience. I simply said that I wanted to see them get on their knees and stay there until Jesus showed them themselves on the Cross with Him.

It's easy to resist that way of thinking! From the authority of God's Word, newness of life is received when we willingly identify with Jesus in His death. No one goes to the Cross with Jesus unless he chooses to do so.

C. We receive newness of life through Jesus' resurrection (v. 8). Having a new life isn't some glib proclamation of the lips or expression of the feelings. We have new life when we identify with Jesus through His death and resurrection.

II. Newness of Life Can Be Known

The scripture emphasizes knowing something. Christian living depends upon Christian knowing—knowing God's Word and being discipled in the doctrines of that Word. These are vital essentials for a growing Christian. Newness of life must be known. Three times in this context that word "know" appears. We have certainty; we have an inward knowledge.

A. Newness of life is known in the certainty of baptism (v. 3). The first "know" is connected to baptism. We have become identified with Jesus in His death for us; the certainty of our death in Him is symbolized in baptism. Both physical and spiritual dimensions provide experiential knowledge.

B. Newness of life is known in the certainty of being crucified with Jesus (v. 6). The old person has been rendered powerless to control, influence, or direct our new life in Christ. Our old self was put to death with Christ so that our new life controls our attitudes and actions.

C. Newness of life is known in the certainty of Christ's victory (vv. 9-10). Identification with Jesus stands central in the miracle of new life. At that instant when my heart realizes that something miraculous and unusual has happened, I have opened my life to Christ.

Throughout the history of the church, monasticism, asceticism, sacramentalism, ceremonialism, ritualism, legalism, and many other "isms" have been man's way to capture the reality of newness of life in Christ. They have sought ways to perpetuate it after it has been realized. The way to continue in this new life is by continuing identification, personal communion, and relationship with Jesus, daily celebrating our victory in Christ.

III. Newness of Life Is to Be Enjoyed

We are freed from death. We are freed from sin. We are freed to live! The freedom we have received in Christ is the source of great power, peace, joy, blessing, and the awareness—moment by moment and day by day—of a new quality of life. The words "joy" or "rejoice" do not appear in this passage, but freedom creates in us a sense of joy as the result of God's newness of life within. An overpowering impact of joy comes when we receive Christ's new life.

IV. Newness of Life Is to Be Realized

A powerful word may be translated "consider" or "count on" or "reckon." The word "reckon" is used many times in the New Testament, several times in Romans alone. Paul is saying, "I act as if it were real—knowing that it is real." You know that Jesus' death is a reality. You know that He didn't die for His own sins, but for my sins and your sins. That's reality!

Jesus deposited in your account all that you need so that you can be all that He wants. Now you have to act upon that fact. If God says that I am crucified with Him, then I "count on" that to be true in my life. I write a check on that account.

ILLUS. The notices in the newspapers of people who are supposed to have great fortunes waiting for them are intriguing! A lot of people have wasted time looking through those long lists for their names, only to be disappointed.

Imagine that some rich relative you have never known had no other kinfolk. Somehow he knew about you. Before he died, he placed \$8 million in a trust account for you. You found your name in one of those lists. Two things you could do.

You could say, "I'm sorry, but that's not mine." You wouldn't get one cent out of that account if you took that attitude.

You could say, "It is worth a try." You would sign a check made out to that account. If you signed a check on that account, you would reckon that there was money in a trust fund for you. Thus you would act upon that reckoning.

If we believe fully what God says in His Word, His inheritance for us is based, not upon our feeling, but on our willingness to take action based on His deposit, that which He has put in our account. Until you reckon that it is there, until you act upon it by faith, it remains there as God's deposit through Christ for you. But it doesn't become your inheritance.

Do you find resentment in your life? Reckon that resentment to be dead and buried with Christ. Reckon that in Jesus' deposit, He has the ability and willingness to replace your resentment with forgiveness and love. Do you find fear in your life? Reckon that it is dead in Christ. Reckon that the deposit that Jesus made for you is full of courage and confidence.

Do you have feelings of inferiority and insecurity? Reckon that those feelings are dead and that they are replaced from the deposit that Christ has made with Jesus' poise, purpose, and power.

Write a check on God's bank account for you. You and the Lord are the only one who know what that check should be. What is it you need from Him? What is it that you want in His newness of life for you today? Is it forgiveness, salvation, freedom, understanding, or love? Act upon that reckoning that your need has been supplied through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. There may be someone here who has never known Jesus as Savior and Lord. You can have Jesus' new life today. Take these steps: (1) Acknowledge that sin separates you from God. (2) Confess your sin and turn away from it; repent of it. (3) Claim the deposit that Jesus has made for you, and reckon that He did it because He chooses to give you His eternal life.

If you don't remember anything else from this message, remember these three tiny words: count on it! Count on what Jesus did! Accept it and confess it as God's will!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"All That Thrills My Soul"
Call to Worship	Rom. 6:4-5
Congregational Hymn	"Jesus Is All the World to Me"
Prayer Choruses	"Jesus Is the Sweetest Name"
	"Jesus Never Fails"
Pastoral Prayer	
Worship in Giving	
Solo	"I Give You Jesus"
Message	"THE NEWNESS OF LIFE"
Closing Hymn	"Give Me Jesus"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Baby Day

Baby Day is a great time to have baby dedications. In addition to the usual ceremonial aspects of the service, give the parents an opportunity to make covenants with each other to provide a spiritual home, to make covenants with God to seek His wisdom and direction, and to make covenants with their child to give them eternal gifts.

As they stand facing the congregation, after being introduced, ask the congregation to make covenants with these parents to pray for them, to love their children, to provide godly examples, to live in the spirit of God's family, caring and sharing with one another.

Give a gift to each parent with a child under one year of age.

Christian Family Celebration Week

Declare this week Christian Family Celebration Week. Give your families information and permission to spend Monday night at home with their families in discussion, Bible study, prayer, playing games, and bonding together in love.

Five-Sunday Months

Make May and all the other months in the year with five Sundays special times to emphasize Prayer and Fasting.

THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 7:1-13

May 9, 1993

INTRO:

In the first six chapters of Romans Paul emphasized the sinfulness of sin, the power of justification by faith, and the glory of the yielded, sanctified life. From his own experience, he begins to correct the common misconceptions regarding the law.

Paul contrasts true spiritual growth with counterfeit holiness. Most people who come to God find that they want to do so much for Him, to be so good for Him, to grow so fast, that they are impatient. Many of them get sidetracked along the way into a preoccupation with the law as a way of becoming God's favorite children. Paul maintains that we are not under law (Rom. 6:14). Law works best when it is in grace.

The law of matrimony works best when it is seasoned with grace, love, and forbearance. The legal responsibilities of matrimony do not necessarily resolve the differences a couple experiences painfully. However, the law of grace—being willing to try again—is powerful. The law operates best mingled powerfully with grace.

Three places in the Bible it talks about our relationship to Christ in terms of marriage. You are joined to Him who was raised from the dead; there is marriage of spirit. It is not an accident that the final judgment includes a marriage supper. It is no accident that Jesus is called the "Groom" and the Church is called the "Bride." There is a vital joining of our hearts when we are freed from the law, freed from sin, and freed to love with our whole hearts. Paul begins to share the purpose of the law.

I. The Law Reveals the Fact of Sin (v. 7)

The law does a lot of good things, but it is not perfect. A lot of things it doesn't accomplish. It does not prevent crime or lawlessness.

ILLUS. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, two men were portrayed for whom the law meant nothing, except something to break. In that book, the law did not keep Dr. Lecter from killing 13 people. The law did not keep James Gumm from killing 6 women in a serial killing style of torment. The law was present. The law finally found them, convicted them, and imprisoned them. But the law could not keep them from damaging, destroying, and diminishing people around them.

Some other things the law cannot do: set us free; sanctify us; save us; make us want to do good; or make us better. According to the Word, what the law can do is to give us a clearer picture of sin. God's Word has at least two definitions of sin. One word means missing the mark, although a more accurate term for us who have lived in sin is that we've shot at the wrong target. Another definition of sin describes a powerful indwelling self-centeredness that drives us to do the things that are damaging to our spiritual well-being.

The law begins to reveal me to myself. The fact that the law reveals sin is one of the necessary functions in the life

of holiness. Paul specifically says that he came to know what coveting was because of the law. When the law said, "Thou shall not covet" (Exod. 20:17, KJV), Paul recognized in himself this desire to have the things that did not belong to him. A paradox exists between God's will and man's impossibility in his own strength. That is revealed by the law.

Most people would say that Paul was a great man. But inside, he saw himself as a divided man, a man torn and tortured between a nature that was new through Christ Jesus and a nature that was old through self-centeredness. Torn, double-minded, double natured. The law was beginning to reveal to him the fact of sin. He was becoming more deeply aware of the involuntary movement from God's will to his own human will. That powerfully defines the nature of indwelling sin—involuntary movement from God's will to our own wills. The human mind and the human heart are so complex that we can rationalize and explain away a lot of stuff and maybe even fool ourselves for a long time. When we come face-to-face with God, the law reveals our sin to us in a way that we can no longer deny it!

II. The Law Reveals the Occasion of Sin (v. 8)

Sin was the central problem. Paul used a strange phrase twice in this context. He said, sin took opportunity of me. Sin found my weak spot; it found the time and place when I couldn't resist. Sin took advantage of me and produced coveting of every kind. Coveting is significant because it is an inward attitude; it expresses that involuntary movement of my will away from God's will and toward my own.

ILLUS. A boy lived on a farm. His father served as a pastor in a little country church. In that church one of the farmers offered free watermelons to everyone. This pastor's son could have gotten a watermelon free by just picking one up. Instead he organized a gang of other teens at night, and they secretly sneaked out to the watermelon patch and helped themselves. Why? Covetousness! Something in us would rather do it our way. Something in us enjoys the risk, the challenge, the illegality, the unlawfulness, the selfishness.

It started with Adam. In the Garden of Eden, Adam was full of innocence. He worked hard; he took care of the garden and the animals. He had things going well until God said, "Don't eat that!" Suddenly the law produced in Adam a stubbornness. The law reveals the occasion of sin. The law creates in me a stubborn unwillingness to yield to God. That results in sin until something happens in that inward spirit that takes away the torn nature and unites it in the will and the love of God through the Holy Spirit.

III. The Law Reveals the Power of Sin (v. 9)

When the commandment became known to me, sin was resurrected; sin became alive and I died. Sin had the power to put my spiritual life to death. It still does. The law wakes up sin within me if I still have the indwelling sin of self-centeredness and of personal willfulness.

ILLUS. In the late 1960s, the greatest thing was hair. Many boys had long hair. Nearly every boy had parents who opposed long hair. Parents would ask evangelists: "What do you think about hair?"

One evangelist always said, "Well, it's there!"

The parents would reply, "What do you think about it? Do you think our children ought to be allowed to grow long hair?"

For some of those parents that was the single most important issue in the world. The minute they made that the point of contention, the major thing they accomplished was to make that the arena where the boy could never give in and still maintain his own identity. They were in for a battle. A few parents finally discovered that they might find a better arena in which to fight their battles. Many others were so legalistic that they wouldn't change their minds.

The law has a way of driving us to stubbornness. When we are driven to stubbornness, we fall easily into sin. Sin has power to diminish, damage, and destroy relationships along with our peace, our power, and our lives!

IV. The Law Reveals the Deceitfulness of Sin (v. 11)

There is a lot of delusion about sin. It deludes us about how much sin will satisfy us. It deludes us about how we could make excuses for it or rationalize. Sin deludes us about the penalty and the consequence that sin brings—socially, spiritually, and relationally.

Paul said, "Sin used the law to deceive me." We think, If we can just keep the law, we will be all right. Then one of two things happens. We fail to keep the law; or we do keep the law, but the spirit is dead. Either way we lose. Sin is so deceitful!

V. The Law Reveals the Effect of Sin (v. 11)

Sin results in death. Sin kills the spirit, or the Spirit kills sin. There is no longer the power of choice. God and sin cannot coexist within us.

VI. The Law Reveals the Seriousness of Sin (vv. 12-13)

Paul is saying that there is a process by which the Spirit uses the law in me. The law is God's tool—probing, prying, prodding, forcing me to look at myself, forcing me to be honest with myself. God's Spirit uses the Word to make me terribly uncomfortable on the inside and finally absolutely unwilling to settle for a half victory, absolutely unwilling to settle for a divided mind, absolutely unwilling to give sin one tiny ounce of place in my life. Sin's awful seriousness is revealed.

The law is holy, righteous, and good (v. 12). Therefore it shows me that sin is absolutely and utterly wrong. No one ever receives grace and becomes willing to commit to God's will totally, in His way and in His time, unless he believes in the utter awfulness of sin. God does not want anyone to be deluded by the false idea that a little sin is all right. The tiniest sin in the world put Jesus on the Cross. There is no room in God's work and in His will for sin in our lives. The law convicts us. It shows us what is wrong in God's sight. It shows us where we stand in our true position with Him. The law is intended to turn us around and lead us to Jesus. Paul summarizes this powerful concept: the law does not justify anyone; it condemns us as guilty (Gal. 3:22); it is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

ILLUS. A pastor remembers his favorite schoolmaster. "He was energetic; I liked him because he was my baseball coach in high school. When my folks decided to leave that area and move away, he arranged for me to stay in that community and live with one of the local businessmen so that I could continue to play on a championship baseball team. I liked him because he taught me mathematics. I loved algebra and trigonometry. I liked him because he taught me science and chemistry. I loved science and chemistry. I liked him because he took a personal interest in me and spent hours with me trying to find out what I should do with my life, and trying to help me find a place where my life would make a difference and count for something. I didn't like it when he yelled at me for doing less than my best. But, the longer I have lived, the more I have loved him for letting me know when I was wrong—shaping me up, forcing me to look at myself straight in the mirror and see myself the way I really was, and be able to change."

That's what the law is. It is a loving, tough schoolmaster, one who will not let us get by with less than what God has for us. The law will continually confront us with God's will and way until we finally, voluntarily move away from our selfishness and toward Him with our whole hearts and spirits.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"Why Should He Love Me So?"
Choir	"And Can It Be?"
Call to Worship	Rom. 7:6
Congregational Hymn	"How Firm a Foundation"
Prayer Choruses	"Learning to Lean"
	"I'm So Glad I'm a Part of the Family of God"
Morning Prayer	
Recognition of Mothers	
Worship in Giving	
Special Song	"In This Very Room"
Message	"THE FUNCTION OF THE LAW"
Closing Hymn	"To God Be the Glory"
Benediction	

Creative Worship Ideas

Mother's Day

Have long-stemmed carnations to give to every mother present as they leave the service.

Ask three mothers to be prepared to share a highlight from the previous Family Celebration Week in their family. Tell them in advance that it must be no more than 2½ minutes long.

Have two or three people prepared to complete one of these statements for incorporation into the morning service: "The thing I remember best about my mother is . . ." (if mother is deceased); "The thing I appreciate most about my mother is . . ."; "I could always depend on my mother to be . . ."

Be sure to express godly concern and appreciation for all single mothers with children still at home. It would be appropriate to give them a corsage or book as a gift, along with public recognition.

Have great-grandmothers stand first, then grandmothers, then mothers, then ask everyone to give a smile and a hug to one of those beautiful ladies near them as everyone stands.

THE STRUGGLE OF TWO NATURES

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 7:14-25

May 16, 1993

INTRO:

A double-minded man experiences inner conflict. Sin that dwells or is "tabernacled" within me is "indwelling sin." That's the center of inner struggle. The personal pronoun "I" is found 32 times in Romans 7. When Paul was describing his spiritual life, he had "I" trouble, a lot of it! Only one time in the whole chapter do we ever read "spirit." In Romans 8, Paul uses "I" only 2 times, while the "Holy Spirit" is used about 19 times. That represents a major reversal.

If you want to have an exciting exercise, spend some time comparing, in your spirit, the differences between Romans 7 and Romans 8. Its contrast is daylight and dark. There is a difference in emotional tone, in dynamic, and in victory and defeat. You'll discover that contrast is powerfully representative of the life lived in the spirit or in the flesh, the double-minded man.

There are a lot of theories about Paul's testimony. Though it is obviously the testimony of the apostle Paul, a lot of people are wondering at which stage of his life Paul was referring back to when he used these powerful mental pictures.

Some people say it refers to a time when he was unsaved but wanted a better life. That interpretation doesn't seem to be supported by either Scripture or Paul's personal experience.

Some say it was the description of a half-awakened, half-converted person. That too is neither scriptural nor supported by Paul's personal experience.

Some have said it's the normal, natural, everyday experience of a Christian, a regenerated person. However, there is a depth of agony and despair and desire in these verses that would indicate that Paul was not interested in living in Romans 7 forever.

Some people say he's a religious man who is not saved but is trying to be good in the power of his own strength. Most likely this represents the person who has been made alive in Christ, regenerated and seeking deliverance from the power of sin, but is still trying to live a godly life in his own strength.

Paul was saved on the road to Damascus. Three days later he was prayed for by Ananias. The blindness that came on him at conversion was taken away. He began to see. Soon he began to witness. The Christians were afraid of Paul because he had been persecuting them. He had to leave at night over the wall, let down in a basket to save his life.

Before that, Paul went into the desert of Arabia and communed alone with God. Some time during that long desert residence, Paul came face-to-face with the fact that, powerful and proud as he was, no way in the world could he ever solve the sin problem in his own strength. He could never experience the spiritual life in his own power. This scripture apparently describes those tor-

mented days of his own search for God's fullness and power. Paul's explanation asks many questions that we, also, must ponder.

I. Who Am I? (vv. 14, 17, 23)

A. We are of the flesh (v. 14). This means we have the wrong emotions, the wrong thoughts, the wrong actions, the wrong attitudes, the wrong way of living that come from being born in sin, with indwelling sin in our hearts.

B. Sin dwells in us (v. 17).

C. We are prisoners of the law of sin (v. 23). Paul elaborates on this concept in 1 Corinthians 2 and 3. He talks about the natural man that cannot accept the things of God, the spiritual man who is enlightened about all things, and the carnal Christian who is still filled with jealousy and envy and the spirit of division—the double-minded, divided heart and spirit. The spiritual man is Spirit-filled, Spirit-possessed, and Spirit-directed.

II. What Do I Wish to Do? (vv. 15-21)

The Greek word is *thelo*. It means "desire" or "wish for." Paul wishes to do good (v. 19). His wishing is working well (v. 18). He sees clearly what he desires (vv. 15-16). Mentally, he clearly envisions the right goals and outcomes.

III. In What Do I Delight? (vv. 22, 25)

Paul delights in being consistent with and walking in the new nature that God has given. In Paul's mind, he joyfully concurs with the law of God. He gets excited about doing what God wants him to do. With his mind, he is serving the law of God (v. 25). Paul's delight is to follow Jesus. What's happening to Paul?

IV. Why Can't I Win the Struggle? (vv. 15, 18, 19, 21, 23)

There is a powerful inner conflict between his intention and his action. There's an inner enemy that is determined to destroy the new nature that Christ has placed within him through justification by faith. Paul does the very thing he hates (v. 15). He feels that the good is not even present in him (v. 18). He doesn't have the power to do the good. He practices the evil that he does not wish to do (v. 19). He sees a principle of evil present within himself (v. 21), a different law in his spirit waging war against the law of God.

Paul is saying very loud and clear that even after he finds the joy of Jesus in the new nature of Christ, there still remains in him a traitor, an enemy that opens the doors to evil in his life, and he is tormented by conflict. He talks like a person who is outclassed by an enemy, an enemy who is stronger than he (v. 24). In a poignant expression of pain and prayer, he exclaims: "O wretched

man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24, KJV).

V. Who Is My Deliverer? (vv. 24-25)

Even though Paul intends a full treatment of the answer to this question in Romans 8, he couldn't leave it there. He couldn't stop until he gave us a foretaste and glimpse of our source of deliverance.

There may be someone struggling with that double nature, and no one knows it but you and God. Perhaps you are afflicted by private, secret compulsions. You may feel powerless, that you cannot control them. You may have tried a number of times. Perhaps you have come to the altar through the years and still have not found the victory in your life that God in His Word seems to promise for you. Take three practical steps toward God's victory!

A. Claim the promise of 1 John 1:9 by confessing your sins to God, knowing that He is faithful and just to forgive your sins. Proceed immediately to 1 John 1:7 and claim God's grace by walking in His light, being obedient. Start living mentally and emotionally in those powerful promises of God's Word.

B. Ponder the fact that Scripture says God's Word is sharp and powerful as a two-edged sword, even dividing between your intentions and the thoughts of your heart. (Heb. 4:12, NASB). God's Word is able to cut down so deep into your being that you begin to see your motivations, blinded as you may have been to them—your intentions, your self-righteousness. Whenever a person begins to see himself the way God sees him, he has the wonderful possibility of finding in God the victory from that divided heart and that divided nature. God works in the powerful, unifying, perfecting of love by the Holy Spirit.

C. Realize the great power available to bring cleansing. Read Hebrews 9 and rejoice that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, can purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Someone may be hearing that same kind of inner note of desperation in his spiritual struggle: "I'm so tired of failure. I'm so frustrated with sin. I'm about ready to give up on spiritual victory. 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me . . . ?'"

ILLUS. Paul paints a very gruesome picture of being a wretched man. In Roman law, a convicted murderer served a very unique sentence of punishment. Romans believed in capital punishment. They believed it should be very sure, slow, and painful. If a man killed another man, and he was brought to justice, the Romans brought the body of the man he had killed and chained that decaying corpse to the murderer—palm to palm, mouth to mouth, face-to-face, life to death. It didn't take very long for the already dead, decaying body to poison and kill the still living body of the man who had murdered him, fitting punishment for the crime of murder. That's the mental picture. Three times Paul has mentioned in this segment of Scripture that, when sin is alive, I'm dead.

CONCLUSION:

If you struggle, the good news is that there is victory and deliverance through the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus' suffering has already bought all the power, all the grace, all the blessing, and all of God's presence that is needed in order to resolve death.

ILLUS. A pastor's testimony reveals this process: "For 10 months after I had been convicted of my double nature, I went to my office five or six mornings a week and read Romans 7. In my heart, I said: 'That's me; I don't like it but it's me!' Then I would read Romans 8. That first verse opened a whole new world of potential spiritual blessing and victory as I said: 'Lord, I want to make the trip from Romans 7 to Romans 8. Give me the road map for the journey. I will follow You!' After 10 months of daily obedience, the Holy Spirit came in His sanctifying grace."

There is no reason to stop in Romans 7. Romans 8 makes it very clear that in God, through Christ Jesus there is absolutely all power available for spiritual victory in your life. You don't have to struggle. You don't have to strain. You don't have to fight the battle in your own strength. You don't have to keep giving in to weakness and compulsion. God's Spirit is the answer. He has victory over the death struggle in which sin puts us.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"Is Thy Heart Right with God?"
Choral Introit	
Call to Worship	Rom. 7:19, 24
Congregational Hymns	"He Brought Me Out" "Glorious Freedom"
Prayer Choruses	"Learning to Lean" "What a Friend We Have in Jesus"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir Special	"Only Trust Him"
Worship in Giving	"Room at the Cross for You"
Special Song	"His Way with Thee"
Message	"THE STRUGGLE OF TWO NATURES"
Invitation	"Just as I Am"
Closing Prayer	

Pastoral Prayer

Read Psalms 51 or Hebrews 9:11-22 as a basis for the prayer time.

In the closing segment, pray these two thoughts: (1) *O God, make the truth of Your Word clear to our hearts. Our minds have a tough time with Your truth. Our nature has a built-in resistance to understanding. Speak peace and power to our hearts that will make us whole, in the name of Jesus.* (2) *Give Your messenger unusual fluency and facility this morning so that His words express Your words to human hearts. Hold back our enemy from interference in the vital work of the Holy Spirit, convicting and cleansing.*

Creative Worship Ideas

Explain to your congregation the ideas that: (1) Romans is a theological book, but it is also at the heart of practical Christianity. (2) Sin and grace are the dominant themes in the Scriptures and in the music chosen for the services. (3) Personal spiritual victory through Jesus Christ is the promise that Romans offers.

Pentecost

Mention that we enter the "Countdown for Pentecost" this week, as we remember Jesus' ascension and His admonition to tarry in the city of Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit.

THREE SPIRITUAL LAWS

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 8:1-13

May 23, 1993

INTRO:

ILLUS. The C.A.R.E. Group (a small Bible study) began with an icebreaker. "Let's share around the circle one outrageous thing that you'd like to do at least once in your lifetime." Sheri wanted to take a hot-air balloon ride. John wanted to do a bungee jump. Another wanted to skydive. There were several others—parasailing and hang gliding, were included. When you analyzed them, nearly every one suggested an act that defied gravity—risky, adventurous, outrageous.

That's the kind of "spirit feeling" that Paul expressed when he talked about living in the Spirit instead of living in the flesh.

ILLUS. A pastor explained, "When the Spirit takes over and lifts us above things that would normally drag us down, we are fulfilling the scripture that says, 'If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live,' (Rom. 8:13, RSV). It literally lifts life to a higher plane. You reject the lower, negative, fleshly things in order to live in the Spirit."

One of his men said, "Pastor, you've really confused me."

They agreed to talk together about this spiritual, scriptural principle, and planned to meet for a flight in the man's private plane.

As the pastor came up to the plane, he said, "That plane doesn't look very sturdy. It actually looks pretty flimsy. It's pretty small. I'm not sure it can even hold my weight, much less get me off the ground."

His friend explained that the law of aerodynamics was stronger than the law of gravity and could set them free from the gravitational pull of the earth.

His pastor said, "I'm sorry, you are confusing me." Then the pastor's friend realized that his pastor was teasing him. The pastor explained that in the same way that the law of aerodynamics in the plane was setting them free from the law of earth's gravity, so the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus was setting them free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Now it made sense to him.

God does not intend for Christians to live under condemnation. There is a difference between condemnation and conviction. Obviously, it is God's will and work to place us under conviction. Conviction is a heavy spirit, an awareness of God's will, and an open door of obedience through which we can walk, with a light at the end of the dark tunnel. Condemnation, on the other hand, is a heavy feeling, a need to change, and a sense of hopelessness. There seems no way out. There appears to be no light at the end of the tunnel. God never intended for any Christian to live in condemnation. He wants us to know that we have a way out through His will, His Word, and His way. If we are obedient, we are in the flight mode, rising above the earth.

I. There Is the Law of Sin and Death (vv. 2-8)

A. In the Scriptures, "flesh" has many different meanings.

1. "Flesh" can mean physical tissue (Rom. 2:28, NASB).
2. "Flesh" can mean natural descent (Rom. 1:3, NASB).
3. "Flesh" can refer to the human race (Rom. 3:20, NASB).
4. "Flesh" can refer to human nature (Rom. 3:20, NASB).
5. "Flesh" can refer, often, to indwelling sin (Rom. 7:18, 21, NASB).

Inbuilt sinfulness is an attitude or an inclination operating in opposition to God's will. It is putting self, self-gratification, self-will, self-control, self-purpose, and self-direction above the will of God at the center of our beings. That's the contrast that Paul gives. The law of sin and death is the law of the flesh.

B. Fleshly life has dire consequences.

1. It is the law of death (v. 2).
2. It controls the mind-set (v. 5).
3. It is hostile toward God.
4. It is not able to be subjected to the will and the law of God (v. 7).
5. It cannot please God (v. 8).
6. It lives for itself and the temporary world around us.

God's will is that we should be set free from the law of sin and death. How is God going to accomplish this? This scripture makes it plain—through Christ. Only Jesus can enable us, by His miraculous power, to rise above the lower levels of the fleshly life, to live in God's stratosphere, defying the law of spiritual gravity.

C. Jesus faces us from this law of the flesh:

1. Jesus condemns sin in the flesh (v. 3, NASB).
2. Jesus took upon himself the likeness of sinful flesh (v. 3, NASB). The Scripture didn't say He took upon himself sinful flesh. He didn't; but the appearance was like us.
3. Jesus sets us free (v. 2). He is God's only solution, the only adequate sin offering.
4. Jesus fulfills divine law in us (v. 4).

II. There Is the Law of the Spirit of Life (vv. 9-11)

A. We are taken out of the flesh (v. 9), out of its control. We are lifted off the ground and taken out of the world's corruption!

B. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (v. 9).

C. We receive the Spirit of Christ (v. 9).

ILLUS. One man said that he had never done any sky-diving or anything like that, but he knew the kind of thrill or adventuresome fulfillment that comes to people who do that. His son, who had been in army airborne, had explained to him what happens in a free-fall—flying through the air faster than driving a car, experiencing all those sights and sounds and feels, a real rush.

That's the kind of inner fulfillment that God's Spirit wants us to understand in rising above the things of the world, when His Spirit dwells in us.

We receive Jesus himself, in attitude and spirit, in power and in person when we yield ourselves to the Spirit's control. He lifts us above the downpull of sin. We are indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

D. We are alive because of righteousness (v. 10).

E. We are continual "Easter miracles" of God's resurrection power (v. 11). The One who is alive in us and lifting us is the Spirit of Almighty God, who raised up Jesus from the dead.

III. There Is the Law of Fulfilled Righteousness (vv. 12-13)

Paul tells us that we must live in the reality of an ongoing process (vv. 12-13).

A. We must "mind" the things of the Spirit (vv. 5-6).

ILLUS. Recently a powerless hang glider set a record of over eight hours aloft. Finding drafts that held it up, the hang glider sailed for hours.

When we fulfill the law of righteousness, we have a focus that concentrates our minds, our hearts, our purpose, our motivations, and our energies upon following God. This mind-set also has an obedience component that empowers that process.

ILLUS. A young man on a championship high school basketball team came home extremely fatigued from practice. His dad said, "What happened, son?"

He said, "We have beaten everybody in sight. We haven't had a loss all year. There's been no real competition for us."

His dad said, "Yes, but why are you so tired?"

He said, "The coach, at the beginning of practice today, told us that we seemed to have decided that we could do it in our strength, without any discipline, without any conditioning, without any careful plans, without working together as a team. He proceeded to drill us on all of the very elementary things that would keep us in good condition, keep us working as a team, and keep us aware of the possibility of falling." The boy added, "Dad, you would not believe the workout that our coach put us through today. We did passing drills; we did dribbling drills; we did layups until I could do them in my sleep. I'm really bushed."

That's mind-set; that's focus; we need to allow God to put our attentions so completely on the right things that the wrong things begin to slough off. We have a choice empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life that defies the gravity that pulls us down to the level of the world and the sin around us.

B. We must choose daily to continually walk according to the Spirit (v. 4). We must continually make choices—in our quiet time in the morning, in our decisions through the day—to walk close to God.

The person whose mind-set focuses on the things of the Spirit must daily make a choice between the things that are temporary and the things that are eternal. When I make that choice to defy gravity by using the law of spiritual aerodynamics that God has given, then He puts His

wind of power under the wings and lifts me, enabling me to live above the junk that would drag me down!

C. We must put to death the deeds of the body through the power of the Spirit (v. 13).

ILLUS. There was a pilot alone in an airplane, in flying's earliest days. He was Handley Page, a British aviator, flying in a single-engine plane. In Arabia, in the middle of a long flight, he had many hours to go before he could make a safe landing. As he sat at the wheel alone, he heard a strange sound, which he finally determined to be a rat gnawing on the equipment in the airplane. He speculated on all the damage that this creature could do to the plane by gnawing the insulation off the electric wires or destroying controls. The rat could easily cause a crash.

What in the world could he do? He couldn't leave the wheel. His plane would go out of control. He couldn't reach the rat. Suddenly, he explained, "It occurred to me that a rat lives best in low altitude." He pushed his plane skyward to an altitude where the rarified atmosphere made it difficult even for him to breathe with his large lung capacity. The gnawing of the rat grew fainter and fainter. Finally it stopped. Hours later, when he reached his destination, he examined the plane and found the rat dead.

We must get up in that atmosphere where the low, "ratty" things of life cannot damage our spiritual lives. We must defy the gravity of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. We must get above sin by God's power for God's purpose, for God's glory.

CONCLUSION:

Paul says that we "are under obligation" (v. 12, NASB). We are not under obligation to live according to the flesh, but we are under obligation. That's not a heavy burden. It's a willingness to live in the Resurrection power that Jesus Christ has provided for us (v. 11).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"God Will Take Care of You"
Choral Introit	"Blessed Assurance"
Call to Worship	Rom. 8:11
Congregational Hymns	"Deeper, Deeper" "Higher Ground"
Prayer Choruses	"The Greatest Thing in All My Life" "I'll Say Yes, Lord, Yes"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Because He Lives"
Worship in Giving	"Bless the Lord Who Reigns in Beauty"
Special Song	"It's Just like His Great Love"
Message	"THREE SPIRITUAL LAWS"
Special Song	"All Because of God's Great Love"
Baptism	Testimonies
Closing Chorus	"There Is Power in the Name of Jesus"

Creative Worship Ideas

Baptism

Have everyone being baptized write out a three-minute testimony. Have each person choose a family member, friend, or someone who helped them come to Christ to read his testimony to the congregation preceding his baptism.

OUR VICTORY IN CHRIST

by Jarrell W. Garsee

Rom. 8:14-34

May 30, 1993

INTRO:

Every Christian has received a measure of Resurrection power. God intends for this power and purity, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, to provide a balanced life of victory and blessing. A vital Christian utilizes this power from God to control the negative things in his life and to increase spiritual things, so that spiritual growth takes place through both avenues—putting away evil and living in the positive. On this Pentecost Sunday, God has victory for everyone.

I. God Has Victory of Family Involvement (vv. 14-17)

This is the victory of belonging to the family of God.

A. We have been adopted. We are all happy for that privilege. Because we have been adopted, we have been given position and possession, prestige and blessing. We have become heirs of all that God has.

ILLUS. Adoption is a unique thing. One family with two adopted children told their children that God chose them specially. The daughter, in grade school, used to tell everybody, "Your folks had to take what they got, but my folks looked around and got the best."

We are special to our adoptive Heavenly Father. Our hearts respond appropriately. The Word assures victory: God doesn't put us back in the shackles of fear and doubt. We receive that spirit that cries out, "Papa; Dad; *Abba*" (v. 15)—in Hebrew, a very warm, wonderful term of endearment for a loving, caring, supporting, providing Father.

B. We are lead by the Spirit of God in His family (v. 14).

C. We have received an inner witness of belonging to God's family (v. 16).

D. We receive a powerful inheritance because we are adopted into the family of God (v. 17). We belong to God as His dear children. There is sonship, fellowship, and heirship in this wonderful family involvement.

II. God Has the Victory of Meaningful Frustration (vv. 18-25)

A. Christians are caught between two worlds. We live in this world and in the world to come, the world where our hearts have already been adopted. There is a terrible tension between the world that we live in and the world that we have already made a commitment to in love. Because we are in God's family, we don't belong to this present world. We don't belong to its values, its habits, its practices, its attitudes, or its feelings! We are caught in a stretching, tension-filled situation. We literally groan within to be set free from the bondage that this world imposes on those who know Jesus and who are new creations in Him (v. 23).

B. In this tension and this groaning we have a hope (v. 24). We are a part of God's process of bringing the new world to pass and making it happen.

C. We have a victory. Suffering is the inevitable experience of belonging to God. A faithful life brings trial, suffering, hardship, persecution. As we look around us, in the world of politics, the world of economics, the world of moral ethics, the world of poverty, the world of pollution, there are so many things that we groan about. We care; we are concerned; we feel helpless sometimes to do anything. There is this inward groaning. If we could only live in a positive world!

D. We have a glory (v. 18). God reveals His radiance in us. That radiance is comprised of hope, faith, personal belonging, and the gradually increasing likeness to Christ himself.

III. God Has the Victory of Persuasive Prayer (vv. 26-30)

Romans 8 has some very powerful and unique things to say about prayer.

A. We are weak in prayer. That's one of the places we are powerless.

B. The Spirit helps our weakness (v. 26). We have to overcome that weakness of actually getting started and doing something about praying. The Holy Spirit prompts and goads and reminds us.

ILLUS. One pastor shared that the Holy Spirit will not let him read the morning paper until he has read his Bible. The Spirit will not let him talk to someone else until he has talked to God.

This simple priority is a part of the Holy Spirit helping in weakness. This counteracts the tendency to jump up and jump into the day; to jump into your job and jump into the list that you have made the day before of all the things you are going to get done that day.

There is also the weakness of inadequate words. We don't know what to say. We have jumbled thoughts. So the Holy Spirit "intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (v. 26, NASB). When we have a burden for prayer but can't put it into words, we may be praying more deeply and more effectively than at any other time in our spiritual experience. When your mind is crowded with cares and concerns, prayer may seem like a futile endeavor. That's when you need to turn to your "prayer Prompter," whom God has provided to help you pray when words won't come.

ILLUS. He went to prayer semidepressed and fatigued but brought his prayer list and a blank sheet of paper on which to write prayers and answers. He got his Bible, knelt at the altar, and said, "Lord, I need a boost; I need a little help; I need a new word from You."

The Lord directed him to the *Come Ye Apart* magazine devotional for the day. The powerful promises of Isaiah 43 became new and true all over again: the Lord made you; the Lord loves you; do not be afraid, the waters will not overflow you; the fire will not scorch you! The Spirit was helping his

weakness. The Spirit was leading him to the place in God's Word where new faith and new hope were available.

C. The Spirit searches our hearts (v. 27). He knows what's in there. He looks for it and brings it to our remembrance.

D. The Spirit works mightily in everything (v. 28). There are two conditions for fulfilling this powerful promise. God is able to make all things work together for good to those who love Him and those who are obedient to His call. It doesn't say that everything turns out for our best; it says that God makes everything come out for "the good." Sometimes God considers "the good" a little differently than we do. It is not just physical health, material wealth, or emotional wholeness that God sees as good. For God, "the good" is being made conformed to the image of His Son (v. 29). That's good! That's what God is at work trying to do within us.

E. The Spirit brings out the best. He is shaping Christ's image in us (v. 29).

F. The Spirit will glorify us, and we will glorify Him (v. 30).

IV. God Has the Victory of Divine Authority (vv. 31-34)

A. If God is for us, then it doesn't matter who is against us. It can't matter because *no one can beat God* (v. 31).

B. God spares nothing for us (v. 32). He has not spared His own Son, and He is not going to start now putting us on a pinch-penny program of grace. He will give us all that we need in order to make us all that He wants us to be.

C. God answers all charges against us.

ILLUS. She was a missionary's wife, giving her testimony. When she was in school, facing economic pressure, instead of trusting God, she had gone the route of selfishness, self-seeking, and solving her own problems. She had taken hundreds of dollars from her employer. Then she told how God's Spirit dealt with her. She went back to her employer and told him exactly what had happened and why, and the exact amount she had taken. She signed a contract to pay it all back. God began to use a talent she had for art. God began to pour His Spirit through those pictures that she drew, and they became salable items. She earned back the money that she needed.

After the service someone came up to her and said, "You're a missionary's wife. You're telling us that you used to be a thief. How can you do that?"

She said, "All is forgiven, and there is no longer anything to hide. If there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to fear."

At the moment that we are honest before God, we receive His blessings and His power. He answers all charges against us.

D. Christ died for us, and He was raised; He ever lives, and He intercedes for us (v. 34).

What do you need to pray in order to have victory? If you knelt at the altar to pray, and you felt that Jesus had come and knelt beside you, and He began to pray for you, what would you overhear Jesus saying to the Father that He wanted to happen in your life?

It may be that on this Pentecost Sunday you are ready to invite the Holy Spirit to fill your heart!

ILLUS. When John Hyde boarded the ship to go from England to India for his first missionary tour, he was handed a telegram. He opened it hurriedly on the deck of the ship. The only words in the telegram were, "John Hyde, are you filled with the Spirit of God?" The note aroused Hyde's anger. He crumpled the paper, put it into his pocket, and went to bed.

Unable to sleep, he tossed and turned all night. He arose from bed in the early morning hours, took the piece of paper out of his pocket, and read it again. He thought, "The audacity of somebody to ask me that question, 'Am I filled with the Holy Spirit?' Here I am a missionary, sincere, dedicated, leaving my home and going to another country. How dare someone ask me if I am filled with the Spirit." Suddenly, Hyde's spirit was touched by the challenge of the note. He fell to his knees before the Father. "O God," he cried out, "the audacity of me to think that I could pray or preach or witness or live or serve or do anything in my own strength and power! Fill me with Your strength. Fill me with Your power."

John Hyde became one of the great missionary statesmen of all time (Brian L. Harbour, *Living Expectantly* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990]).

Whatever you are praying for this morning, imagine that Jesus is right there by you. Ask Him to lead you in your prayer. Listen to what Jesus asks the Father for you, for He intercedes for us! God has victory in Christ for us! When we hear what Jesus wants for us, and we realize that He has already bought all that is necessary for those prayers to be answered by His own grace and power, something happens in us. We have the victory of divine authority. God's intervening and interceding begins to make an impact on us for His glory and for our good.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Prelude	"The Comforter Has Come"
Choir	"Bless the Lord, O My Soul"
Call to Worship	Rom. 8:28-29
Congregational Hymn	"He Abides"
Prayer Chorus	"Come, Holy Spirit, I Need Thee"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Since the Holy Ghost Abides"
Worship in Giving	"Breathe on Me, Breath of God"
Special Song	"Have Thine Own Way, Lord"
Message	"OUR VICTORY IN CHRIST"
Invitation	"Fill Me Now"
Closing Prayer	

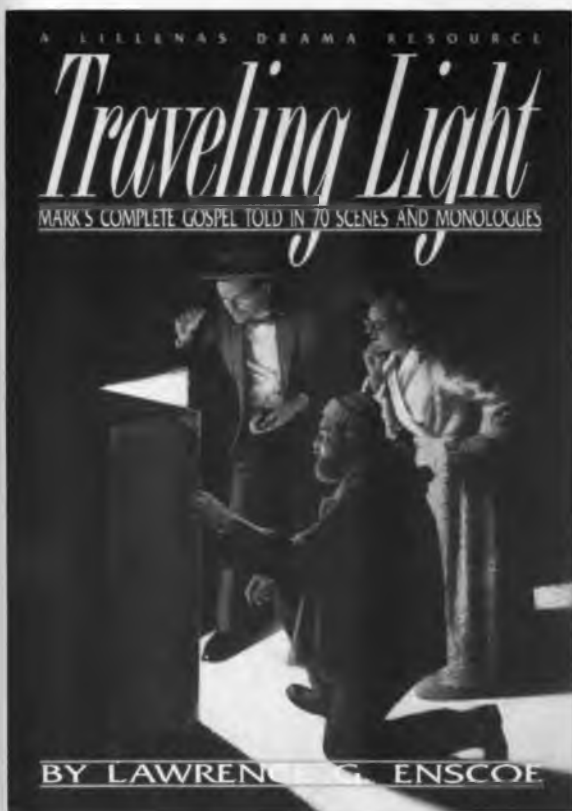
Pastoral Prayer

"Father, thank You that, even when confusion reigns and words won't come, Your Holy Spirit is there, communicating my human hurts. Though I cannot always speak my mind, thank You that You always hear my heart. That's part of the joy of being Your child. Amen."

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Pentecost Sunday

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