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MARCH / APRIL / MAY 1995



THE

Preacher's MAGAZINE

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**PAIN IN THE
PULPIT—PANIC
IN THE PEW**

SERVANT EVANGELISM

**ESCAPING
CONGREGATIONAL
DOLDRUMS**





THE Preacher's MAGAZINE

Volume 70

March/April/May 1995

Number 3

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Accept One Another

At a party, the adults were engrossed in conversation and games, hardly noticing the little girl moving from one person to the next. She tugged on dresses, pulled on trouser legs, and held up her hands, saying, "Me! Me!" Her small cries for attention went unnoticed.

Suddenly, outside the lovely home, a loud scream pierced the cool evening atmosphere. The party quickly emptied outside and surrounded the swimming pool. The lifeless body of the child floated facedown in the water.

The pastor who walked with the family through the grief learned that the little girl had a history of incidents in the pool. He believes that she associated falling into the pool with being loved and held close. Perhaps, ignored by the partygoers, she jumped into the pool, believing that she would be rescued and taken in warm, loving arms. Instead, no one was there for her.

Our churches and communities are filled with people like the loveless child—people holding out their arms to us, seeking some sign of compassion and love. They wonder, "Is there any room in your church family for me?"

How will we answer? Do we see the hurting, the troubled, the poor, the unattractive, the desperately lonely? People feel loved when they feel accepted. Even our best-crafted sermons cannot fill the gap if they don't feel loved. Paul urged, "Accept one another" (Rom. 15:7).

We should accept one another because God has accepted us. Paul wrote:

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and



by Randal E. Denny
Spokane, Wash.

the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him (Rom. 14:1-3).

In spite of disagreements, we must accept those whom God has accepted. Considering God's acceptance of us sinful creatures through the atoning work of Jesus, our acceptance of one another is insignificant in comparison.

We should accept one another because God strengthens us. Paul asks: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:4).

You don't find isolated Christians living outside the church fellowship anywhere in the New Testament. Early in my ministry I learned that we pastors do need each other. Lone rangers in ministry usually don't survive long or survive healthily. People have said, "We don't need them in our fellowship. We can do without them." The person we would not accept has the right to be accepted—and will probably be the one we eventually need.

We should accept one another because Jesus is our Lord. Paul says: "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to

the Lord" (Rom. 14:7-8). In Rom. 14:4-9, Paul speaks of the "Lord" eight times. Regardless of your titles or lack of titles, I cannot lord it over you and you cannot lord it over me. Jesus is Lord of life!

We don't need "junior gods" to take the Lord's place. Some pastors create dependent Christians who think they can't do a thing in ministry without checking with somebody. Guidance is good, but Jesus is Lord.

After the Resurrection, Peter walked the shores of Lake Galilee with Jesus. Jesus said to Peter, "Follow me!"

Peter heard footsteps nearby, so he turned and took his eyes off the Lord. He saw John. "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus responded: "What is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:19-22).

Positions, assignments, professional advancements, academic degrees all have their joys and dark sides. Never let those things separate our fellowship because we have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:5-6).

We should accept one another because Jesus is our Judge. Paul adds: "You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. . . . So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10, 12).

Never will you nor I sit in the judgment seat! I can't give an accounting for you. You cannot give an accounting for me. We are in this ministry together. Jesus knows you and your assignment. He alone understands the whole picture. There's not a report devised by the hand of man or woman, committee or board that can ever fully depict who you are and what you do under God. But Jesus knows—and He is our Judge. The Bible says: "Therefore, let us stop pass-

Runaway



by J. Grant Swank, Jr.

Pastor, Windham, Maine

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KANKAKE, ILLINOIS

ing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way . . . or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall" (Rom. 14:13, 21).

At a Christmas program, a handicapped child attempted his first recitation. As he struggled across the platform, an older boy called out a disparaging remark aimed at the boy's handicap. Completely demoralized, the little boy stood there and sobbed.

A man got up quickly, walked to the platform, knelt beside the boy, and put his arm around him. Then he said to the audience: "It takes a very cruel person to say what was just said to this boy. He is suffering from something not his fault. This was his first time to venture out with his handicap to say something in public. He has been hurt deeply. I want you to know that this little boy is mine. I love him just the way he is. He belongs to me, and I am proud of him." Father and son walked off together hand in hand.

Sometimes you and I feel so conspicuous with our maimed and sorry imperfections, but One whom I love kneels down beside us and reassures us: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine" (Isa. 43:1). Let's refrain from shooting our own wounded and be extravagant in accepting one another. After all, we are family! 🙏

Is this the fourth time or the fifth? I can't keep count. I only know my son does not want to be at home. He runs away, to stay at shelters or newfound friends' houses or on the streets.

This time he packed three suitcases and left with another friend. He thinks that "out there" is truly something awesome—wild—satisfying. No matter the danger. The edge of the cliff is better than inland's boredom. So be it.

Yet as a caring, loving father, I wonder. What am I to do? What can I say? Where can I go for help?

There are so many other parents out there who are dealing with this same strange occurrence. I don't suppose it is unique to our generation either. How could it be, when Jesus used the prodigal as one of His chief teaching points 2,000 years ago? Did not Jacob run away from home? And Cain? Let's go back further. Did not Adam run away from the Heavenly Father, doing "his own thing," leaving the garden home?

So this is not new to the world. But it is new to me. This is the first time that *my* son has left my family.

Do I call the police? Do I join a support group? Do I search library shelves for teen care paperbacks? What about phoning an 800 number for free aid? Where do I turn?

I do know that when I go to the Bible to reread that tale of the wayward boy who left father and home for the pleasures "out there," he ended up with the pigs. What a sorry state. Predictable. But tell that to a kid itching to get away.

I also know from scouring that story that although the lad left hearth, Dad stayed home. He did not do detective

work in the alleys. He did not prowl through the dives in search of his son, ready to drag him screaming out of the dark dens into the safety of home.

Dad prayed. Dad loved. Dad stood on the front porch many an evening to scan the horizon. But Jesus never mentions Dad leaving home to survey pigpens.

That gives me great comfort. I conclude that I am not to leave the front porch to tramp the city streets, Salvation Army basements, or local hangouts. That is not part of my job description as the father of a runaway.

What is expected of me is just what the parable father did. And I will do it: stay put, petition Heaven, keep the faith, keep fit so that when my boy does "come to himself"—his better self—his dad will still be in one piece.

Then who will go in search of his body and soul? Who *will* poke around the back lot, question the other kids, and keep watch into the night? Who?

In another part of the Bible I read another story told by Jesus. It is about a good shepherd who leaves the fold to search for a lost lamb. He goes here and there, up and down, in and out. That is his job. That is his beat. That is his love.

How kind of God to do that for me. He goes where I cannot go—even into my boy's heart. He sees what I cannot see—even into my son's head.

So I believe there really is hope for my wonderful, wayward kid. If I stay at home, keeping sanity and sense, and God goes out to the byways, keeping up the search, we have an excellent chance that my boy will come to himself.

And when he comes to himself, he will come home. 🙏

From Worm to King

Ps. 22:6-8

What a hymn!

A Hebrew favorite. And it anticipated the Messiah's coming. Then during His final hours Jesus whispered these words between agonizing groans on the Cross: "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him'" (Ps. 22:6-8).

Execution by crucifixion was unutterably excruciating. Oh, the shame of it! No criminal was so despised as the one hanging on a cross. Oh, the rejection of it! Such cruelty was inhumane. And the insults of it!

It would make anyone say to himself, "I am a worm and not a man." When the sense of failure seizes the soul of a man like that, what better thing is there to say? All is lost. The world makes its judgment. That's history. And death closes the chapter. You can feel it.

The disrespect. The rejection. The loneliness and loss.

Jesus' reputation was gone

"Will anybody believe me again?" Where is God? Really abandoned? Who will help if God is not around?

"Look at me. A complete failure. My friends think I have let them down. Who will they turn to now?" How despicable.

Jesus felt like a worm. He crawled on His belly in humiliation. No one considered Him of any worth. He was considered contemptible—only someone to be discarded in a "potter's field." Both the courts and the Temple had plotted against Him. It was a classic case of discrimination. "He was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3).

Anybody who has ever felt like a nobody knows exactly how Jesus felt

Racial and social prejudice con-



by Wilbur W. Brannon

Pastoral Ministries director, Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City, Mo.

spired to eliminate this troublemaker. It was an act of violent injustice.

Yet everybody has felt like a nobody sometime

It may have come, on the one hand, from someone's hateful act, or from a cruel assassination attempt by innuendo and misleading half-truths. On the other hand, any sin, intentional or not, cheapens self-worth.

When a valued relationship breaks up, your world of self-confidence comes crashing in on you. Any compromise of personal integrity reduces you to something less than you are and has fatal consequences. To violate another's trust leaves you morally bankrupt and spiritually empty. Nothing devalues a person more quickly and decisively as sin. The Bible says, "Sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:15). Sin equals zero. When life is subtracted from sin, the remainder is a cipher. Nothing! The end result of sin reduces you to a nobody.

Jesus became that Nobody to open the possibilities of becoming a Somebody

There was no way to break the power of death except by entering its realm. He died—not to remain, but to return by the power of LIFE: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). So Jesus' return was not only

for himself but for us too—to give us life.

Resurrection life can overpower the corruption of death. Without Jesus' life, personal integrity breaks up, commitments crumble, marriages disintegrate, and moral values rot. The fact that "He lives" shows that His integrity is rooted in tact. His character remains unflawed. The character of Christ reflects a person totally dedicated to God's will.

The epitaph cut in my father's tombstone was written in the flyleaf of his Bible, "No price is too great to wholly follow God." Father's legacy? A priceless treasure.

Because Jesus obeyed and died, "God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

What a name!

He who was groveling as a worm without reputation and in disgrace arose a conqueror over sin and death. With the power to lift you out of death, Jesus gives you new life. From disgrace to grace unlimited! Out of being a nobody, He gives you power to become a somebody.

After having sung Ps. 22, Jesus hears the angelic choir reverberating throughout God's moral universe echoing Ps. 24:7-10: "Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory."

Selah

Yes, "Selah!" That is to say, think about this: He who was a **worm** has a name that is above every name.

Let the **King of Glory** come in! ✠

The Crucified One

A Candlelight Good Friday Service

I love holidays. I have always been one to celebrate special events. I particularly love Christmas and Easter. This past Easter was made richer by a Good Friday service destined to become a tradition for our church.

On Palm Sunday, I invited everyone to take home with them an 8" steel spike. The spike was to be a reminder of God's gift of love. The people could only have a spike if: (1) They promised to carry it with them all week; (2) When they touched it or held it, they were to reflect upon the great gift that God made for them; (3) They were to share, whoever may ask them, what the spike represented; (4) If possible, they were to come to the Good Friday service and nail it into the cross. In so doing, they were to think of something they desired to crucify with Jesus. It could be anything: a broken relationship, a hurt, a sin, resentment, etc.

Throughout the week, I heard story after story of people unusually empowered to talk about Jesus. One man in the congregation had not previously shared much about Jesus. He carried the spike in his work coveralls and showed it to everyone with whom he talked. He was excited.

As we gathered for the Good Friday service, the enthusiasm level was extremely high. The anticipation of God meeting with us was evident to everyone.

(Practical Note: We gave out over 200 spikes and the cost was only about \$50. A fellow in the church constructed a cross. He built it out of 4" x 6" treated beams. He notched the beams so that they fit perfectly into a cross that stood 10' tall and 8' wide. A wooden-handled hand sledgehammer that weighed about two to three pounds was purchased. It was light enough for most people to use but heavy enough for the large spikes.



by Gary Waller
Pastor, Enumclaw, Wash.

The spike only needs to be driven in far enough to hold it, approximately 1" to 2".)

The ceremony began promptly at 7 P.M. The cross was carried in and laid flat on the platform. The service began with these words:

"Welcome to this very special service of remembering. At any time, feel free to:

**share a story or
testimony of faith,**

**go to the cross and nail
in your spike,**

or pray at the altar.

This is your service. Most of all, remember: God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that we might have everlasting life."

A crier shouted: **"Hear ye! Hear ye! The best news that the world ever heard came from a graveyard near Jerusalem!"**

SERVICE ORDER

Prayer

Hymns

"Lead Me to Calvary"

"When I Survey"

Scripture

Luke 23:26-43

Sharing

Hymn

"Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

Song

"At Calvary"

Sharing

Hymn

"At the Cross"

Song

"Blessed Redeemer"

Scripture

Luke 23:44-56

Hymn

"Wounded for Me"

Song

"The Old Rugged Cross"

Reading

"THE ELEVENTH HOUR GIFT"

(From *Six Hours One Friday*, Max Lucado)

Sharing

Closing Song


"Wonderful Savior"

Closing Prayer

(Practical Note: Many people took part: staff and laypersons alike.)

As the service began, I walked to the cross and pounded my spike in. I had neglected to turn off my microphone. As I hit my spike, an amazing thing happened! The sound reverberated throughout the entire sanctuary. There was a sensation of being on Golgotha as spikes were driven into Jesus. It set the mood. People came to the cross as families, friends, or alone. Many people found their way to the altar. The spontaneous sharing was inspirational and transparent.

The service ended with a note of praise and with great anticipation for Easter Sunday. Many people have remarked since then how their lives were changed when they realized the tremendous gift of a loving God. The spike and the sound were reminders of God's ultimate sacrifice.

This is our story. You are welcome to use it, and may the story of our church be multiplied in every congregation, so as to enable your people to grasp how deep and wide and all-consuming is the love of God. 



Easter Means "Rising from the Dead"

Clinton T. Duffy, who served so long and so efficiently as warden of San Quentin, tells the story of a convict from death row who was brought to his office.

"Warden," the convict asked, "what happens tomorrow . . . after . . . I . . . I . . ."

The warden knew he was trying to say, "After I die." Thinking that he was worried about the disposition of the body, the warden said: "Don't worry about that—the government has it all arranged."

"Yes, I know that," said the convict with a strange, fixed smile. "What I want to know is where do I go when it's over? Is there a life after death? The men up there on death row talk about this all the time. What do you think?"

The warden then asks the reader: "What would you tell a man who has no God—a man without a church, who has turned the chaplains away?" Then he adds: "The real fear of these men on death row is fear of the unknown."

All sane men and women have some fear of death. This fear is as old as human life, as long as human life, and as widespread as human life.

From earliest times, men have known this fear. In the dim beginnings of history, we find them recoiling from the dark mystery of the grave. The Persians, the Greeks, the Romans—all of them knew the fear of death.

Death isn't something we like to confront, so we avoid it as much and as often as we can. When we cannot escape the encounter, we find ourselves with all sorts of problems and nightmares and wondering. Why? Because every death is a graphic reminder that one day I will die too. And so will you.

Mike Royko, columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, said after the space



by Morris Chalfant
Evangelist, Bourbonnais, Ill.

shuttle *Challenger* exploded 73 seconds after blastoff: "How sure are any of us that there will be a tomorrow when even the very special, the very gifted, can be gone in an instant; when all the dazzling technology, the brilliant minds of the space agency, the meticulous planning, the countless safeguards, can't guarantee that a disaster won't occur?"

Of course, Mr. Royko is right. None of us enters this world with an iron-clad guarantee of tomorrow. We are mortal. We die. Some die very young, some very old. But, we all die.

"A man can die but once; we owe God a death." So says a common soldier as he goes to fight for his Lord in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*.

He speaks what is perhaps the greatest truth about human life. The inevitability of death has the most profound effect on the way we think and feel about life. It is the cornerstone on which philosophy, religion, and psychology are built. Yet, most oddly, we know practically nothing about it.

How to cope with the last enemy is not only a Christian concern—even though we owe the phrase to the New Testament—but also a human concern that often is the most troublesome to those who ignore or repudiate the Christian revelation. That the fact of death should become a

near obsession is not surprising when the one satisfying answer is rejected.

More than pulpитеers declare that time is in short supply. Playwright, philosopher, and psychologist agree on this point.

If it weren't for Easter, we would have good reason to fear death. In itself it is so final, so devastating, so separating. What can you say to a little child who has lost a parent, a husband or wife who has lost a spouse, a person who has lost a colleague and a good friend? Only that we all must die? Only that they died bravely after living well? Only that it was a sacrifice that will eventually benefit all humankind?

No, there is more we can say. There is life beyond death, and hope beyond the grave. We may not have a guarantee of tomorrow, but we know we will be returned to our Maker. And it's all because of Easter.

If Easter means that God really cares what happens in this world and will personally see to it that Good Friday is always followed by Easter Sunday for those who are obedient to His will—then that makes a tremendous difference.

If Easter means that one day all the violence and hatred and bigotry and cruelty of Good Friday will be swallowed up in the victory and joy and peace and exaltation of Resurrection Day—if that's what Easter means, then a world torn by strife and defiled by sin should not only hear that good news but also glory in it.

Easter means "rising up from the dead." Easter means another chance. Easter means a new beginning. It means a new road, a way back to God.

Once more, the ever-new, ageless story summed up, the miracle of the spring rebirth after the winter's death is recounted:

"HE IS RISEN!"



The Verdict of History

We now live under the impact of the forces of aggressive humanism: the "liberal left," political correctness, cultural elitence, militant eroticism, extreme exploitation of claims to civil rights, moral relativism, multiculturalism, and unrestrained self-indulgence.

Even to list the results of a declining morality is to almost certainly focus upon oneself a contemptuous assignment to the so-called religious right.

However, let us set aside a direct assessment of religious and moral values to ask a question that seems to be almost totally ignored in the heated discussions so prevalent upon the current scene:

"What is the verdict of history?"

An epic contribution to the literature of history is the monumental work of Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, published by Simon and Schuster, New York. The third volume of this work was published in 1944 under the title "Christ and Caesar."

The author, whose eminence as a historian remains undisputed, closes this volume with an Epilogue. In summarized form we present his answer to the extremely relevant question: "What is the verdict of history?"

"A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself within. The essential causes of Rome's decline lay in her people, her morals, her class struggle, her failing trade, her bureaucratic despotism, her stifling taxes, her consuming wars."¹



by George J. Douglas

Retired pastor,
Newport News, Va.

After listing numerous evidences of physical and natural decline, he further comments, "The cause, however, was no inherent exhaustion of the soil, no change in climate, but the negligence and sterility of harassed and discouraged men."²

Durant proceeds to itemize the elements of the downfall of Rome, with documented references to sources from over the centuries. These may be represented as follows:

1. DETERIORATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES

There was a serious decline in population due to losses from warfare, enslavement, crime, gladiatorial games, and so forth. In addition he queries, "What had caused this fall in population? Above all, family limitation." He further cites infanticide, sexual excesses, and avoidance or deferment of marriage as contributing factors.³

He then proceeds,

Second only to family limitation as a cause of lessened population were the slaughters of pestilence, revolution and war. . . . The holocausts of war and revolution, and perhaps the operation of contraception, abortion, and infanticide, had a dysgenic as well as a numerical effect. . . . The dole weakened the poor, luxury weakened the rich. . . . *Rome was conquered not by barbarian invasion from without, but by barbarian multiplication within.*⁴

2. MORAL DECAY

Moral decay contributed to the dissolution. The virile character that had been formed by arduous simplicities and a supporting faith relaxed in the sunshine of wealth and the freedom of unbelief; men had now, in the middle and upper classes, the *means to yield to temptation*, and only expediency to restrain them. *Urban congestion* multiplied contacts and frustrated surveillance; *immigration* brought together a hundred cultures whose differences rubbed themselves out into indifference. *Moral and esthetic standards were lowered* by the magnetism of the mass; and *sex* ran riot in freedom while *political liberty decayed*.⁵

It is interesting to note that Durant takes issue with Edward Gibbons. "The greatest of historians held that Christianity was the chief cause of Rome's fall." He and his followers argued that Christianity had declared war upon the classic culture and destroyed the old faith. Durant acknowledges, "There is some truth in his hard indictment. Christianity unwillingly shared in the chaos of creeds that helped produce the medley of mores which moderately contributed to Rome's collapse . . . [but] *the ethical influence of Christianity upon Rome life was largely a wholesome one. It was because Rome was already dying that Christianity grew so rapidly.*"⁶

3. ECONOMIC CAUSES

After naming numerous causes unique to the situation of Rome, Durant cites the following also:

The inability of Italian industry to export the equivalent of Italian imports, and the consequent drain of precious metals to the East; the destructive war between rich and poor; the rising costs of armies, doles, public works, an expanding bureaucracy, and a parasitic court; the depreciation of the currency;

the discouragement of ability, and the absorption of investment capital by confiscatory taxation; the emigration of capital and labor, the straight jacket of serfdom placed upon agriculture, and of caste forced upon industry: *all these conspired to sap the material bases of Italian life*, until at the last the power of Rome was a political ghost surviving its economic death.⁷

4. POLITICAL CAUSES

"The political causes of decay were rooted in one fact—that the *increasing despotism destroyed the citizen's civic sense* and dried up statesmanship at its source."⁸ Durant then cites numerous facts: loss of interest in government, decay of patriotism, rejection of responsibility in local government, defection of the military and the influx of mercenaries, the division of internal power and the breakdown of unity in administration, all together contributed to the dissolution of authority. "In this awful drama of a great state breaking into pieces, the internal causes were the unseen protagonists; the invading barbarians merely entered where weakness had opened the door, *and where the failure of biological, moral, economic, and political stewardship had left the stage to chaos, despondency, and decay.*"⁹

Some or all of these factors can be alleged in the breakdown of civilizations before and after that of Rome. In considering our own society, it is disturbing to realize that if the specific references to Rome and Italy were

to be edited away, the analysis might well seem to be an essay from the pen of William Buckley regarding Western civilization.

The lessons of history are not always immediately apparent.

However, we must remember that the lessons of history are not always together immediately apparent. For instance, the New Testament record informs us that, "The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah God burned to ashes, and condemned them to total destruction, making them an object-lesson for godless men in future days. But he rescued Lot, who was a good man, shocked by the dissolute habits of the lawless society in which he lived; day after day every sight, every sound, of their evil courses tortured that good man's heart" (2 Pet. 2:6-8, NEB).

Even so, if we refer to Genesis 19, we find that the divine visitors found Lot sitting in the gate of city. In that day and culture, this was an allusion to the fact that he was an influential citizen who participated in the governing affairs of the city. Further facts derive from this record: When urged

to flee to the hills, he resisted the advice and sought permission to relocate in Zoar. His wife, because of disobedience, suffered retributive judgment. At a later time, he left Zoar and fled to the hills as originally advised.

The real tragedy was not alone in the destruction of the cities of sin. Lot's associations and his compromise in pursuing the mercies of God issued, through incest, in the rise of the Moabites and Ammonites. They, like the Ishmaelites, were among the nations that were so perversely antagonistic toward God's chosen people.

History abounds with lessons not easily perceived and consequently ignored.

Let us beware lest the clamor of the humanists distract our attention from the repeated facts of history. People may hope to escape the consequences of their choices by denying the reality of sin, but history joins with scripture to advise that, "They rush blindly down to Sheol, the wicked, all the nations who are heedless of God" (Ps. 9:17, NEB).

Let us humbly but firmly join the ranks of the prophets of God to declare the lessons of history to the people of our own day.

1. Will and Ariel Durant, *Christ and Caesar* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 665.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 666.

4. Ibid., emphasis added.

5. Ibid., 667, emphasis added.

6. Ibid., emphasis added.

7. Ibid., 668, emphasis added.

8. Ibid., emphasis added.

9. Ibid., 669, emphasis added.

Beyond Belief



The Altar and How to Use It

by Richard A. Lint

Freelance writer, Milton, W.Va.

Sometimes we need to step back and look at something familiar from a different perspective.

The Sunday evening service ended with an altar service. There was no special revival emphasis, but the pastor's sermon was "evangelistic." Several responded to the pastor's invitation to come forward. A time of prayer was followed by testimonies.

Remembering what happened at that worship service several years ago has inspired me to do some serious rethinking about the altar and how we use it.

A religious practice that has been sanctified by the years is extremely difficult to change. Even the suggestion that such a practice be evaluated usually meets staunch resistance. "But we've *always* done it this way!"

Resistance to change is especially strong when the practice or custom has produced positive results in the past. "If it isn't broke, don't fix it." Such a custom or practice is evaluated on the basis of what it has done in the past rather than its potential for doing good in the present and the future.

Before jumping to wrong conclusions, let me assure you that I'm not calling for the elimination of altars, altar calls, or altar services. I wonder if we are failing to receive maximum benefit from the altar. Is a view of the altar that was inherited from a previous generation actually limiting the role of the altar in our worship?

The Altar in Hebrew History

For the patriarchs, long before the center of corporate worship was established among the Hebrews, the altar was the meeting place between God and man. Abraham and his immediate descendants built altars at places where they had significant encounters with God. The altars became memorials of those encounters and also served as places of sacrifice and recommitment.

After the Exodus, God instructed the Hebrews to build a central place of worship. The altar stood as the most prominent feature of the wilderness Tabernacle and later of the Temple in Jerusalem. There actually were two altars in the Hebrews' worship center: in addition to the more prominent altar of burnt offering was the

smaller altar of incense. The altar of burnt offering became the place of sacrifice and sanctuary. Incense was burned twice a day on the altar of incense, located at the entrance to the most holy place. The ascending cloud of smoke from the burning incense symbolized the offering of prayers (see Rev. 8:3).

From what we know about the role of the altar in Old Testament times, we see several functions of the altar:

A meeting place between God and man.

A memorial place commemorating past encounters with God.

A place of sacrifice where atonement for sins was made and where sins were forgiven.

A place of safety and sanctuary.

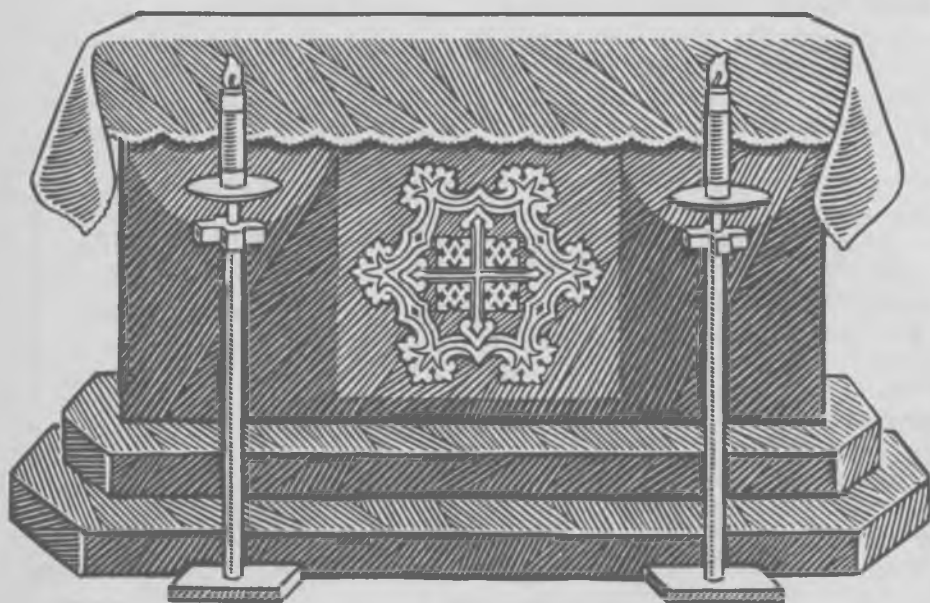
A place of prayer.

A place where previously made commitments were renewed and reaffirmed.

Looking at the varied functions of the Old Testament altar, we would expect the altar to play a variety of roles in our worship. However, that seldom happens. Many ministers have chosen to emphasize the altar as the "place of forgiveness" while neglecting the other functions of the altar.

Listen to what you say the next time you "open the altar." You probably will discover that you are calling for sinners and backsliders to come forward to pray, emphasizing the altar as a place for confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

Of course, it's necessary and important to emphasize this role of the altar. Yet I feel it's wrong to imply—even if it's never actually stated—that the altar exists only or even primarily for confession and repentance. This approach tends to perpetuate the view that the altar is *for sinners only*. It says the altar is not an appropriate place for professing Christians with a problem; it is where sinners and backsliders go to make things right with God.



As a preacher's son growing up in the church, I sat through more than my share of evangelistic services. So I was exposed to a lot of altar calls. I remember the negative comments that were made about those who went to the altar on a regular basis. They were labeled spiritually unstable and immature.

In case you think that mentality belonged only to a past generation, I heard the same observation only a few days ago—after a lady in the church that I attend went to the altar to pray.

Is a view of the altar inherited from a previous generation limiting the role of the altar?

I remember my own fears and apprehensions about going forward to pray. They had nothing to do with my fear of God or a reluctance to pray. They had everything to do with what the other people in the church would think. After all, "good Christians" don't go to the altar—only sinners, backsliders, and unstable Christians.

Several weeks ago the minister of the church where I attend made a point of opening the altar to Christians as well as sinners. While this may seem to be a step in the right direction, it actually reinforced the stereotype. The pastor actually was saying, "Ordinarily the altar is only for sinners, but today we'll make an exception and open it to everyone. So you can come up here to pray even if you aren't a sinner, a backslider, or an unstable Christian. And nobody will think you're a bad person."

The Altar as a Place for All People

Thinking of the altar as the meeting place with God can point us toward a

more appropriate and more creative attitude about the altar. The altar is a place of prayer—a place where every person can meet with God and talk things over with Him.

I'm not saying that the altar is the only place of prayer or even that it will be the best place of prayer for every Christian. However, it can be a rewarding place of prayer for these reasons:

The altar is the focal point of a building that has been set apart (sanctified) to the worship of God. This inspires reverence and awe in the worshiper.

The altar is the place of communal prayer where fellow believers gather to lift their hearts and voices toward God. This fellowship of believers is both inspiring and supportive.

The altar is a special place where God meets with His people.

Thinking of the altar as a place of prayer for everyone—not just sinners and backsliders—can be refreshing. What better place to pray about an important decision or a perplexing problem or a depressing personal situation than at the altar? Or what better place to receive spiritual strength and nourishment? The altar is an ideal place to make a reaffirmation and a recommitment. Courage for performing a difficult task can be found at the altar where believers are surrounded by Christian friends who are interested in their personal welfare and spiritual well-being.

The concept of "the altar as a place of prayer for all people" will not develop overnight. Most church members customarily think in terms of only sinners going to the altar. Therefore, the first few times you talk about coming to the altar simply to talk with God, they may be reluctant to respond. If you are brave enough to go to the altar yourself, someone is sure to say, "I wonder what's wrong with the pastor?"

We can gain enough benefits from seeing the altar as a place of prayer for all people to justify the risk of having some people question your motives and the quality of your relationship with Christ. By explaining what you are doing and why, you may help the idea to be appreciated and helpful.

The Difference



by Michael Andrews

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What difference can one person really make?

In 1793, one vote transformed France from an absolute monarchy to a democracy. One vote proclaimed America an English-speaking nation rather than a German-speaking one. One vote gave Thomas Jefferson and John Adams the White House. One vote per precinct also elected John F. Kennedy. One single vote appointed a convicted criminal as leader of an obscure political party: he was Adolf Hitler.

Where would the church be if Paul had said, "I am only one—what can I do?" Where would we be if that had been Martin Luther's stand? Or John Wesley's? Or Mother Teresa's?

What if the person that led you to Jesus Christ had thought, "I can't make a difference?"

One man—alone, hated and persecuted, mocked and ridiculed—came into the world to make a difference. That One opened the door that all humankind might enter.

What difference will you make? 

In Spirit and in Truth: The Search for True Worship

by Carl M. Leth

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The search for true worship has consistently been an important theme in the history of the Christian Church. What should be preached, what should be celebrated, and by whom have been questions around which debate, political struggle, and overt conflict have taken place. The renewed interest in worship in recent years is a contemporary reconsideration of these perennial issues of the church. The heightened awareness of the role of worship in defining the faith community only serves to emphasize the importance of this debate. At the heart of the search for true worship is the realization of the true community of faith.

For our purposes, a critical development has been the awareness of the importance of worship that has emerged among evangelicals. While the worship of the community has been generally understood to be important, the nature and character of that worship has come under increasing scrutiny. This development of intentional interest and care in worship should be broadly affirmed and encouraged. Advocates of worship renewal have appropriately raised questions about unreflected and careless practices in worship. With disconcerting frequency these practices have tended to cater to sentimental, enthusiastic, and "popular" tastes in worship. Accurate messages about God have sometimes been traded for the sake of impact or inspiration. Within the evangelical church, there is increasing concern to redress these shortcomings in our worship.

The movement of worship renewal itself needs to be critically evaluated and considered. With the identity of the church and the understanding of its message and mission at stake, care should be exercised in the renovation of our practice of worship. In his article "The Missing Jewel of the Evangeli-

cal Church,"¹ James E. White proposes some interpretative conclusions and criticisms that need to be critically considered. These views are frequently held within the worship renewal movement in the evangelical church. However, they should be understood to reflect the agenda of one perspective on worship renewal rather than the sole agenda in worship renewal. The agenda of that perspective, as presented by James White, will be considered in this paper.

White begins with a fundamental critique of evangelical worship. It is that evangelicalism fails by understanding the worship of the community as an instrument or tool rather than an end in itself. He laments that the end result of this lapse in the understanding of worship is that "worship was made useful."² The idea of "useful" worship is set in contrast to the claim of scriptural worship as "an end in itself."³ This contrast poses fundamental questions about the character of worship that cannot, or should not, be passed over as self-evident. There is more than adequate justification for challenging White's historic, theological, and scriptural characterization of worship. It can be argued on historical, theological, and scriptural grounds that worship should be "useful." It is one thing to call for worship to be appropriately and correctly useful as an instrument of the community. It is quite another to deny the propriety of usefulness in worship at all. We may agree with White that "an essential element" of worship is its exclusive purpose in "the service of God." That does not mandate the understanding of that service in nonfunctional terms. This is not a self-evident conclusion that should be assumed.

White offers four areas of critique in evangelical worship.⁴ The first is in the understanding of community.

"One of the great losses of the nineteenth century was that of any strong sense of the church as the community of those who were being saved."⁵ Instead, evangelism understood itself (reflected in its worship) in terms of bringing people to faith. The purpose of the church was in making converts or bringing people *into* the church rather than in terms of *being* the church. Certainly, the question of the adequacy of our ecclesiology deserves serious attention. *Inadequate* ecclesiology is not necessarily *inappropriate* ecclesiology. One might reply that an ecclesiology that is not significantly shaped by the Great Commission is itself adequate. Further, it could be asked whether it is correct to require each tradition of the Christian community to fulfill *all* aspects of a complete ecclesiology. The diversity within Christianity would seem to affirm the expression of various aspects of the church in different states of "imbalance." The evangelical church, by definition, is an expression of the mission emphasis of the faith. This may require attention to balance, but does not deserve censure.⁶

Despite the attention to evangelism in evangelical worship, it is not clear that this has resulted in a denigration of the importance of the community. Evangelical congregations generally exhibit high levels of loyalty and commitment to their church. The high levels of participation, strong financial support, and congregational nurture prominent among evangelical churches argue for the significance of the role of community among evangelicals. The struggle over the identity of the church as the community of those who are "being saved" versus the community of those who have "been saved" is an ancient one that long predates 19th-century evangelicalism.

The second area of critique ad-

dresses the order of worship. The central issue in determining the proper order of worship is the audience to be addressed. The error of evangelicals is that they continue to see "worship as a means of changing humans rather than our offering of praise and glory to God."⁷ The presumption is that not only should worship include addressing God with praise and adoration, but that it is God who should be primarily, if not exclusively, addressed in worship. God becomes the audience while the worshipers look away from the human audience. This understanding produces the amazing critique that "By focusing on the human object, much evangelical worship misses the center of biblical worship, the celebration of what God has done, is doing, and promises yet to do."⁸ How can this center of worship be realized without addressing "the celebration of what God has done, is doing, and promises yet to do" to the human community among whom God desires to be at work? Is it displeasing to God when worship addresses the Good News to the lost, hope to the helpless, healing for the broken, encouragement to those in despair? Jesus declared that there was more rejoicing in heaven over 1 lost sheep who was found than over the 99 who were safe. Again, this critique points to areas of possible imbalance or inadequacy in evangelical worship, concluding that they are inappropriate. Such a conclusion is not merited.

The third area of critique is the use of Scripture in worship. The central criticism is the limited use of publicly read Scripture in evangelical worship, frequently only a few verses as a sermon text. In contrast, White points out, the mass uses three full lessons plus a psalm. Consequently, "The mass proclaims that Scripture is a basic part of the Christian life; the evangelical service indicates that Scripture is an option used as necessary."⁹ We must conclude that we can expect the celebrant of mass to live his life under the authority of Scripture while the evangelical is indifferent to the message of Scripture for life. We might question, however, whether White's characterization will actually find verification in the life of the church.

We might also question the adequacy of the quantity of publicly read Scripture as the measure of scriptural

worship. A more fundamental standard might ask whether worship accurately and effectively communicated and reflected scriptural truths. It is possible that an entire worship service could be employed to express the meaning of the Bible's shortest verse, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). That would not make it an inherently less scriptural worship service than one in which extensive passages of Scripture were read. The call for a breadth of exposure to Scripture seems merited, but the measure of the effective use of Scripture must go beyond quantification.

At the heart of
the search for
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The fourth area of critique is the celebration of the sacraments. White maintains that evangelicals reflect the Enlightenment's denigration of the sacraments to mere "pious memory exercises of humans rather than divine means of grace through which God works."¹⁰ It seems clear that evangelical theological understanding of the sacraments, as well as their practice in worship, merits serious attention. However, the debate regarding the nature of the sacraments and our understanding of them as means of grace is another controversy that long predates 19th-century evangelicals. It would be presumptuous of worship renewal proponents of any perspective to declare that *their* sacramental theology is the basis for proper worship.

White adds a claim for the high ground of authority in worship renewal. That is, authority in determining the renewal of worship should rest with scholars. In support, White marshals historical precedent. "The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century

was largely brought about by scholars, and most major reform movements since have been led by scholars."¹¹ This broad declaration needs to be qualified on two accounts. First, while the actual renewal of worship may have been accomplished by scholars, the initiative and impetus for that renewal generally began at a popular level. The scholars serve more often to codify, correct, and institutionalize popular movements of renewal. Second, while the Reformers generally were scholars, they were also primarily practitioners in ministry. In the ongoing life and ministry of the church, the Reformers used their scholarship to address the needs they encountered there. It would be an inappropriate anachronism to conceive of or present the Reformers as scholars in the contemporary sense of academic specialists. While historical precedent suggests that worship renewal should be guided by good scholarship, it also suggests that such reform should be guided by the practical concerns of ministry in the church.

Worship renewal merits our serious attention and best efforts. We must use every resource available to us to create theologically accurate and effective forms of worship. However, we should also remember that worship is a many-faceted jewel. Only through mastery of the many facets of worship can we hope to appropriately present that most-precious jewel, the pearl of great price. The contemporary worship renewal movement has raised the important questions. We should be careful in assuming that it has also provided the answers. ✠

1. "The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church," James F. White, *Reformed Journal* 36, No. 6:11-16, June 1986.

2. "The chief change in the last two centuries in Free Church worship was movement not in a more scriptural direction but in a more practical one: worship was made useful . . . in this case the work of making converts." In "The Missing Jewel," 12.

3. "The Missing Jewel," 12. White might be accused of biblical "imperialism" in such a categorical claim from Scripture. The pervasive theme of mission throughout Scripture could tenably be understood to support a practice of worship that effected that mission.

4. "These four reforms are the well-springs of the worship revolution of our times." "The Missing Jewel," 15.

5. "The Missing Jewel," 13.

6. White's characterization of this emphasis as apostasy seems ill-considered and immoderate. "The Missing Jewel," 13.

7. "The Missing Jewel," 13.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 14.

10. *Ibid.*, 15.

11. *Ibid.*

In the Small Church, Can You Overcome the Survival Mentality?

We can't do that here, Pastor, because we're just a small church."

"We'd love to go along with that idea, Pastor, but we can't succeed because we're just a small church."

Do these comments sound all too familiar? If so, here are some keys that have proven indispensable for overcoming the survival mentality in our church. I believe they can help you unlock the survival mentality in your church as well.

The small-church pastor must understand that the primary goal of a small-church lay leader is not evangelism or dynamic worship or a well-organized Sunday School. The number one goal of a small-church lay leader is making certain the church survives. He or she knows that in order for their small church to survive, they must have two things: a building and a preacher. They want to adequately supply for the needs of the best pastor they can afford. Many small churches dream of having a full-time rather than a bivocational pastor. Small-church leaders also know that if they are to survive, they must keep the church mortgage paid and the building adequately maintained. These two tasks often consume the majority of the small-church leader's time and energy.

Key No. 1: Challenge People to Change

In order for the survival-oriented church to grow, the pastor must challenge the church to change. Laypeople have



by S. Alan Duce

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gotten used to the way things work in their church. When a new pastor first arrives on the scene, he or she is excited, filled with new ideas and exciting possibilities, and enthusiastically begins to share ideas and attempts to get the church-people excited. But often there is a very strong undercurrent of resistance to anything new. These small-church laypeople have



been through this process before with a dozen other pastors. They are happy enough to let the "new pastor" do anything—as long as it doesn't cost them anything. It can be incredibly difficult to motivate small-church lay leaders to consider anything new or innovative.

Pastor, remember that, for the lay leader, change equals risk. Risk means that the primary objective—making certain the church survives—might be threatened. The pastor must gently but directly challenge the people to replace the idea of maintenance with commitment and to replace survival with victory in Christ.

Key No. 2: Focus on Doing a Few Things Well

The small-church pastor must learn that working hard is not enough. Many pastors work themselves tirelessly but generate no new growth. The growth-oriented pastor not only will work very hard but also will work smart. I believe the key is to focus on doing a few things well.¹ The pastor of the small church often looks with envy at the wider-ranging program of ministry at the large church just down the street. However, the best strategy for the small-church pastor is to focus on being the best small church in the community.

Ask yourself two questions: "What are my greatest strengths for ministry?" "What are the greatest strengths of my congregation?" Select two or three areas where you are currently strong, and intentionally improve them. The next year add another area. After a few years, you will find that you have greatly improved the quality of ministry in most areas of your church.

Notice also that there are certain things about the small church that make it uniquely attractive and effec-

tive in ministry. Most people perceive small churches as more friendly, with more of a family-type atmosphere than large churches. Capitalize on the friendship factor. Train your people to be friendly to visitors. Insert a friendship time into your worship liturgy. At the close of each service, encourage your congregation to greet someone they don't know well before greeting their friends. Norm Whan, in his book *The Phone's for You!* asserts that what people want most from a church is to be accepted, feel comfortable, and be loved.² No one does that better than the small church. Become the friendliest small church in town.

Key No. 3: Love Your People

Another key to effectiveness in the small church is to love your people. John Maxwell stated that "people are your most appreciable asset."³ This is doubly true in the small church where there is no paid staff other than the pastor. Small-church leaders are used to working sacrificially to build the Kingdom. Love them for it.

Part of loving people is practicing affirmation. Encouragement may or may not be one of your spiritual gifts. Practice affirmation anyway. The only thing people know about what you are thinking is what you tell them. You may believe in them and brag about them at every preachers' meeting, but if you don't affirm them in person, they often assume the worst. Small-church workers receive no earthly reward other than affirmation. Love and affirm small-church workers, and they will stretch beyond themselves in helping you build God's Church.

Key No. 4:

Build a Climate of Success

To succeed in the small church, you need to build a climate of success. The small church with its survival mentality has a low level of faith. The members are reluctant to believe that God will accomplish great things through their church, because it seems He never has before. Faith must be practiced and developed. All they have ever practiced is survival. In order to develop their faith, you must help the church

achieve some successes. The maxim "Success breeds success" reflects the faith-building process for the small church. Give the church legitimate victories to celebrate. Begin by raising the vision higher but still setting the goal low enough to attain. With each victory, you raise the goal much as a pole vaulter does in the Olympics. Again, build on your strengths. Focus initially on the areas where you are certain of success. Each success will strengthen your faith and embolden the church to face new challenges.

For the lay leader, change equals risk.

Key No. 5:

Focus on Gift-Based Ministry

To organize for success, remember to build on your strengths and the strengths of your people. Leaders in the small church are used to wearing many different hats. Often, they have done ministries for years that they do not enjoy because it is outside their area of spiritual gifting. When the church begins to grow, they are often more than happy to "retire" from these unpleasant assignments. Here again you must confront the survival mentality head on. The long-term leaders know what level of activity is necessary to maintain "business as usual" in order for the church to survive. The pastor must help the retiring leaders realize that they are needed now more than ever if the church is to not only survive but also continue growing.

You will frequently hear comments such as, "There are so many new people; let one of them do it."

It is vitally important at this point to help potential retirees discover their spiritual gifts and become involved in ministries that utilize their gifts. When people minister in areas where they are gifted, they find

greater satisfaction and become more effective in ministry.⁴ They will be less likely to create friction because, rather than standing on the sidelines evaluating the "new" person's performance in their old ministry, they will be deeply immersed in their own exciting new ministry.

Key No. 6: Stay Long Enough to Earn Their Trust

The church that has lived on the edge of survival for many years needs a leader who will commit to earn their trust. Over and over again, these churches have had pastors come, win their hearts, and then quickly move on to other more exciting assignments. Love is freely given, but trust must be earned over time. The only way to overcome the survival mentality is for a pastor to stay long enough to earn the people's trust.

In my third year as pastor of my church, I saw the need for additional classroom space if our Sunday School was growing. I graphed the attendance projections based on recent growth patterns and patiently explained the need for new space and how we could reasonably acquire it.

One church board member expressed the unspoken sentiment of many when he said, "I know about you preachers. You get us to go out on a limb and then you leave, leaving us to pick up the pieces."

Needless to say, we did not build. Only now, after three more years of earning their trust, are we constructing the building we need.

Overcoming the survival mentality requires large doses of love and patience. But, it can be overcome and it must be overcome if ingrown, non-growing churches are to become growing, soul-winning, ministry-providing churches.

1. John C. Maxwell, from lecture notes during "Developing the Type of Leadership and Congregation Needed to Break the 200 Barrier," lecture taught at the "How to Break the 200 Barrier Seminar," Pittsburgh, Pa. April 11-13, 1989.

2. Norm Whan, *"The Phone's for You!"* (Whittier, Calif.: by the author), 58.

3. John C. Maxwell, from cassette, "Morale—Faith in the Man at the Top" (Spring Valley, Calif.: Injoy Life Club, 1985).

4. C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1979), 126.

Homiletical Hints from a Veteran Preacher

I never get around to preparing my sermon until Saturday night. I know that's too late, but there's so much else to do," said my preacher friend. And I wondered at a theology that supports preparatory laziness.

THOU SHALT NOT PROCRASTINATE

Sermon preparation that begins and ends on Saturday is seldom worth listening to on Sunday. I am much more comfortable with a prayer that asks for self-discipline than one that asks the Holy Spirit to take over for my lethargic spirit. Does God sometimes provide a wonderful verbal harvest without toil? I am sure it has happened and will happen again. I still believe that we preachers owe it to our commitment to properly prepare the soil.

SET ASIDE THINK-TIME

Close the office door and take no phone calls. Be sure to promptly return the calls as soon as your think-time is through. Ask if your planned subject for preaching is worth the effort. Has it lit a fire in your soul? Is it relevant to current needs or simply a rehash of thoughts you had 15 years earlier? Does it meet people's needs, or is it 20 minutes of fill? How much time in study for how much time preaching? I have heard sermons that were little more than the thin veneer of an idea. Below that was part of an iceberg that could be seen in massive depth and width. It took a long time to build up that kind of stability. It is the kind of stability a sermon deserves.

MAKE YOUR LIBRARY A FRIEND

One would assume that all ministers love to read. The truth, however, is that all ministers do not love to read. Loved or not, it must be done. Reading is the delivery room of new ideas. Knowledge does not guarantee wisdom, but a lack of knowledge is certainly a father to ignorance. Pulpit



by V. Neil Wyrick
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time is temple time. It is no time to reach out to hungry souls with a blank look that comes from an empty barrel.

ENTERTAIN, EDUCATE, MOTIVATE, AND INSPIRE

Whether 6 or 60, a tired and tedious sermon will lose the listener. A good communicator is also a good and exciting entertainer. Billy Graham not only has something to say but also is animated. Jesus spoke in parables because He knew the advantages of a good story. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, "Blessed are the bored."

Always have what I refer to as the "Wow" factor: information that causes

the listener to respond with "Wow, I didn't know that!"

A good sermon should motivate a congregation to aspire to more than it can accomplish. It should lead each member to want to walk tall and sun-crowned above the crowd.

I never preach without prayer—before, often during, and always in closing. I cannot give inspiration if I am not inspired. I cannot light a congregation's celestial fire if mine is extinguished. Having hopefully anointed my mind with study, now is the time to ask for the editing of the Holy Spirit.

DON'T OVEREDUCATE/ ENOUGH ALREADY!

I remember early in my ministry that if I learned it in study, I wanted to hear it in my preaching. Sometimes I tended to overload. I crammed into one sermon what could easily have been a series of two or three messages.

OFFER WHAT YOU'VE ADVERTISED

Don't promise T-bone steak and then give your congregation French fries and fruit salad. All preachers have been known to touch lightly on their titles and then wander in the wilderness for the next 20 to 30 minutes.

BE PERSONAL

Quoting Norman Vincent Peale or Robert Schuller is certainly an attention getter. But quoting from your own life experiences can be even better. Show a bit of your humanity. Admit problems and how you and the Lord solved them. Walking and talking with the troops can often communicate better than sending out edicts from on high.

USE PROPS?

Would you be uncomfortable with props? In giving a sermon, should we be concerned with comfort or outreach? We've all used props in children's sermons. We use them to make



what we're saying more clear. Can any of us truly argue that every sermon we have ever given was never confused? Ira Hays, one of America's outstanding professional speakers, says that props "give an audience something to look at besides an immobile set of head and shoulders forever glued to a lectern."

SPEAK WITH NO NOTES OR FEW NOTES

If or when we preachers read our sermons rather than preach from notes or an occasional glance, we send a message to our listeners: we weren't impressed enough with this sermon to learn it. Therefore you don't have to be impressed enough to remember it.

BE PREPARED FOR CATASTROPHES

No matter how much we prepare, Murphy's Law will eventually show up for one of our sermons. A projector light can blink off when we have no replacement. Have one. The wind will blow our notes away. Place them in plastic. The lectern can be too short or too tall. Check it out ahead of time. The wireless microphone can die in midsentence because the battery is old. Replace it ahead of time. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of pain.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC

I've listened to good sermons delivered from a face that graded out somewhere between "Woe is me" and "Woe to you." An enthusiastic cook can make a poor meal almost good. A weary cook can make a good meal not so good at all.

A GOOD SERMON BEGINS LONG BEFORE YOU GIVE IT

I now do a lot of pulpit supply. I make a point of walking around and introducing myself to members ahead of time. We can hardly establish a relationship, but I can exhibit warmth and caring. I know when I preach I want as many new friends in the congregation as possible. I did the same when I was in the pastorate. Call it priming the pump. Call it common sense and, hopefully, uncommon caring.

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Before we're enthusiastic in our delivery, we need to be controlled in our beginning. We need to stand qui-

etly for a few short seconds and look out over the congregation with a pleasant expression on our face. We need to send out the message that we are comfortable with the moment. This will relax our listeners and make them comfortable. Particularly, if we are guest speakers, we need to give the congregation a chance to simply look at us.

THANKS

If it isn't your own pulpit, thank the person who introduced you. Thank the congregation for the opportunity to speak to them. We should never dive right into our sermons as if we're afraid we might forget them.

CLOSE WITH A CLINCHER

We should never finish a sermon like someone who has just run out of steam. We should give a final toot that is a wrap-up. If, up to the point of closing, some in the congregation are still wondering what we've been trying to say, the close is our one last


chance. A one-liner certainly leaves no doubts such as, "God is alive! It is only His people who have made cemeteries of His churches."

SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY

Ask some people what time it is, and they'll give you instructions on how to build a clock. If I can say it in three lines rather than six, most likely what I say will be more clear. Tell a story. Jesus did.

TUNE IN MIND AND BODY

Are you a morning person or a night person? When does your energy level sag in the valley? Do the routine things when your energy level is low. Go for the creative when your energy level is high. Don't try to run a hundred-yard dash when you're mired in a mud puddle of apathy.

Good preaching is common sense mixed with uncommon caring, stirred by the power of the Holy Spirit, and flavored by concentration and consecration. It's that simple. 

PASTOR THUNDERLIPS CARRIED LONG-WINDED
PREACHING TO NEW HEIGHTS.



All Alone?

Who in the pastorate has not at one time or another felt like Elijah sitting in a cave saying, "I am the only one left" (1 Kings 19:10). It is so easy to think I am the only dedicated one left. Lately these feelings have come to me in a particular area. Pastors who hold the position taken in this article have been called "old-fashioned," "behind the times," "uncaring," and "harsh." Even to voice a concern has been called "problematic" and "divisive." The area? The integration of psychology and Christianity.

I do not reject the legitimate areas of psychology such as learning theory, sensation, and perception. The problem lies in the fact that psychotherapy is now seen as the best way to solve life problems. It is now used as an addendum to the Bible.

What does the word "integration" mean? Integration means "incorporation as equals." To integrate means "to end the segregation of and bring into common and equal membership" (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*). Is that really what we want? Do we really want to make humanistic psychology an equal with biblical Christianity?

The argument is made: "As long as it is 'Christian' psychology it's all right." However, the term "Christian" psychology is misleading. There are Christian psychologists, but there is no discipline that can be called "Christian" psychology, as opposed to secular psychology. Yet the term "Christian psychology" is quite popular among evangelicals and carries the idea that such a type of study does exist when in fact it does not.

There are many areas of concern. I will address only two: the sufficiency of Christ and the sanctification of the believer.

It wasn't that long ago that the Bible was looked upon as the only guide for life and how it is to be lived. Integration of the Bible with any extrabiblical teaching does not enhance



by Gary Skagerberg

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biblical truth; it dilutes it. We have always rejected the Bible integrated with the *Book of Mormon* or the Bible and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. Why do we now accept the Bible integrated with the teachings of humanistic psychology? It's the state of mind that C. S. Lewis called "Christianity And." The question is this: What takes precedence, human reason or Scripture? Psychology should not be considered a source of authority alongside Scripture any more than the *Book of Mormon*.

Those who would tell us that the Bible alone is not sufficient to meet the "deep needs of modern man" are actually telling us that God's Word is not an adequate source for the spiritual and emotional problems of the 20th century. What amazes me is that many in the church today are falling for such heresy.

I recently heard someone say that the Bible isn't able to deal with every area where man has problems. For example, the Scriptures don't tell us how to counsel the alcoholic or the bulimic. That is true. But neither does the Bible tell us how to counsel an adulterer or a murderer. We must begin with the sinfulness of the self and lead people with such behavioral problems to repentance and biblical life principles. Alas, that sounds too simplistic and inadequate for modern man.

So far, the church has been reluctant to challenge these situations be-

cause psychology has gained such inroads into our thinking. The presuppositions of humanistic psychology ultimately deny the life-transforming, life-changing power of the cross and the blood of Jesus. They empty Christ of His sufficiency and His glory. We can afford to be reluctant and accommodating no longer. The fundamental reality of God's grace to break the power of sin is in danger of being denied under the influence of "Christian" psychology. How long can we ignore the fact that something of major importance is happening here?

This whole issue is one of authority. Whom do we believe? Authority can't be shared in this area. We can't quote 1 Cor. 10:13 to someone and then tell them they were "destined to commit adultery because they were victimized as children." This is more than a scriptural paradox. These are conflicting worldviews—one divine, one secular. Such contradictions cannot be integrated without losing biblical authority.

A second area of concern is the sanctification of the believer. The growth of the new life in Christ is being hindered by the belief and practice of victimization therapy. This is another secular method of helping heal the hurts of believers. It rests on questionable tactics and a set of unbiblical presuppositions that should raise searing questions about the way a believer progresses in his spiritual life.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that there are people in this world with hurts and concerns regarding their past. The question is, How are we to deal with those hurts? Psychology, both "Christian" and secular, says that our sense of worth is tied up in the way we were treated as children, especially by our parents. In order to function in our relationships with God and man, we must deal with these hurts and disappointments. The only way to do so is to dig them up and emotionally relive them.

Victimization therapy is drastically changing the way we look at sin and how to deal with it. Where can we find any scriptural foundation for such a theory? This is another denial that the Cross has the power to change a sinner. The reasoning goes something like this: "He has been terribly abused. This is not the time to press upon him his sinfulness. It might turn him away. He needs to feel the love—not forgiveness of God, not rejection. He needs to work through his fears, rejections, hurts, and disappointments. This is not the time to speak of the Lordship of Christ or the authority of Scripture." When is a good time?

If ever there were an opportunity for Jesus to teach victimization therapy, it was certainly with the Samaritan woman at the well. What a messed-up life! She had gone through five husbands and was now living with a man to whom she was not married. What an opportune time for Jesus to say, "I want you to go back in time and recall the events in your life that led you to your current behavior. Tell me about your father. We need to get those memories to the surface so that they can be healed." But there was not even a hint of such an approach.

The woman caught in adultery provided a classic opportunity. If victimization therapy should be part of the spiritual process, surely Jesus would have used it then. But to the sinful woman, Jesus simply said, "Go and don't do it again."

A pastor of counseling from a large and successful evangelical church in southern California recently spoke on the life of Isaac. The main thrust of his message centered on Isaac as a victim all of his life because of the trauma of being almost killed by his father. Abraham had violated Isaac's trust in him. He had tricked Isaac into being the sacrifice; therefore Isaac never trusted Abraham again. Nor did he trust God because God was the

one who told Abraham to kill Isaac.

According to this "Christian" psychologist, Isaac's life was filled with much hurt and pain that he never worked through. He had no psychologist to whom to turn. His explanation was that "Isaac never dealt with the pain in his life. He just buried it and went on. Why else would one so chosen by God and selected by the Lord deliberately disobey his Heavenly Father? He had no feelings at all. He had no internal validation program. He had just decided that he would never let anyone get close to him in his life again."

Unbelievable! According to this modern-day prophet, Isaac was a victim who needed to work through his victimization, but didn't know how. Because he couldn't work through it, he couldn't help disobeying God. A deceitful and wicked heart is conveniently eliminated and another blow dealt to biblical authority. If only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had known what we now know! How much more effective they could have been.

Has biblical Christianity been a hoax all these centuries? If being in Christ makes no difference in dealing with sin, if we have to wait for the attention of psychology to get us through our storehouse of memories in order to be free, if the Cross has no more power than that, then we must conclude that biblical Christianity has been a cruel joke. The Bible promises that "through Christ Jesus [alone] the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

The author of Hebrews instructs us to "leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death" (6:1).

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers telling them to forget the past and to work on what was ahead (3:13). To continually live in the past and to relive the ugly events of our lives denies the power of the Cross and hinders

the sanctification and maturity of the believer.

The Bible does what psychology cannot do: "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). To see ourselves in the light of Scripture is to see ourselves as we really are. No amount of therapy can do that.

John MacArthur, in his book *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, writes:

Unfamiliarity with the Spirit's sanctifying work has opened the door for the church's current obsession with psychology.

Psychological sanctification has become a substitute for the Spirit-filled life. What point is there in seeking the Holy Spirit's comfort if, after all, deep-seated emotional problems can be addressed only by a trained psychologist, or if people can come to grips with their lives only by getting in touch with their childhood, or if the answers to our deepest hurts are buried deep within us? If those things are true, we don't need an Advocate; we need a therapist. And that is precisely the route many in the church have chosen.*

Don't be deceived. One of the gifts of the Spirit is discernment. It's time we start using it. Too many of us have forgotten that we need spiritual weapons to fight a spiritual war, not humanistic techniques. Sanctification comes, not from therapy, but from the Holy Spirit working through God's Word. We are being changed "into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

We must devalue man-made theories and return to the reliability of the Scriptures and walk in the power of the Spirit.

"Sola Scriptura!"



*John MacArthur, Jr., *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), 105.

Can You Testify to What You Preach?

The parishioner commented, "Preacher, that was a tremendous exhortation you just presented! You proclaimed scriptural holiness and made the need for entire sanctification crystal clear. You told me the wonderful things that God wanted to do for me. You let me know how I can be filled with the Holy Spirit. But I have just one question: Why didn't you testify that you are now living a holy life—the life you tell me is possible?"

How would you respond to that question if you were in that preacher's shoes? Indeed, every time we preach that kind of a message, questions may arise in the minds of our hearers if we haven't testified to possessing and living what we preach. Would you turn red and stammer because you think your life or biblical authority has been challenged? Just how big a defense would you deploy? Would you trot out your ICBM arsenal of theological jargon, or perhaps a few automatic weapons—or clichés? Or would you just spot someone over the questioner's shoulder to whom you urgently need to talk? What would you do?

Probably your questioner does not think you are living an immoral life. He's not even your enemy. He has great respect for you, but he simply wanted to know why you don't testify to being holy as a result of the biblical holiness you proclaim.

For 27 years I have been attending district, regional, and general convocations. Most of the time there is an appropriate and challenging message by an esteemed leader on some form of "Christian Perfection," as Wesley called it. We are rightly challenged to attain it and live it. Even though I believe all the speakers were in the experience of holiness and living it, I cannot recall ever hearing one say in essence, "I am sanctified by faith through grace, and by the power of Christ, I am living a life without sin-



by Raymond Lane
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ning." Isn't that what we preach and believe that the Bible promotes? Don't we personally believe it's true for each of us? Isn't that the standard of all the elders and officers of the Holiness churches?

Perhaps there are six reasons why we are reluctant to make a bold claim as to having the experience of purity of heart and life.

First, there is the seeming reluctance of John Wesley to claim the experience for himself. Yet, in the very last paragraph of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*—the place of utmost importance in wrapping all his defense of the doctrine—Wesley says, "This we confess (if we are fools therein, yet as fools bear with us), we do expect to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Yea, we do believe that He will in this world so 'cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, that we shall perfectly love Him, and worthily magnify His holy name.'" Certainly John Wesley included himself in those plural pronouns!

On the other hand, even though we revere the fact of Wesley's leadership in reinstating entire sanctification to its position in Christian theology, he is not our premier authority. The apostle Paul testified: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may

gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith" (Phil. 3:8-9). "Timothy . . . will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17). "You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed" (1 Thess. 2:10). "We have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God . . . according to God's grace" (2 Cor. 1:12). "You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings" (2 Tim. 3:10-11). "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9). "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

The second reason for reluctance to testify to the experience could be the normal human reluctance to claim such an awesome privilege.

The thought that "I am holy as God is holy" is enough to cause a Christian to be paralyzed and awestruck at the enormity of it. Martin Luther ran from the room at his first mass because he was so overcome with his own feeling of inadequacy in the presence of God.

Also, the fear of seeming to be proud as opposed to humble is, for some, a hurdle to overcome. If we rightly understand "poor in spirit" and "meekness" in the Beatitudes, then can't we appropriately claim to possess the holiness that is promised to us? To claim less is to call God a liar.

Oswald Chambers said, "The way we continually talk about our own in-

ability is an insult to the Creator. The deploring of our own incompetence is a slander against God for having overlooked us. Get into the habit of examining in the sight of God the things that sound humble before men, and you will be amazed at how staggeringly impertinent they are. 'Oh, I shouldn't like to say I am sanctified; I'm not a saint.' Say that before God, and it means—'No, Lord, it is impossible for you to save and sanctify me; there are chances I have not had; so many imperfections in my brain and body; no, Lord, it isn't possible.' That may sound wonderfully humble before men, but before God it is an attitude of defiance."²

In dealing with this issue, the question is raised for John Wesley: "Would it not be better to be entirely silent, and not speak of it at all?"

He replies in part: "If such a one were to confer with flesh and blood, he would be entirely silent. But this could not be done with a clear conscience: for undoubtedly he ought to speak. Men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel; much less does the all-wise God. He does not raise such a monument of his power and love, to hide it from all mankind."³

"Why didn't you testify that you are living the life you tell me is possible?"

Those statements make a good case for speaking the truth of our condition. By now you, the reader, realize that we are destroying straw men. Yet they *are* typical human arguments for silence.

Next is our awareness of Jesus' strong condemnation of the Pharisees for their prideful demonstration of ritual holiness. We cannot read Matt. 23 without being aware of the ways we might be claiming to be righteous, yet be like the whitewashed tombs—full of dead men's bones. The danger of hypocrisy is

very real. We can't preach tithing and then not tithe.

Long ago someone said about the statement, "I won't go to church because there are hypocrites there," that we should reply, "Sometimes there are, but, since there are those who act it out, isn't it equally true that there is the real thing?" Certainly, it is. We must not let pretenders spoil the opportunity for us to testify of true holiness. In fact, it is ever more desperately needed as a result of hypocrisy.

Someone else has said, "If you won't become a Christian because of the hypocrisy you have observed, then the hypocrite is closer to God than you, for he is between you and God." It may be particularly true for ministers that we don't testify to Christian perfection because we all know so many fallen brothers and sisters, both active and ousted.

At Brazil's Nazarene Seminary, the class was wrestling with the doctrine of Holiness. J. Elton Wood reported this exchange: "Several students were pointing out the reality of human limitations and imperfections, even among church leaders and within the Christian community. One of them stated with vehemence, that 'the ideal of holiness is very sublime and exalted and an impossible experience for mortal man.' (Author's note: I have heard this repeatedly.)

"A former Communist who had been active in political aspirations while a sociology major in a leading university before his conversion, quietly commented (with evident conviction): 'But in no way does this invalidate what He requires of His people. . . .'

"With grateful heart I commented, 'And the requirement is the same for all men in all cultures, just as the provision for its fulfillment is also the same: "And Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood."'"⁴

We ought to be able to say with Paul, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

What about the fear that people may think that the sanctified have assumed a holier-than-thou attitude?

The question was directed to John Wesley: "Suppose one had attained to this, would you advise him to speak of it?"

He replied: "At first perhaps he

would scarce be able to refrain, the fire would be so hot within him; his desire to declare the loving-kindness of the Lord carrying him away like a torrent. But afterward he might; and then it would be advisable, not to speak of it to them that know not God (it is most likely, it would only provoke them to contradict and blaspheme); nor to others, without some particular reason, without some good in view. And then he should have especial care to avoid all appearance of boasting; to speak with the deepest humility and reverence, giving all the glory to God."⁵

How can we keep from crying real tears of unspeakable joy at the transformation God has performed in us?

Surely the overwhelming majority of our listeners would recognize the source of any proclamation or claim of being holy. Of course, we need to proceed with caution to proclaim the majesty and magnitude of what God and God alone can do in a human life. How can we keep from crying real tears of unspeakable joy at the transformation God has performed in us?

I had the singular privilege of becoming a Christian as an adult and of immediate association with a church body (Meridian, Idaho) where the testimony "God sanctifies me this moment" was often heard. Whatever form it took, it was true and exciting and always glorified God. In less than two months, I had to have what they had. Those were the days when Evangelist Paul Martin was proclaiming, "Happiness is holiness and holiness is happiness and no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." I weep for joy as I write this

because of the richness of the memory of the moment I began the journey of the sanctified life, but also because the condition is continuous, ongoing, glowing, and growing.

How I long to hear others testify now to the purging, cauterizing, dynamite affect of God in their lives. Perhaps the timidity in the pulpit has brought about the scarcity of boldness in the pew. Perhaps if we affirmed our condition in the sanctuary, the proclamation would become evident in the marketplace.

The apostle John did not seem to be holier-than-thou when he penned: "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God. . . . We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5:18-20). When he wrote, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin," was he writing only from intellectual knowledge? Surely not! It was from experience too.

"Oh, but there is so much room for improvement in my life." Of course there is! Praise God, how did you discover that? Isn't it because God—the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that is in it—is communicating with you? This is rejoicing ground. The possibility of improvement is wonderful; just ask your spouse if he or she doesn't think so too.

Let's look at Wesley again to see how he responded to the question:

"But how can every thought, word, and work, be governed, by pure love, and the man be subject, at the same time, to ignorance and mistake?"

John Wesley said, "I see no contradiction here: 'A man may be filled with pure love, and still be liable to mistake.' Indeed, I do not expect to be freed from actual mistakes, till this mortal puts on immortality.

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"A mistake in judgment may possibly occasion a mistake in practice. . . . Yet, where every word and action springs from love, such a mistake is not openly a sin. However, it cannot bear the rigor of God's justice, but needs the atoning blood."⁶

Let us never think we have gotten beyond the need to repent!


The sixth and last issue mitigating against a bold claim of Holiness is the fact that we all know people who have claimed to have it, but their lives contradict it. You may have church board members like that, and they may think their pastor

is like that. In some cases, it may be true. Since when do we stop getting married because so many marriages end disastrously?

God has the power to keep the whole barrel of apples from spoiling no matter what folk theology says. Far too often we mistakenly leave God out of the equation. We do that to our shame.

As I close this challenge to testify to Christian perfection, let me say that it has been my blessed privilege to personally know hundreds of Christians serving Christ in perfect love. They live without resorting to continual sinning (rightly so-called), in all walks and roles of life.

Then there is my wife, whose transformed living so contrasted with her life before Christ, that I was convinced of the reality and possibility of holy living—even before I became a Christian.

Last of all, I must say to you, the life I live today is directed by the Holy Spirit who has purified my heart by faith. My entire motivation in life is to return the love He has placed in me—both for God and man. The resurrected power of Jesus keeps me. Though I make mistakes both in thought and action, they are continually confessed and kept under the blood. 

1. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1966), 119.

2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1935), 335.

3. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 56.

4. "Cross Cultural Holiness?" *World Mission* magazine, June 1990.

5. Wesley, *Plain Account*, 55.

6. *Ibid.*, 52.

Pontius' Puddle



Crime Is Rooted in the Soul

Laws do not deter crime and prisons don't convert criminals. The American Criminal Justice System is terminally ill. Prisons are filled with anger, bitterness, despair, and dejection," according to a lot of prison administrators and the American Correction Association.

After being released, 66 to 74 percent of inmates commit new crimes within four years. Prisons separate dangerous offenders from the rest of society. The deterrent theory is to lock up and scare people out of crime. It isn't working.

Sociologists, politicians, and criminologists have passed over the human character and forgotten the soul, where the cause of crime is rooted. The cause of crime cannot be traced to environment, poverty, oppression, education, gangs, or peer pressure. Crime is the result of individuals making wrong moral choices (*Inside the Criminal Mind*, S. Samenow). The answer to crime is a conversion of the criminal to a responsible, moral lifestyle. The cause of crime is a lack of moral training among young people during the morally formative years. The root of our crime problem is the loss of individual morality and the resulting erosion of our character as a people.

If crime stems from moral factors, then the solution to crime must be moral as well. So what do we do with those individuals who choose to commit crime? Governments punish crime; they do not convert individuals.

First: The message to those in prison must be of redemption and change. History and experience reveal that the spiritual impact of Jesus Christ changes lives and makes a lasting change. Inmates who receive religious and spiritual instruction have a lower rate of recidivism. If in-



by William Goodman

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mates follow the instruction of the Bible, they will have a 100 percent success ratio.

Second: To deal with crime there needs to be a balanced criminal justice policy that includes punishment and real redemption. Prison overcrowding will continue as long as citizens lack moral persuasion. Change will come when criminals pay back their victims and own up to the responsibility of their choice. This can happen in community-based treatment centers or in-home incarceration. There has to be a way for criminals to learn to change. They must learn spirituality from someone somewhere to change, to be morally right.

Third: Our society must deal with our culture's crumbling moral consensus. No society has ever succeeded without a moral consensus, a shared belief about right and wrong, a common standard of truth. Without this consensus, the individual is abandoned to self-interest alone. As discipline and standards decrease in society, crime increases . . . this is our society.

While government punishes behavior and does not transform souls, religion and spirituality provide a moral impulse to do good, the power to be good. Historically, Christians have


brought positive redeeming practices and lifestyles to our society and still have the most important values for humankind.

In the interest of tolerance and freedom our society aggressively seeks to remove religious values from public life. Certain people/fear mixing church and state and complain about "having religion rammed down our throats!" They worry about being too religious while crime increases and prison reform fails. There is a continuing frustration with prison administrators and correctional professionals as they watch crime increase, prison populations increase, and recidivism increase. We all wring our hands and sigh: "What to do, what to do? Can we have a safe society to live in?"

Our free society depends not only on economic and political educational answers but also on the moral character of religion and spirituality that supports all areas of decent, safe, clean living. Jesus Christ was right when He said He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and anyone who follows His teachings has inner peace and is indeed free.

As we exclude God from society and God's influence on society; lower, reduce, and remove moral standards; and daily champion the bad, evil actions of citizens in books, movies, and TV, we will reap the social whirlwind we have at present.

The inmate who admits to himself, another person, and God the nature of his wrong; lets God remove those wrongs; and daily lets the righteousness of God be his righteousness, will be changed and improve society.

Righteousness increases in society as more people become righteous. As we become more righteous, we have a safer, crime-free society. Shouldn't we all live for this? 

The Untapped Source

by Dennis L. King

Pastor, Potsdam Church of the Nazarene, Potsdam, N.Y.

Two tents dramatically altered the course of Billy Graham's ministry.

The first tent housed the services for the young evangelist's crusade in Los Angeles during the fall of 1949. Under his anointed preaching, hundreds of people walked the sawdust trail and found Christ. The enormous impact of the meetings thrust Graham into the national limelight.

The second tent, a much smaller one, was set up adjacent to the first. While huge crowds pressed into the large tent, a little group of believers met in the second tent to pray during the services. According to observer Armin Gesswein, the band of praying people "stormed the gates of heaven for God to . . . pour out His Spirit in fresh power, anoint Billy Graham continually with the Spirit in his preaching and for conviction of sin and many conversions to Christ." Gesswein concluded that the smaller tent "held the secret of the wonderful

power of the Holy Spirit displayed in the big tent."¹

The tale of two tents demonstrates an important truth: behind every spiritual success in ministry is a supporting cast of intercessors. Is it any wonder that at many of Graham's crusades, one can still find a small prayer tent where a faithful band gathers to pray for him while he preaches?

Every pastor needs two "tents." The first one is where he² performs his public ministry, whether it be in the role of preaching, teaching, counseling, or administrating. The second tent represents the behind-the-scenes people who are praying for his ministry. Without the faithful intercession that takes place in the second tent, a pastor cannot expect to reach maximum spiritual productivity in the first.

Yet many pastors attempt to carry out their God-given tasks on their own, without giving thought to their

need of others to pray for them. Their ministry becomes so action-oriented that little attention is given to the hidden source of true Kingdom effectiveness. As E. M. Bounds writes, "The true preacher, next to the cultivation of the spirit and fact of prayer in himself . . . covets with a great covetousness the prayers of God's people."³

No less a spiritual leader than the apostle Paul understood his need for personal intercession. Time after time in his letters he requests prayer for himself and his ministry. Listen to his appeal:

"Join me in my struggle by praying to God for me" (Rom. 15:30).

"Keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me" (Eph. 6:18-19).

"Pray that I may proclaim [the mystery of Christ] clearly, as I should" (Col. 4:4).

"Brothers, pray for us" (1 Thess. 5:25).

Paul understood his dependence on the prayers of God's people if his ministry was to reach its full potential. He was not afraid to ask for those prayers. If that was true of Paul, it should be no less true of God's servants today. However, many church leaders are hesitant to request this kind of intercession. The reasons for this reluctance may be many, but they can perhaps be isolated to these:

Ignorance

The thought may never occur to a pastor that he needs the prayers of his people. Much has been written about the relationship of prayer to pastoral ministry, but the discussion usually concerns a pastor's own prayer life. The Christian leader might assume that his prayers are enough. While the intercession of others can never substitute for a pastor's personal devotional life, Scripture seems to indicate that both kinds of prayer are needed.



Other pastors may be unaware of the nature of spiritual conflict that they face. If leading the church is a purely human endeavor, then problems can be resolved by sheer determination or creative ingenuity. But if the real battle is "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world" (Eph. 6:12), then intercessory prayer is an essential weapon. Thankfully, there seems to be a growing realization among clergy of the unseen spiritual factors that influence the work of the Kingdom.

Pride

It is a humbling thing for a spiritual leader to request prayer from a congregation. Many believe that to confess need is to reveal weakness. Some may feel that it undermines people's confidence in his ministry. Bounds attacks this argument with powerful words: "[The Apostle] Paul did not feel that [his] urgent plea for prayer was to lower his dignity, lessen his influence, or depreciate his piety. What if it did? Let dignity go, let influence be destroyed, let his reputation be marred—he must have their prayers."⁴ But a pastor's pride can keep him from ever admitting his need for prayer.

Behind every spiritual success in ministry is a supporting cast of intercessors.

Overconfidence

Maybe the most subtle reason why more pastors don't seek out intercession is that they don't feel the need. Pastors who are especially gifted in areas such as preaching, teaching, or leadership can be easily tempted to rely upon their abilities to build the church. Much church growth literature, while perhaps not intending to, can lead to an overconfidence in human methods to advance God's kingdom. Dependence upon the Holy Spirit is replaced by attendance

graphs, growth seminars, and Sunday School contests. None of these activities are wrong, but they are devoid of spiritual power if they have not been initiated and sustained by prayer.

Fear

Some pastors shrink away from the vulnerability and accountability that is required if they are to receive effective intercession. If, for instance, I ask one of the men in my congregation to pray about my habit of overeating, I am in effect inviting him to come back a few days later and ask, "How's your eating problem going?" Sometimes it's easier to just keep my needs to myself!

Other church leaders may have a very real fear that if they reveal a personal need to someone in the congregation, that information may someday be used against them. This risk must be taken into consideration when considering what needs to share and with whom.

I am not suggesting that a pastor's life should be an open book, available for the scrutiny of everyone in the church. Nor am I saying that a pastor should ask for prayer about the most private areas of his life. Obviously, sharing of personal concerns requires great caution. But that does not rule out the fact that every pastor needs others to be praying for his public ministry, moral integrity, and physical and emotional well-being.

Evidence of personal intercession for church leaders abounds in Christian history. Few people realize that William Carey, the father of modern missions, had a bedridden, paralyzed sister who prayed for him every day for 50 years. A man by the name of Daniel ("Father") Nash assumed the role of Charles Finney's personal intercessor and traveled with him on his evangelistic journeys. While Finney preached, Nash would pray for him. The picture of a little saint named Pearl Goode hangs in the Billy Graham Center in tribute to her devoted intercession for the well-known evangelist.

I am fully convinced that such prayer support should not just be the privilege of a few renowned evangelists or missionaries, but the experience of every pastor. But how does a pastor go about receiving this kind of regular intercession? Willing laypeople are part of the equation, but the

pastor himself is the primary factor. Without his initiative, there is little chance that the people of his church will be mobilized to pray.

Many believe that to confess need is to reveal weakness.

So, how can a pastor receive personal intercession from his people?

A Pastor Needs to Be Human

Churchgoers will not see the need to pray for their pastor if he gives the appearance that he is isolated from the struggles common to humanity. While he has a unique calling, he wrestles with the same insecurities and limitations that ordinary people do. A pastor would be unwise to parade his imperfections before his congregation. However, when he allows the people to catch a glimpse of his humanness through sermon anecdotes or down-to-earth interaction, they learn that he is a real person who, like them, needs prayer.

A Pastor Must Express His Needs

He must be vulnerable if he wants others to pray for him. How this is done depends upon the individual. Occasionally during a Sunday morning service, I will share a personal or family need with the congregation. Why? For one thing, I genuinely need prayer. But I also want to model the transparency and openness that members of the Body should have toward one another.

Should pastors display spiritual need? Excessive confession of spiritual failure will undermine a pastor's leadership. But there have been times when I have responded to my own altar call because the Spirit was addressing me. When the people see that their pastor hungers for God the way they do, they will want to pray for him.

A Pastor Should Stress the Importance of Prayer

Before enlisting intercessors, the pastor must give high visibility to the importance of prayer in the life of the

church. Prayer must be shown to have a vital link with evangelism, world missions, and the spiritual health of the Body of Christ. If prayer seems to be an adjunct activity rather than the lifeblood of God's work, then people will not sense the need to intercede.

The pastor's most effective means of instilling a vision for prayer is the sermon. There is a wealth of biblical material on prayer that is waiting to be preached. Also, Sunday School classes provide an excellent forum for teaching about intercession. I have led two classes through Wesley Duewel's book *Touch the World Through Prayer*, with wonderful results. People must see that "prayer moves the arm that moves the world to bring deliverance down."

A Pastor Should Seek Out Intercessors

Whether this is done on a volunteer basis or by pastoral selection, a pastor will reap rich spiritual rewards by having a team that prays for him regularly. Pastor John Maxwell of the 3,000-member Skyline Wesleyan Church has a group of 100 men whom he calls "The Pastor's Prayer Partners."⁵ In my church of 175 people, I have developed a team of 12 men⁶ who are personal intercessors for me and my ministry. Numbers aren't important; quality prayer support is.

How can a pastor identify potential intercessors? One ready source is the people who commonly tell him, "I am praying for you." Other candidates are people who strongly believe in prayer, those who have a burden for the mission of the church, or those who have a strong desire to be used

by God. Sometimes the quietest members make the most effective intercessors.

Pastors who are especially gifted in areas such as preaching, teaching, or leadership can be easily tempted to rely upon their own abilities.

A Pastor Needs to Use His Intercessors

Communication is key. Peter Wagner writes, "When leaders are distant and indifferent toward their intercessors, many prayer warriors will eventually lay down their weapons, and both the leader and the intercessor come short of what God wants them to be."⁷ A pastor should have regular contact with his prayer team in order to share needs and give reports of answered prayer. In my local church I use quarterly prayer breakfasts, occasional letters, and frequent phone calls to keep my intercessors informed.

A pastor should also call his inter-

cessors together for times devoted just to prayer. John Maxwell has a small group of his partners pray with him before each Sunday morning service. Our church has converted a storage room into a "prayer closet" where intercessors meet to pray during the Sunday School hour for the upcoming service. Remember, intercessory prayer is only a meaningless phrase if there are no opportunities for it to take place.

After decades of writing on church growth, Peter Wagner makes this amazing statement: "The most underutilized source of spiritual power in our churches today is intercession for Christian leaders."⁸ I think he is right. Why should any pastor attempt to lead God's church by his own skill and energy when he has a huge, untapped source of divine enablement right within his own congregation?

Don't rob your people of the privilege of praying for your ministry. Discover the untapped source of intercessory prayer!

1. From Central New York Billy Graham Crusade newsletter (n.d.).

2. I believe that God calls both men and women into positions of Kingdom leadership. However, from this point on in the article I will refer to pastors with the third person masculine pronoun for the sake of grammatical clarity.

3. E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 84.

4. *Ibid.*, 87.

5. John Maxwell has published a resource called *The Pastor's Prayer Partners* (Donita, Calif.: Injoy Ministries, 1989), which provides helpful information on developing a prayer support group.

6. Women are just as effective intercessors as men, if not more so. The reason I chose 12 men for my prayer team is that I share with them on a personal level. That would be inappropriate for me to do with women other than my wife.

7. C. Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1992), 184.

8. *Ibid.*, 19.

Pontius' Puddle



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Ministry Under Siege

What does a pastor do when an unidentified enemy band begins circling in the darkness outside his protected camp? Does he strengthen the barriers, pull back into cover, and begin taking potshots at the circling foe? Or does he throw open his defenses and invite the enemy into his circle of defense with their weapons blazing?

That's the decision I had to make at a regular Tuesday night church board meeting in December two years ago. They weren't exactly enemies out of the darkness; they were five unhappy church members. And they weren't exactly carrying blazing darts, but some of the things they said hurt as much, and burned as deeply.

Here's my story and, interspersed with the story, the lessons I learned about handling myself during a time of siege.

My first instinct was to strengthen my fortress spiritually, draw within the protective confines of my call from God, and protect myself with the cloak of "Touch not mine anointed" (1 Chron. 16:22, KJV). My second instinct was to run for the hills. Neither of these ideas were good ideas, but they were natural responses to being under siege.

Your first instinct is seldom the best choice during a time of stress, especially when you're feeling attacked or threatened. If you're human (and aren't all pastors human above everything else?), you will feel compelled to defend yourself. Self-defense in the initial stages of a siege will often solidify the other person's position and justify his criticisms, at least in his own mind. It's best to pull back emotionally, remain calm, and make sure you understand fully what you're facing before taking any action.

I first learned that the troops were coming late that Tuesday afternoon when a lady phoned and said that she and her husband would like to visit the monthly church board meeting. I told her they were welcome, for all of our church board meetings were



by Bill O'Connor

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open to the membership if they wished to attend. When the couple arrived, they were accompanied by a third person. In short order, two others came in, and then two more. Five were present to express concerns. Two were present, they said, to observe. Obviously, like the troops massing at the outer perimeter of defense, those who were ready to do battle had found each other and decided that there was strength in numbers.

People seldom express their concerns directly one-on-one. They should, but they won't. It's one of the great frustrations of the ministry that the pastor often learns second-hand that "so and so is unhappy," but that so-and-so won't say so. When people find two or three others who share a similar concern, however, they become more courageous. Don't assume that two or three persons with concerns, or even a large group, represent a united front. They really aren't a band of well-trained assault troops. They are several individuals who have gathered together for support.

Now I understand that it was by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit that I decided to suspend the regular agenda to hear the concerns of our five visitors. Going against all my natural instincts, I invited one after the other to express their problems.

Like all grievances, some were legitimate; many were not. Some contained a grain of truth while others were unfounded. Some were situations that could be addressed and

problems that could be solved; others seemed to be concerns that had no direct answer, problems that were beyond solution—at least by me.

Most of the concerns expressed that night have been heard by pastors repeatedly. I didn't visit enough. Was 650 visits that year too few? Would 900 be too many? I hadn't paid attention to someone on a Sunday morning between Sunday School and worship service. How many people can you give direct, personal attention to in a 15-minute time span? I hadn't adequately met someone's emotional needs and his or her feelings were hurt. The worship services weren't inspirational enough. (For inspirational, read emotional.) Someone had come to see me about a problem, and I hadn't seemed sympathetic.

Some of these things go with the territory. No matter how much the pastor does in any area, there will always be someone who thinks he isn't doing enough. Sometimes it's a question of priorities or interpretation. Not all people see ministry in the same way. It does little good to argue the point, however. When people are feeling out of sorts with the pastor, it does no good to argue at all. The best thing you can do is to hear them out. Pray while you listen, and ask the Holy Spirit to add an extra measure of His spiritual fruit of self-control.

No two persons, except the couple who had initiated the visit to the church board meeting, were in agreement about their concerns. Each had his own; each was unrelated to the rest. There was no doubt that, together, they presented a strong front. What it all amounted to in summary was stated simply by one member who said, "Pastor, we think it's time for a change."

By the grace of God, I kept my cool. I answered but little, seeking instead to ask questions for the sake of clarification. Only the gracious Spirit of God kept me from answering back, from marshaling line after line of defense. I wanted so much to tell them

how unfair this was. And I wanted someone on the church board to speak up on my behalf. None did. The silence was so loud it hurt.

Listen. Then listen some more. Don't defend yourself; at least not until you've heard it all. Listen for what's behind the outward expression of concern. Do your best to hear what's coming from the heart. Even unfounded concerns are real to the person who holds them. And there can never be rational discussion, let alone healing, until everything has been said.

In a situation like this, don't expect your church board to defend you. They're likely more shocked than you are. Being human, like their pastor, they, too, want to pull back into the fortress and protect themselves. Though silent, most of them will stand with you later on when you need them most.

The session lasted for more than two hours. During the whole time, I felt that I was all alone with the enemy troops ever circling. I stood weaponless in the center, attacked from every side.

At the end of the meeting, everyone had been heard, but not everything had been said. I knew that. And I knew that I would have to be sure that every concern had been fully expressed and fully heard before any healing could take place. I fought off another inclination—to give my resignation and walk out of the board room—and I started the process of reconciliation.

Never make critical decisions when under pressure or stress. Give yourself time to regain perspective and think things through. You may not feel better, but you'll feel different in the morning.

Never assume that you've heard the full story after one expression of concern. Often what you've heard is simply the outward manifestation of a much larger inward problem. The conflicts that rise between people may focus on performance, but they usually begin on the inside with some wounding of the spirit.

Before everyone went home that evening, we reached agreement that I would have further conversations with each of the five persons who had expressed concerns. We had also heard on several occasions during the



course of the evening that "others weren't happy," or that "they also have concerns." I made it clear that I would talk to anyone who wished to identify himself and state his problem! I could not, I said, do anything about "them" if people chose not to identify themselves. I asked one of the church board members, whom I knew to be objective and skilled in relationships, to sit in on our discussions. The meeting was closed with prayer for divine help and guidance, then I drove home with a heavy heart.

Refuse to deal with the nebulous "they" or "them" who inhabit so many expressions of concern. Such persons may exist or they may not. Even if they're real, you can't do a thing about it until "they" personally step forward and say, "Pastor, I have a problem." Trying to solve the problems of "them" is like dancing with shadows. You don't have anything to get your arms around.

When you do have someone of substance to talk to, it is seldom a good idea to talk alone. Not, at least, after the problems have become public knowledge. Though it's wonderful to trust other people, it is sensible to have a neutral person on hand who can act as a mediator and keep future interpretations of the conversation honest. When dealing with

problems, it is wise to have one or more church board members on hand for the good of all concerned.

Christmas was three weeks away. This wasn't the best Christmas present I'd ever received. It cast such a shroud over my mood that I'm afraid my wife and children were affected too.

During the weeks that followed, everyone acted as if nothing had happened. But we all could feel the tension when we met in the hallways. I felt like the commander who knew that the enemy troops had withdrawn from the battle only to plan

another attack; emotionally I was still under siege. It was time to get on with the peace talks.

Though a brief cooling off period may sometimes be necessary, it is wise to begin dealing with the issues as quickly as possible. Once the tensions that were previously beneath the surface have been released, they need immediate attention. The sense of siege may increase if the identified problems are not dealt with swiftly.

The week following the church board meeting, I met for lunch with two of the five and visited a third at his place of business. Conversations lasted two and three hours. Repeatedly I asked whether there was anything else. Did I understand what they were saying, I asked, repeating or rephrasing their concerns. When I felt I had heard it all, or as much as I was likely to hear, I offered my defense where defense was needed. And I suggested solutions, compromises, adjustments, or the freedom to disagree amicably. Gradually I felt the sense of danger lessening. The constriction in my chest began to relax. I could breathe again, though I was still aware of danger.

It is important that people feel they have really been heard. You must listen actively. Rephrase their concerns and then ask if you have understood correctly. Ask questions that encourage further revelation and discussion. Avoid being defensive or stating your own positions until you feel everything is out in the open. Then, with all the facts

and feelings on the table, and with as much love as possible, begin to negotiate some new understandings and expectations. You can't solve every problem. Do your best, however, to come to some agreement with which both sides can live. Don't be afraid to compromise. The best solution is usually the one in the middle, toward which both sides must move.

A meeting was scheduled to give "them" the opportunity of identifying themselves and making their grievances known. It was announced as a time for discussing the entire program of the church and its direction for the future. Worship, pastoral ministry, leadership style, everything, the congregation was told, was open for discussion. The five who had come to the church board meeting were specifically asked to invite others who might have problems or needs to be addressed.

When the meeting began there were less than 20 persons present. Those present were my associate pastor and myself, four church board members at my request, the five visitors from the original church board meeting, 2 others who had an interest in discussing worship, and 4 who had come to support their pastor by their presence. "They" failed to put in an appearance.

As a result of the discussions that night, we did make some changes in our worship service, largely to satisfy the needs of three persons. One of them, whose concerns had centered in worship at the church board meeting, subsequently left the church. Even though we tried to address his desires for a more spontaneous, inspiring (read emotional) style of worship, we couldn't go far enough in that direction and still meet the needs of our many senior members who preferred a more traditional service.

Don't solve one problem by creating others. Make what changes you can. Offer reasonable adjustments. Never sacrifice the good of many for the needs of one or two. Sometimes we need to realize that, given the makeup of any local congregation, it is impossible for some people's needs to be met in that setting.

When people really can't be happy in your church, it may be the best thing for them to move to a place where happiness abounds.

Christmas itself stood in the way of a talk with the couple whose concerns were the greatest, who had initiated my sense of being under siege. Soon after the first of the new year, however, we got together and spent almost four hours talking things out. Once again, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and with the objective help of my church board member facilitator, I spent most of the time listening. I did my best to hear every nuance of complaint, every detail of concern.



Your first instinct is seldom the best choice during an attack.



At the end of our time together, having made notes on everything that was said, I addressed those problems that could be addressed. I offered explanations where explanations were valid. I admitted my mistakes where I felt I had made some. I asked for understanding and for forgiveness where it was needed. And I made it clear that there were some needs I could not meet, some wishes I could not or would not fulfill. I would not, for instance, devote another night in my schedule to visitation when the church already claimed four nights out of seven. My family was more important to me than that.

Always be honest with people. If you've made mistakes, admit them. If there are things you can and should do differently, make the changes. If you've harmed someone in some way, ask for forgiveness.

But don't compromise your principles or your ministry. Where you cannot change, say so. Where personal integrity or conviction must be maintained, stand your ground. Where other priorities are paramount, state your case firmly. Seek understanding, not complete agreement. Seek accommodation, not perfect unanimity on every issue.

When we left that session, it was with some new understandings and some agreements about what we could and could not expect from each other. We had negotiated some reasonable expectations with which we could all live. We prayed together, hugged one another, and asked and gave forgiveness. I went home that night, almost two months after that first Tuesday in December, feeling that the siege had lifted. The assault troops had returned to their camp, and the program could begin moving forward again.

When I left the church for another area of ministry nearly two years later, it was with a profound sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Had I followed my instincts that first evening, I would have resigned at the worst possible time. I would have lost five friends who became strong supporters of my ministry in the months that followed. By the grace of God, and with the constant calming, directing presence of the Holy Spirit, I had survived the siege with openness and vulnerability instead of withdrawn self-protection and defense.

The people of the church aren't really an enemy attacking out of the darkness, and the pastor isn't really a commanding officer under siege. We're people who live together and who must learn to negotiate and adjust our needs and expectations like members of a family, each of whom is unique and special. Not all problems can be solved. Not all needs can be met. Not all expectations can be fulfilled. But we can refuse to pull back into the fortress, calling instead for a family council in which the concerns can be heard and reasonable compromises reached. That's how we keep the family whole and healthy.



Good Advice in the Early Years

One of the privileges as members of the family of God is being recipient of godly, caring advice. Early in my pastoral ministry, I came under severe criticism from a couple in my congregation. It was devastating to me. I turned to a veteran pastor for advice and counsel.

Rev. Bob Weathers, neighboring pastor, listened to my "cry for help." Without agreeing with my critics—which he probably could have done—he listened with empathy and care. I shall never forget his advice to me: "Never let the word of a person be the last word on your ministry." It was just what I needed at that moment. It put my dilemma in perspective and gave me courage to go on. I owe a great debt to Rev. Bob Weathers, whose good advice in my early years kept me in ministry. Thanks, Bob.

I have had occasion over the years to draw strength and encouragement from Bob's advice. I have thought a great deal about his statement. Let me share some of my thoughts with you.

First, "Never let the word of a person be the last word on your ministry" is good advice because no one has all the facts about whatever it is they are criticizing. Often I remind congregations and church boards that the pastor must see the entire church and consider every person in planning, decision making, and responses. But laypersons often see things in a one-dimensional way. With limited knowledge and understanding, therefore, a person's word may or may not be valid. At any rate, your word or mine is never the last word on a person's ministry. We need to know this.

Second, we need to remember that a lot of things can impact a person's view of one's ministry. What I did not understand in those



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early years—but Bob knew so well—was that often people have their own agendas. They have dreams too. Often some of our severest critics are good people who want to see the work of God progress as much as we do. So it is easy for good people to interpret a pastor's plan or dream or methods as destroying their dream. Thus they lash out with words that are judgmental, critical, and condemning. What we need to remember is that all of us are pursuing the same things, but down different tracks. Pastor, be encouraged; their words are not the bottom line of your ministry.

Third, often the critical words on a pastor's ministry stem from unprocessed anger, a disappointment, some personal failure, or a heartbreak. Out of such hurts, people lash out at others because the reservoir gets to overflowing. Often these people are mad at God for some event or experience. The one who gets the venom is the pastor whom people perceive as God's representative. Again, if we can remember that their overflow is not the definitive word about our ministry, we will survive the crossfire.

Fourth, some people are critical by nature. I remember an incident a number of years ago, leaving a board meeting where the pastor had been

under the gun of a person's attack and criticism. It was so shocking, for the church was growing and all seemed to be going well. The son of the individual attacking the pastor followed me to my car and, with tears in his eyes, said: "Mom is just critical by nature. Please understand. She is a good woman, but it seems she must always find something to criticize. Please pray for her." I put my arms around the son, and we prayed together. What a tragic story of so many who have developed the habit of criticism and faultfinding. Pastor, be encouraged—such do not have the final word on your ministry.

Fifth, pastor, be encouraged—God has the best and final word on your ministry. He has called you into service. He will equip and encourage you to serve, to minister, to love, and to care. It will mean, on occasion, that we will have to bring our fractured self-image to God and let it be bathed in the presence and Word of the One who called and will sustain us.

There will be times when you and I must bring the thoughts and words of our critics to God in order to get His perspective. I think it is always valid for us to ask, "What can we learn from this?" "Do they have a point?" "Are they right?" "What is going on here?" We must allow that God may be saying something to us through the ordeal. It is dangerous to assume that every critic is wrong. Somewhere in the process we must be able to distinguish the bottom line and learn from our worst experiences.

Pastor, be encouraged. A person's word on your ministry is never the final word. But God's word and guidance sustains, strengthens, and stretches us for a loving, caring ministry. Thanks, Bob Weathers, for advice that has lasted a lifetime. ✠

Helping Those Who Do Respond

by O. Dean Martin

Author

People need informed assistance, and the fact that so many of us do not know what to do is possibly the chief inhibition from extending invitations.

Many of us in noncreedal churches are like the minister I know who said to me, "I wouldn't know what to do or say if someone should respond to my invitation." Or, we are afraid of being caught in the bind of the Ohio minister who once told me that, shortly after his own conversion, he extended his first public invitation. This particular invitation, sequential to the message, asked for a public acknowledgment of surrender or commitment. When the invitation was given, a man came forward obviously moved, according to my friend, and deeply in earnest about the condition of his life. My friend walked down from the chancel, shook his hand, talked with him about the weather, and invited him to return to his seat. As this inquirer passed through the front door after the hymn he said, "Pastor, I still need help." The pastor replied, "I know you do, and so do I. I'll find out what I can and get back to you." Some of us are hesitant to extend invitations because we would not know what to do if anyone did respond. Still others react with misplaced hostility. Yet others cover up with quasi-indifference. Others overcompensate and move into the safe haven of polarity by asserting non-thinking, insensitive mandates.

Like the congregation itself, we the proclaimers also come from different places, manifesting different needs, epitomizing varying compassions and concerns. But, whatever our background or orientation, each one of us looks at the "holy moment" with one thing in common: fear—that is, awe. If the desire to run away and hide is

not lurking somewhere in the conscious or unconscious mind, then the proclaimer probably does not understand the gravity of the situation.

Let us make an honest attempt to find practical help in the awesome responsibility of assisting the inquirer. Let us look at the subject under three basic headings: (1) problems and misconceptions facing the inquirer, (2) difficulties to be faced by the counselor, and (3) possible approaches.

Problems and Misconceptions Facing the Inquirer

When a person comes forward at the end of a service, or enters my office during the week, or comes by my home in the evening—whenever and wherever he or she may choose to accept my invitation to respond to my message—I must never naively assume that everything is as it appears on the surface. This is not just a simple human being facing a moment of truth with God. This is a complex person struggling with, or maybe against, fears or preconceptions that may be rooted in the present or, as often as not, may go back deep into early childhood. Deep childhood bruises may be rendering this person incapable of believing in a loving, forgiving God. Present complexities may find expression in fear of what this surrender may mean to one's lifestyle or future plans. The individual may simply be concerned, as many are, about the question, Will I be able to live this commitment?

Inquirers come with a bedeviled mixture of motives and wandering motivations. They come not only needing help right now but also having needed help long before this particular confronting invitation. They come to me as pastor, not needing an amateur psychiatrist who can help "reassimilate a personality." They come needing the assistance of a

friend who will help them gingerly or courageously cross the bridge of faith in Christ. I must be this friend, but it will help me in the task to realize some of the more common problems and misconceptions that are brought to this holy moment.

Many people come toward faith with a very poor image or understanding of the true nature of God. It is not information they have, but misinformation. It is not conception but misconception. If this is true, they will need help in the response to the invitation because their childhood image of God, derived from parental models in childhood, is inadequate if not destructive. Persons, for instance, who have never had anyone in their lives whom they could trust, will find it most difficult to "trust" God. Others of us have never really been loved. Others of us grew up in homes where forgiveness for anything was hard to come by, or virtually nonexistent. Perhaps our inquirer is oriented toward a concept of God that J. B. Phillips refers to in his marvelous little book *Your God Is Too Small* as "the resident policeman." Many people I talk with about a personal faith have yet another imagery problem. They were raised to be so fearful of making mistakes—getting "blasted" if they did—that they are very reluctant to enter into a relationship with yet another "Parent" who may not give them a fair chance to attempt, fail, learn, and then attempt again. Still others may have trouble responding to deeper commitment because they were raised in a home where nothing was expected of them. They were, are, and always will be perfect in the eyes of their parents, and they have no capacity to understand the need for change.

In personal counseling in my office, at the chancel rail, or at general

prayer time in the pews following the message, I have found it extremely helpful to be aware of the part early childhood orientations play in the conscious or subconscious mind of the inquirer. Often a person can be helped to accept the real God of the universe while forever, and for good reason, remaining unable to respond to the god of childhood, environmental, or sociological orientations.

The minister who would be decisive and invitational should get in touch with this dynamic. I found great help in this area from J. B. Phillips' book and also from Hugh Missildine's two excellent books, *Your Inner Child of the Past* and *Your Inner Conflicts and How to Solve Them* (Simon and Schuster).

If the desire to run away and hide is not lurking somewhere in the conscious or unconscious mind, then the proclaimer probably does not understand the gravity of the situation.

Another very real problem brought to the moment of counseling concerns the misconceptions surrounding the imagery of conversion itself. I often encourage individuals to read E. Stanley Jones' book *Conversion* for help with their imagery. All of us have images of how "it" happens, what will happen, how we will feel, and so on. Simply if not simplistically stated, most misconceptions in imagery surrounding the time of surrender (or

precisely *how* we think we *must* respond to an evangelistic invitation *if* it is to be *authentic*) can be traced to how "my brother did it," or my mom, or Uncle John or Aunt Clarabell, and so on. Thus, driven by our inner preconceptions, if not pressured by overt representatives of specific piano lids, we shuffle off into the unknown, or more often than not, refuse to shuffle, because "they" are really not "us," and no one has yet informed us that we do not have to have identical experiences.

Yet another point of assistance often needed by the inquirer, and another important argument for sequential invitations, is help in isolating specifically that which he or she wants God to do in or for his or her life. The nature of the two previous disorientations, the inquirer's understanding of both God and conversion, often makes it very difficult for him or her to know what he or she needs, and in times like this, a caring and objective friend can be of immeasurable help. The person wanting to respond to the invitation not only must be helped to isolate specific need but also must be helped to make a clear decision as to whether or not he or she is really looking for a deeper life. The motives of the seeker can be just as untested and disruptive as can be that of the proclaimer.

For instance, many times the response of the inquirer will actually be as "conscience sop." We want something to happen to us that will help us "not feel quite so bad or guilty." Christian conversion, the most important and highest form of evangelistic inviting, certainly possesses the important ingredient of peace and well-being, but feeling better may not be the true aim of the sermon shared. In reality, feeling better would be but the by-product of surrendering one's life to Christ. Or, as Cannon Byron Green of Great Britain once said, many inquirers also need help because "they seek a 'blessing' instead of the Blessor."

One should indeed expect a sense of joy in forgiveness, but it is sheer folly to seek the product instead of the Producer. The counselor may need to stand ready to help the inquirer understand that the Producer will bring the product along. The one who has responded to my invitation may need to hear the words, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and *his*

righteousness; and these things will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33, KJV, emphasis added).

They come
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Christ.

Commensurate with this awareness, many inquirers of our generation are called the now generation. We call them the yuppie generation (young urban professionals) because every time anything new comes along and someone asks, "Do you need this?" their first and immediate answer is, "Yup!"

We are constantly seeing people in our congregations who have gone after all there is to get but are now asking, "Isn't there more? This doesn't make it! There's got to be something else!" Consequently, they do not come toward faith because they need to be *obedient* to the cross of Christ but because they want what Christ can do for them. They want an immediate and satisfying walk in the rose garden of faith. And, of course, ours is not the first generation to mistake God for the gardener (John 20:15). But our generation is the group to whom we proclaim the eternal truths of God, and as the proclaimer, I need to help inquirers understand precisely what it is they are after. Do they want the product or the Producer? In this clarifying role I can help inquirers appreciate that the new life in Christ will have its great moments of joy and unspeakable beauty.

Still other seekers are looking for deliverance from various hells of all descriptions, sizes, and expressions, here or eternally. Yet other people are inadvertently seeking greater conformity with their Western culture.

Whatever it is we seek, we are not apt to find it until we do two things: (1) **realize that what we are seeking is not what we ought to be seeking, and (2) zero in on what it is we really should be after.** Some people call it intentionality. Wesley put it this way: "We must be singular or be damned." Most of us remember this important insight from the early teen years when we walked into our closets, declared our favorite shirt was nowhere to be found, only to have our mother walk in and put her hand on it immediately! Our feeble response was, "Well, it wasn't there when I looked!" Mom was deliberate, and we were dallying. One of the problems or misconceptions facing the inquirer is the need to be intentional, or at the very least, have someone help them find this important key: the need to be deliberate.

**When we finally
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God's all.**

As you might remember from your own experience, another area where the inquirer gets derailed is over the general subject and meaning of the word *surrender*. Surrendering to someone or something is a very intimidating concept for many people. This is particularly true of people who have made previous surrenders and have been badly burned. Integrity in surrender is a scary thought for most of us. Unconditional surrender is the key to any relationship.

Another of E. Stanley Jones' books, *Victory Through Surrender*, contains much practical and significant advice concerning the need to explain and better understand surrender. In his book Dr. Jones explores the logic of surrender. He explores it as a paradox to our understandings of reality, and he helps us see that no person either fully accepts, or is fully accepted, un-

less he or she gives all. Dr. Jones points out, when we finally give our all, we then find the greatest freedom, the freedom to receive God's all.

Another misconception that often comes with the seeker to the moment of truth is the rampant misconception of our day that usually finds expression in one of two forms: (a) **that one must earn salvation**, that one is not "worthy" and decidedly "not deserving." The seeker should be directed to the fundamental tenet of Ephesians (2:8), "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (NRSV). Or, (b) the very opposite position, namely, that **nothing is required**. Here the counselor may need to expose the seeker to such words as *surrender*, *restitution* (a very important word so often overlooked in contemporary evangelical theology), *resolution*, or perhaps just the simple word *discipline*. In both a and b, people often need help in distinguishing between "earning" and "working." We do not earn our way in, but the fruit of our belonging is the work we do for others.

Many people fail to realize the forgiveness of God because they cannot bring themselves to forgive themselves! God has forgiven them. The grace of God has been operative in their lives. They have been responsive to God through faith, but they fail to appreciate this reality because they sustain a subconscious desire to "make amends" by self-flagellation. It is a common, fruitless endeavor. These people must be helped to see that they are not more pious or righteous than God. If God can forgive them, they ought to be able to forgive themselves and not waste precious energy on self-punishment.

These are a few of the primary problems and misconceptions brought by all of us to the point of encounter with God. This list is not inclusive but does pinpoint the most evident and persistent among our preconceptions, poor orientations, and superficial emotional baggage.

Difficulties to Be Faced by the Counselor

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned the one common ingredient, fear (awe), which lurks in everyone assisting people in their exploration of faith. The counselor must recognize and ap-

preciate the universality of fear as it relates to any tremendously important task. Like the soldier, the surgeon, the marriage counselor, or the air traffic controller, to understand your critical task is to expect and even appreciate this predictable element. Those persons who are fortunate enough to have a job that is critical and exacting, must learn to live with fear. They find it invigorating, enlivening, stimulating, and important to peak performance. No task is more important or more critical than the ministry of invitation. Thank God for it. Accept and utilize the emotions that come with it!

**We do not earn
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belonging is the
work we do
for others.**

If, as someone has said, "courage is fear that has said its prayers" and, if productive people involved in important work must live beyond what brings comfort, we need to consider what it means to be a *channel* of God's grace.

Unfortunately we often see ourselves as "the one" who has to "produce." We busy ourselves learning "how to win people to Christ," getting the right technique down to a fine art. We concern ourselves with results. Again, Spurgeon had it right, "God has not called me to be successful but to be faithful."

We are channels of grace, not grace itself. God does not need us for techniques, but God does need us as a thoroughfare! God wants to move through our lives to bring truth to light in other persons' lives according to their need, their willingness, their understanding.

In the early days of my ministry, as I tried to learn how to "win people" to Christ, I read a little book titled *Soul Winning*. The book instructs the reader on how to "get" the person. It teaches how to systematically manipulate per-

sons into "decision," how to get them to "do the right thing." I quickly learned, thank God, that "winning" a person is not the point! The task of the inviter is to be a loving and caring channel for God to touch someone's life. I appreciate the thought from Paul found in the dedication of this book (2 Cor. 4:1-2, TLB): "It is God himself, in his mercy, who has given us this wonderful work . . . , and so we never give up. We do not try to trick people into believing—we are not interested in fooling anyone. We never try to get anyone to believe that the Bible teaches what it doesn't. All such shameful methods we forego." I, as the inviter, must regularly be reminded that I am not the champion of God in the world; rather, I am God's channel to the world.

Many counselors still face the difficult task of assuming responsibility for winning people. I believe this is a harmful position both for the counselor and the seeker. To deal with this, I must constantly and consciously remind myself that **(a) God is much more willing to help this person than I; (b) God knows better how to reach the individual than I ever shall; and (c) these two principles can be brought together only as God has open and willing channels available to use.**

Spurgeon had it right, "God has not called me to be successful but to be faithful."

Counselors, or the inviter, must also be conscious of yet a third area of personal difficulty: wanting people to start from where the counselor feels they ought to be.

My family and I have done much camping over the years. We have thoroughly enjoyed hooking up our trailer and heading for woods, open sky, peace and quiet. One thing I learned was that no matter how

much you may want that trailer to go with you, no matter how sincere you are in your desire, no matter how well you may drive your car, you have to back all the way to where the trailer is to get it hooked up. Helping people in their inquiry after God is very much the same.

We cannot hook up with people and take them with us on a great journey if we do not go where they are and hook up where they live. That is, we dare not assume that they are like the last person we were privileged to help, or that "they should know more" about theology or faith than they do, or that they ought to be further down the road of Christian understanding, or that they are not ready, or whatever. Be sure to start with them where they are, and not where you are or where you think they ought to be.

Similar to this difficulty is another problem area, not so much for the inquirer but for the inviter: the tendency to overfeed. People can digest only so much. Therefore, the counselor must be careful not to demonstrate his or her own profound knowledge of faith and must carefully and prayerfully give to the seeker that which will nourish the need *for now* and thus can be assimilated without causing him or her to strangle. Or, as Paul reminds us in First Corinthians, give them the sincere milk of the Word and not strong meat, for now.

Another great difficulty facing most counselors for those people acting in response to invitation is developing the fine art of listening. I often find it most difficult to actually listen to people because I am anxiously looking for an opening to pour in profound utterances and clever sayings. Listening in a caring framework is mandatory. In his wonderful book *Ask Me to Dance*, Bruce Larson relates Paul Tournier's philosophy concerning this need. Dr. Tournier felt that people had misunderstood Jesus when He talked about being fishers of men. "After all," he said, "no one wants to be caught by somebody else. So I sit by the bank without a fishing pole in my hand and enjoy the scenery. Fish seem to sense that I'm not trying to catch them. They come to me just to talk about themselves and about life. Then from time to time, some do get caught by Jesus Christ, and I am more surprised than they are."

Finally, be available! Harried people cannot relate to hurried people!

The task of the inviter is being a loving and caring channel for God to touch someone's life.

Joseph Bayly has written a fascinating little book titled *The Gospel Blimp*. It is the story of some well-intentioned Christians who want to reach one particular man for Christ. Their main strategy rests in the purchasing of a big blimp, the Gospel Blimp. They finally raise enough money to buy the thing, and then they begin hovering over the victim's house, dropping gospel tracts and calling out scripture verses through an overly loud amplification system. One day, however, the targeted neighbor comes over in deep distress to ask for help from one of the main blimp operators. The blimp leader dismisses the victim because he must hurry down to the hangar for a committee meeting to discuss planting flowers and shrubbery around the blimp hangar. After all, the blimp man reasons, how can we "reach" anyone if we continue to fly our blimp out of a hangar area that is not properly landscaped? The golden opportunity to reach the man is missed all because no one had time to do the very thing they were supposed to be doing!

This marvelously irritating story reminds us, the Gospel Blimp operatives, that we must constantly reassess our priorities and put *people* first. Everything else, except the man standing at your door asking for or needing your time, is daisy planting. Be available!

The invitational counselor does bring these and other difficulties to the moments and days after the sermon. Each of the skills gained from other sources of counseling can be brought to your invitational preaching. Here we can remember one important rule.

God can do more with our committed failure than with our uncommitted perfection. Therefore, let us take our bumps and blemishes out into the world, and let God use us. Let us live beyond our comfort zone and be a channel through which God can pour out love and grace to a needy world.

Possible Approaches

I write this section because I meet ministers all across America who need some *specific* reference point for further evaluation and assessment of this important and practical subject. My hesitation in suggesting possible approaches is based on concern over my lack of knowledge, the desire not to perpetuate manipulative methodology, and a fear of oversimplification. However, my motivation to include it is much simpler and much stronger. Many of us want help at this point regardless of inherent pitfalls. Most of us have enough sense to use suggestions rather than allow suggestions to use us.

Take a look at some possibilities for approaching people who are making inquiry based on an invitational sermon. The following suggestions are primarily oriented toward someone who may be seeking a personal conversion experience. While invitation, if truly sequential to the message, could be an open door for any decision, one subject must serve as an example. Nothing is more important in ministry than extending the decision to accept Christ.

**The counselor
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1. Ask inquirers why they have come and what they want God to do in their lives. After they have dug as deeply as they can, give them time to pray in their own words concerning their need.

2. A second but more hazardous approach is to help the inquirer "word a prayer." I mention this because in this day of an incredible lack of knowledge about God, what someone else has called "agnosticism," I am finding more and more people who want to pray but simply do not "know the right words." I can spend a lot of time lecturing them on the fact that there are no "right" words, or I can spend a little time helping them word their prayer.

The hazards of putting words into a person's mouth can be greatly reduced by prayerfully listening and caring. After you spend some time with the individual, in a listening and caring attitude, you should be able to assist that person in putting the essence of his or her concern into words.

Often, for instance, in a quest for conversion, I will ask the person responding to my invitation to "pray the following prayer," or "use your own words along the following line." The prayer is often as follows (pausing between sentences for them to repeat or reword): "Dear God, I do not pretend to understand all that I am doing. I do not come claiming to be deserving, or pretending to be worthy. You know I have a long way to go and need Your help in getting there. Right now, therefore, as an act of simple faith, I confess my failures before You and, in an act of intelligent worship, I do receive Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord. With faith I thank You! Amen."

A worded prayer, whatever the subject of surrender, after much listening and caring, can be very helpful to many people.

3. Another option is to show inquirers a verse from the Bible relating to their quest; for example, 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (KJV). This "written guarantee" can be of real help to many people. Then, help them appreciate the integrity of God. God offered forgiveness! God's promise will not be broken.


4. If it is "feeling" they are after, and they are making no headway because they cannot feel God's presence, encourage them to truly "take God at his word," to accept love and forgiveness by faith. En-

courage them to contract with God. That is, encourage them to lay their lives in God's hands and consider the transaction (of faith) done. I have seen many who walked away in faith, in due time and season walk ultimately into feeling and assurance. But it is imperative to help them understand that the starting point is not feeling but faith! Seek *first* the kingdom of God, and God's righteousness, and all other things will come as they may!

**Harried people
cannot relate to
hurried people!**

5. Be sure to give inquirers practical guidance concerning the next few days. Help them understand that what goes up must come down, and faith feelings or emotions are not exceptions to that rule. If they do experience high feelings of assurance, peace, or ecstasy, they must count on counterbalancing moments of emotional recovery (again, called postadrenaline depression). Help them appreciate both the normality and the necessity of this kind of healthy emotional maintenance.

Help them appreciate and be prepared for doubts, temptations, and low moments that would be predictable in any new undertaking. Encourage them to become involved in private prayer, prayer groups, corporate worship, and Bible study. Help them to appreciate the need to develop and maintain personal devotional habits and public involvement in Christian fellowship. Help them understand the importance of good habits and healthy discipline as vital aids to a growing and healthy faith.

6. Where you can, give them personal follow-up in their new decision. Visit them in the early days following their choice, especially in the case of newborn infants in Christ. Encourage them. Pray with and for them. 

Taken from *Involve: Preaching for Response*, by O. Dean Martin, Pathways to Church Growth Series (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1987). Reproduced by permission.

Pain in the Pulpit— Panic in the Pew

We sat in stunned silence.
“Not another one.”
“It couldn’t be!”
“Are you sure?”
“I never thought it would happen to them.”

But it does—with frightening regularity. I speak of ongoing, destructive church conflict.

A month seldom passes that we do not hear of pain in the pulpit, panic in the pew, or pandemonium in the parish.

While this phenomena is not new, it seems to be escalating. Within recent months, we have heard the following:

CHURCH “A”

Advancing with exceptional growth. Suddenly we hear of intense internal conflict, loss of membership, and staff resignations.

CHURCH “B”

Becoming prominent in program and community impact. Then, immorality is found in its leadership! The body convulses and disbands.

CHURCH “C”

Carrying a large debt. The pastor is



by Robert Tauber

*Pastor, River Bend Church of God,
Saskatoon, Sask.*

enthusiastic and optimistic. When the congregation fails to keep up his visionary aspirations, judgmental reaction brings division and dispersion.

CHURCH “D”

Dynamic! It came to birth during the revival emphasis of an evangelist turned pastor. When the euphoria of early success waned, the leadership left and the congregation dispersed.

CHURCH “E”

Established with a long history of stability, sound doctrine, and successful programs. Then, angry exchanges between pastors, polarization of peo-

ple, and leadership burnout. More hard feelings and casualties followed.

CHURCH “F”

Famous for its innovative outreach and seeker-sensitive services. Now it is faced with the exodus of a significant number of longtime adherents.

CHURCH “G”

Going through change following the resignation of a high profile pastor. The adjustment to new leadership and philosophical differences culminate in deep division.

Enough!

No, it is not all negative. There are healthy churches in our area. A fresh sense of trust and cooperation exists among leaders. Yet the impact of unresolved conflict leaves a festering scar on the Body of Christ.

The world deserves to ask for visible evidence that:

“The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men” (Rom. 14:17-18).

Sadly, disunity elicits God’s displeasure and humankind’s repudiation.

A Personal Journey

My personal ministry journey covered 25 years of relative tranquility. Seven years ago, I accepted a pastorate that appeared to be on a progressive pattern of growth and vibrancy. The congregation’s philosophy of ministry seemed in keeping with mine. Growth necessitated a new facility with excellent potential. Adjustments were difficult but not abnormal.

However, early signs of unrest refused to dissipate. They came mainly from a group of highly motivated, idealistic, talented individuals—“movers and shakers” of the church. We eager-



ly anticipated an ongoing relationship of joint participation in the vision of growth and expansion already established.

The passing of time failed to resolve the issues of discontent. Positions were firmly fixed; attitudes were unbending. As evidence of division expanded, so did our efforts at negotiation, communication, and reconciliation. It was to no avail. Outside efforts at mediation only compounded the confusion. After three years of intense duress, I resigned. In the aftermath, others left the church. Firmly held positions of authority were vacated. Coalitions relocated.

We learned many lessons through this heartrending experience. There was much we would like to have done differently. In retrospect, the issue of control seemed to be at the heart of the conflict, as was the case in many of the previous illustrations. With its deep-seated spiritual implications, this issue is seldom negotiated away.

As a result, spiritual warfare took on new dimensions.

Seminar leader Bill Gothard, in an invitation to his 1989 Ministers' Seminar, writes:

"Dear Pastor,

"If you have the feeling that it is 'open season' on pastors, you are right! Today, even a successful church is no guarantee that a pastor will not be run off for little or no reason, or suffer a devastating church split."

On the flip side, pastors have often been ill-prepared to manage the type and intensity of conflict now surfacing.

The Definition of Conflict

The dictionary defines *conflict*: to strike together. (1) A fight, clash, contention. (2) Sharp disagreement or opposition, as of interest, ideas, etc., mutual interference of incompatible forces or wills.

"Conflict describes those experiences of individuals and groups trying to achieve goals which are either incompatible or appear to be so. A conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other but not by both."²

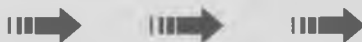
In his recent classic, *The Body*, Charles Colson titles one chapter "Extending the Right Fist of Fellowship."

In it, he describes the sickening scene that culminated in a fistfight and all-out donnybrook at the altar of a church on a Sunday morning. While the physical fight may be isolated, the drama of division is epidemic.

Conflict in itself is not wrong or out of place in the life of any growing, functioning body—redeemed or otherwise. However, our ability to manage and control conflict is often found wanting. Fortunately, there are exceptions.

THE FIRST BIBLE CHURCH STORY*

First Church has not been without its share of conflict over the years. Some historic chapters would be left untold. Fortunately, past failures have turned into persistent resolve to find a better way.



Our ability to
manage and
control conflict
is often found
wanting.



Jerry and Jane came to serve as pastor and wife at First Church on the heels of the unhappy resignation of their predecessors. Their ministry brought warmth and healing to the church family. Jerry's pulpit ministry was energetic and inspiring. His sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and compassionate heart endeared him to the congregation.

Jerry was surrounded by a support staff consisting of an associate pastor who was of a quieter disposition and more administratively inclined, a youth pastor, and a children's and singles' pastor.

Throughout the '80s, First Church experienced steady growth. The facility was approaching maximum use.

Along with growth, First Church was geared for change. The principles of "Celebration," "Congregation," and "Cell" were being expounded and im-

plemented. Encouragement and Growth home groups became an integral part of church life.

The concept of dual congregations sharing facilities was borrowed and launched as a growth mechanism. This venture proved potentially divisive and set the stage for more conflict than anticipated. This issue contributed to Pastor Jerry's decision to accept a call to another church. The possibility of resolving the impending impasse without this personnel adjustment would have been a major undertaking. The resulting interim nature of the pastoral staff now necessitated dropping the dual congregation concept. However, limited space demanded the continuation of two worship services with alternate worship styles.

With this format now in place, the church board then pursued the task of pastoral replacement.

There were naturally those who anticipated another "Pastor Jerry" ministry style. Others were comfortable with the safe, familiar approach of their longtime associate. The latter became the church board's preference. Constitutionally, they were in a position to proceed with his installation as senior pastor. However, caution prevailed. Rather than call for a vote, the church board was advised to hold several informal information meetings. In this unthreatened setting, concerns were aired, questions answered, and prayer offered. The subsequent vote came without confrontation and was nearly unanimous.

In retrospect, conflict was resolved and potential damage avoided by:

1. The attitude of grace and care displayed by Pastor Jerry in conveying the intent of their move
 2. The lack of disruption in basic ministries due to the availability and shared vision of a united staff and church board
 3. The space allowed for emotional and spiritual adjustment following the departure of a former pastor
 4. The wisdom and sensitivity of the church board in providing time for the congregation to take ownership of the recommendation for pastoral replacement
 5. The spiritual commitment to maintain the mind of Christ and follow the direction of the Holy Spirit
- Upon the installation of Pastor Jim*

as senior pastor, two other areas of staffing needs were met. The harmony of this transition was due largely to the fact that both persons were members of long standing in the church. They had served with distinction in a variety of lay ministries, were known by the congregation, and now released to function with greater capacity in the gifts and callings already obvious.

Changes in worship style also carried potential for divisive conflict. Although these adjustments have not occurred without some accompanying strain, the result has been mainly positive. This has been largely due to the sensitivity and heart preparation of the worship teams, as well as audience magnanimity.

Commitment to a balance of both contemporary and traditional worship styles within the alternative worship service format has contributed much to unity and joyful celebration.

Within this atmosphere of unity and blessing came continued numerical growth with its added stress on facilities. This became especially true in the area of Christian education. With a commitment to "build people" rather than "brick and mortar," every alternative was explored to provide adequate housing for an ever-expanding program.

Again, the leadership, department heads, and congregation participated in identifying needs and finding solutions. Once strong consensus to build was established, the remainder was accomplished within an amazingly short and efficient time frame.

While a building program, with its accompanying financial implications, often causes discontent, this was not the case at First Church. While expertise and commitment from those in charge was largely responsible for its success, we note the following.

1. In spite of the narrow time frame, every possible opportunity was provided for departmental and congregational input.

2. A financial plan was implemented, agreed upon, and rigidly adhered to. There were no surprises or unilateral decisions made to jeopardize the trust and confidence of the congregation. As a result, the spirit of ownership prevails, and commitment to completion is mutual.

3. The project was completed un-

der budget and the debt elimination plan is on target.

First Church is not immune to conflict. However, the will to manage and solve problems in an atmosphere of grace and tolerance has saved the church from destructive conflict during potentially volatile transitions.

As long as we are on this earth and in these bodies, conditions for conflict will surface. How we handle conflict will determine whether or not we will panic or prosper through the experience.

HOW WAS IT IN THE BEGINNING OF THE EARLY CHURCH?

"All the believers were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32).

But it didn't always stay that way! The very nature of their encounter in such close interpersonal relationships made conflict inevitable. Somehow, they survived!



How we handle
conflict will
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whether we will
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through the
experience.



While musing on the miracle of this magnitude, I was captivated by the engineering genius of an orb spider web suspended between our house and fence. Most intriguing was the way in which the spider was able to skim over her web—securing food, mending broken strands—yet never getting caught herself in the intricate, three-dimensional tangle of thread running in all directions. The question loomed: "With what wizardry does the lowly spider escape the captivating capability of its own creation?"

Then a timely article in *Reader's Digest* revealed:

"Researchers believe the thin coating of natural oil on her feet saves her from self-entanglement."³

How simply and awesomely profound! Does not the oil of the Holy Spirit provide identical results in the spiritual counterpart? Without the oil of the Holy Spirit, it is little wonder we are so glaringly inept at spiritual net-mending and conflict management. All too often, our feeble attempts end in tragic entanglements.

No wonder Paul commands: **"Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).**

The mysterious maze of ingredients composing the intricacies of church life were never intended to be ventured into *without the oil!*

Our casualty rate has been horrendous! Shattered fragments of once vibrant churches and ministries are stark reminders that:

"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

The potential for conflict was ever present in the infant Church. It also faced the ferocity of persecution within weeks of its inception. The Church had come to birth on the breast of the Roman dragon and was only brief years away from a holocaust of death and dispersement. Did it survive? Indeed it did! And so shall we, if we practice the biblical principles of conflict resolution immersed with the oil of the Holy Spirit.

The result will be power in the pulpit, peace in the pew, and productivity in the parish. An unprecedented harvest of people will characterize the end of the age in response to Jesus' prayer:

"I pray . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21). ✠

*Author's note: While the stories in this article are recorded as observed, names were changed and some anecdotes slightly altered for the sake of privacy.

1. Bill Gothard, *Newsletter* (Oak Brook, Ill: Inst. Basic Life Principles, Jan. 1989).

2. Larry McSwain/William C. Treadwell, Jr., *Conflict Ministry in the Church* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 25.

3. Jerry Cambridge, *Secrets of the Spider* (*Reader's Digest*, May 1989).

Useful Tools for Strengthening the Minister and Ministry

by David Grosse

Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

Excellence in the practice of ministry requires continual honing of the workman's tools.

In their splendid book *Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome* (PA084-232-8491, \$8.99), Kent and Barbara Hughes tell of a young man who approached the foreman of a logging crew, asking if he might be put to work. "That depends," replied the foreman. "Let's see you fell this tree." The young man stepped forward and skillfully felled a great tree. Impressed, the foreman exclaimed, "Start Monday!"

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday rolled by, and on Thursday afternoon the foreman unexpectedly handed the young man his first and final paycheck. Asked why he was being let go, the foreman replied, "Because you've fallen behind. Our daily felling charts show that you've dropped from first place on Monday to last on Wednesday."

"But I'm a hard worker," the young man objected. "I arrive first, leave last, and even have worked through my coffee breaks!"

The foreman, sensing the boy's integrity, thought for a minute then asked, "Have you been sharpening your ax?"

The young man replied, "I've been working too hard to take the time."

This *Preacher's Magazine* feature is for those who are "hacking away" at ministry with dull instruments. Sharpening your "ax" with some of these resources can help you meet and master the big challenges in pastoral care and self care. Remember, inclusion on this list does not imply blanket endorsement. Rather, it is an assessment that at least some of the content can be useful in strengthening your min-

istry. All items can be ordered by writing your denominational publishing house. Please include the order number.

PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING

Charles V. Gerkin, *Prophetic Pastoral Practice: A Christian Vision of Life Together* (Abingdon, 1991). PA068-734-3739, \$13.95.

Pastoral and practical theology in a hermeneutic mode. Because cultural and religious norms are disintegrating, pastors cannot simply appropriate the techniques of the other helping professions. They must embody and communicate the basic values of the Christian faith as revealed in the Scriptures.

Howard Clinebell, Jr., *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Abingdon, 1984). PA068-702-4927, \$19.95.

A resource "standard" by the acknowledged leader in the field. Surveys the entire field of pastoral counseling, providing readily usable information and counseling techniques for the busy pastor-counselor. Emphasizes the traditional role of the pastor as healer, sustainer, guide, and reconciler.

Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Word Publishing, 1988). PA084-993-124X, \$18.99. Paperback.

A comprehensive resource guide for pastoral counselors, with clear perspectives on the biblical basis of counseling. Useful as an information and training resource for developing people-helping skills. Extensive case studies, index, and end notes greatly enhance the value of this resource.

Wm. B. Oglesby, Jr., *Biblical Themes*

for Pastoral Care (Abingdon, 1980). PA068-703-4477, \$15.95.

Applies the principles of Scripture to such issues as conformity and rebellion, fear and faith, death and rebirth, initiative and freedom, risk and redemption. Readable. Biblical. Practical.

Wayne E. Oates, *The Presence of God in Pastoral Counseling* (Nelson/Word Publishing, 1986). PA084-990-4757, \$12.99.

A respected leader in the pastoral care movement exposes the "unreliable centers" of pastoral counseling, then explores Christian counseling whose central dynamic and objective is to minister God's presence to hurting people. Shows how to communicate nonjudgmentally; how and what to "hear" in the silences; how to enlist the healing power of the community. A gem!

Brian H. Childs, *Short-Term Pastoral Counseling* (Abingdon, 1990). PA068-738-432X, \$10.95. Paperback.

Workable counseling strategies for the overworked pastoral counselor. Guidance for doing diagnostic interviews, developing contracts with counselees, making timely referrals, conducting consultations. Shows how certain problems (e.g., minor depressions, grief, poor job performance) can be resolved using short-term counseling. A best buy for time-limited pastoral counselors.

PASTORAL SELF CARE

Ben Campbell Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality: A Focus for Ministry* (Westminster, 1988). PA066-425-0033, \$12.99. Paperback.

Spiritual adrenalin for harried and beleaguered pastors seeking a recovery of vocational sanity and holiness. Examines the elements and multiple

roles that shape the minister's identity. Includes useful exercises for helping pastors recover the spiritual essence of ministry as calling by God.

Jay Kesler, *Being Holy, Being Human* (Word Books, 1988). PA091-746-317X, \$11.99.

The president of Taylor University helpfully addresses the tension between the Holiness imperative and our humanity. Probes issues such as the pedestal problem, the performance trap, the perfectionist syndrome, unrealistic expectations, and conflicting demands. Offers a prescription for living with these tensions creatively, while still embracing God's call.

Wesley Tracy, E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, Morris Weigelt, *The Upward Call* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994). PA083-411-5166, \$10.95. Paperback.

With spiritual formation the goal and Wesleyan spirituality the means, the authors have provided both a compelling vision and a practical methodology for living the image of God expressed as Christlikeness. A "must have" resource for those who hunger and thirst to heed the upward call in Christ Jesus. A 13-session leader's guide for group study is available.

Carmen Renee Berry, *When Helping You Is Hurting Me* (Harper and Row, 1988). PA006-250-0503, \$10.00.

Provocative insights and practical

guidance for escaping the "Messiah Trap." Raises the work of caring for oneself to the level of divine mandate, persuasively arguing that self-neglect in favor of helping others is a destructive "snare," ultimately hurting oneself and others. Useful hints as antidote for those who have fallen into the messiah trap and who feel spiritually, emotionally, and physically depleted as a result.

Walter Wangerin, *Miz Lil and the Chronicles of Grace* (Harper and Row, 1988). PA006-069-2286, \$10.00.

Twelve beautiful stories of growing up and living out a spiritual quest. They comprise the story of a pastor's spiritual growth through struggle and triumph. Told with intensity, humor, and passion. Wonderfully entertaining and useful for spiritual reflection. Get to know this author if you don't already!

Peter Rutter, M.D., *Sex in the Forbidden Zone* (Random House, 1986). PA044-914-7274, \$5.99.

A medical doctor deals honestly, sensitively, and authoritatively with an often glossed-over problem within the helping professions: men in positions of power who betray women's trust. Practical wisdom and healing for those having difficulty with relationships where sex does not belong.


Marie Fortune, *Is Nothing Sacred?* (Harper and Row, 1989). PA006-062-6844, \$10.00.

The gripping case study of a church congregation broken apart by the actions of its unprincipled pastor. The abuse of power and trust by church leaders is plainly described, at times shockingly, but always sensitively and instructively. Implications for appropriate ethical behavior when pastor-parishioner sexual contact threatens.

Harley D. Hunt, *The Stained Glass Fishbowl* (Judson Press, 1990). \$9.95. Paperback. Order directly from The Ministries Council, Judson Press, 1-800-331-1053.

A no-nonsense resource on the care and feeding of the marriages of those who serve in the "stained-glass fishbowl": clergy couples. Useful as a couple's guide or in support group study. Critical issues and problems are helpfully addressed in this groundbreaking book.

Tim Stafford, *As Our Years Increase* (Zondervan, 1989). PA031-032-8411, \$9.99.

Nuts-and-bolts information and guidance on how to grow old with dignity, even when poor, suffering, and dying. Develops a view of old age that is positive, honorable, and hopeful—not overwhelmed by hardship, hopelessness, and fear. Especially helpful sections on losing a spouse, role reversal, and dependency. Wise, compassionate, highly readable. 

Pontius' Puddle



© Joel Kauffmann

Time to Be Used

Bill served as our director of Adult Ministries. One Sunday morning I noticed him standing in the foyer of the church, glancing my way. Looking shy and sheepish, he walked over to me. "Anna-Marie," he began, "I have something I want to ask you. Would you be willing to teach the senior adult Sunday School class?"

Stunned, I couldn't believe he was asking me to do that. Attempting to mask my disbelief, I responded, "I thought that class already had a teacher."

Bill continued, "Well, they did, but he resigned and we really need someone."

Like any good pastor's wife, I smiled and said, "Let me give it some thought, and I'll get back to you."

I sat in the worship service with little thought of worship. Instead I had a running conversation with the Lord:

Lord, senior citizens? I'm only 42 years old. There are people in that class who are double my age, wisdom, and biblical knowledge. Besides, Lord, You know my "gift" is teaching teens, young adults, or women.

I wasn't being rebellious. The Lord knew I had always attempted to do what He placed before me. Later that afternoon, the Lord put things in a better perspective. He reminded me of several things:

1. Often senior adults are the most neglected group in the church.
2. Senior adults are usually the "faithful few" who have stood beside the church and paid the bills when younger, less committed members become disillusioned.
3. These were the very ones who prayed for my spiritual growth and well-being more than 20 years ago when I was a fledgling Christian.
4. In their twilight years now, their needs are often forgotten: the loneliness of widowhood, the iso-



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lation from friends due to ill health.

5. It is easy for them to feel unappreciated and not needed.

Then the Lord reminded me of the priority of ministry I established with Him many years ago: to meet the needs of people. God had just laid out an array of needs within this age-group.

Suddenly I began to feel a sense of urgency and excitement in allowing God to use me to minister to the needs of these senior adults.

Later that evening, I walked into the foyer of the church. There stood Bill, a look of pleading desperation on his face. It was obvious that he lacked the courage to ask, fearing what my answer might be. I made it easy for him. "Bill, I feel the Lord is leading me to teach that senior adult class." With a sigh of relief, he told me I could begin in about three weeks.


Several months passed. Through my willingness to meet a need in the church, the Lord taught me new lessons:

1. **God equips us for every task to which He calls us.** Guard against the "gifts" syndrome. When we refuse to serve the Lord outside of our "gifts" arena, we miss opportunities for service. God uses our availability rather than our great talent.
2. **Obedience results in spiritual**

blessings. I resolved to send a note card to each absentee in the class every week. Short, simple—a message of appreciation and encouragement. One Sunday morning, I reached across the pew to shake hands with Mabel, a faithful member of the Sunday School class. She held my hand in both of hers, smiled, and began, "Anna-Marie, thank you for your note this week. You are the first Sunday School teacher who ever sent me a note when I was absent. It means so much to know I'm missed." Mabel is a 78-year-old widow and lifelong church member. However, she is not too old to feel the need to be appreciated.

3. **No one is beyond challenge.** One Sunday I encouraged the class to do one nice act of kindness to someone every day that week: a note of appreciation, an encouraging phone call, or a visit. The next Sunday, I began by asking the class if anyone had done their "homework" from last week. Loretta and Gerry, two sisters, ages 83 and 84, were so excited. Loretta could hardly contain her joy. She began, "I did what you asked us to. What a blessing I received! I felt the Lord's presence in a real way all week long." She shared the same testimony in the evening service and challenged the entire congregation to follow the example of her Sunday School class!

Upon my own life, God has showered personal blessings. The class is cooperative, responsive, and respectful. It's a joy to be their teacher. One Sunday night after church I invited the class over to the parsonage for refreshments. They were delighted to come.

Through this experience, the Lord showed me that sometimes it is necessary to set aside our "gifts" in order for God to use us and equip us for His purposes—in His time. 

Picture Windows for Preaching

PITFALLS

John Maxwell relates the story of Karl Wellenda, the tightrope walker who died a few years ago in a fall in Puerto Rico. The great Wellenda at one time stated, "Being on a tightrope is living. Everything else is waiting." Each time he went on the tightrope was a moment of exhilaration for him.

Mrs. Wellenda, an aerialist herself, talked about the fateful day that her husband fell the 75 feet to his death. She said that all that Karl could talk about for three straight months was falling. Before that time all his energy had gone into how he was going to walk the tightrope, but now it was directed into falling. He took it upon himself to supervise the installation of the tightrope, making absolutely sure that the guy wires were secure. He always allowed his crew to do that in the past.

His performance that day included fear of falling for the first time—a sense of insecurity. It resulted in his demise.

Maxwell wrote:

I think that's what so often happens to us when we face giants. We look at the Goliaths of our lives in the same way the army of Israel looked at them, and our thoughts focus on not being defeated. That was all they could think about—not being killed, not being destroyed. When we focus on the pitfalls rather than the prize, we often fall right in. We should never allow ourselves to lose sight of our goal, for we may never see it again.

John C. Maxwell, *Be All You Can Be!* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1987).

THE CHURCH

"The church of Jesus Christ, with



Compiled by Derl Keefer

Pastor, Three Rivers, Mich.

all its blemishes, its divisions, and its failures, remains our best hope of spiritual vitality. However poor it is, life without it is worse."

Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961).

WITNESSING

Richard Halverson, writing in the devotional Bible *Time with God*, penned the following paragraphs.

For the New Testament Christians, witness was not a sales pitch.

They simply shared, each in his own way, what they had received. Theirs was not a formally prepared, carefully worked-out presentation with a gimmick to manipulate conversation, and a "closer" for an on-the-spot decision . . . but the spontaneous, irrepressible, effervescent enthusiasm of those who had met the most fascinating Person who ever lived. . . .

[The disciples'] school of witnessing was the school of the Spirit where they learned continuously. Authentic Christian witness is born of the Spirit.

Madison Avenue, with all of its sophisticated know-how, can't im-

prove on the strategy. Nothing is more convincing than the simple, unembellished word of a satisfied customer.

Richard Halverson, *Time with God*, New Century Version (Dallas: Word Publishing Company, 1991), 85.

INCARNATION

Craig A. Loscalzo, in his book *Preaching Sermons That Connect*, tells a story about a Midwestern family whose home was almost destroyed in a tornado. The little girl of the family became frightened each time the sky darkened and the storm clouds rolled onto the scene. When night came and it was time for bed, she would become afraid to go up to her room. Her parents would carry her upstairs and tuck her into bed. When they retreated back to the living room downstairs, they would hear the little girl crying. One night Dad went back up the stairs and once again reassured the little girl that she had no reason to be scared or afraid.

To this the little girl responded, "Yes, Daddy, but you don't know what it's like to be little!"

Loscalzo wrote,

Sometimes when I face difficulties or hard decisions, I want to pray, "O God, you just don't know what it's like to have to make the decisions we have to make, to deal with the people we have to deal with." In such moments, I am reminded of the Incarnation. I can almost hear God say, "Yes I do. I know what it's like to be human. And because I do, I know what you're going through."

Craig Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons That Connect* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 57-58.

Servant Evangelism

It was the Friday evening before Labor Day. Rush hour traffic was backed up for nearly a mile at the corner by our church. The temperature was 95 degrees with matching humidity. About 10 of us from the church quickly went into action to touch several hundred hot, frustrated motorists with God's love. We iced down 400 soft drinks and set up signs just down the road: "Free Drinks Ahead." As the cars came to the stop sign, we asked, "Would you like diet or regular?"

"Diet or regular what?" was the skeptical reply.

"We're giving away free drinks to show people God's love in a simple and practical way."

"Why?"

"Just because God loves you."

Reactions varied greatly—some people smiled, some shook their heads, several mouths dropped open. Most were a little stunned to receive something for free. A UPS driver drove away saying, "But I don't even know you guys. Why would you do this for me?" In less than an hour, we spoke with about 600 people, gave away all the drinks on hand, and even made it on a local radio station's traffic report.

A Slow Start

I met Christ in the revival atmosphere of the "Jesus People" movement in southern California. A lot of evangelism was going on, but most of us doing it at the time were high on enthusiasm and low on understanding about how people come to Christ. We had an oversimplified picture of what bringing someone into relationship with Christ involved. Our model for evangelism worked extremely well in southern California, but it depended upon highly gifted leaders doing evangelism in public meetings. Little person-to-person evangelism was going on outside of corporate gatherings. We naively thought we could reproduce the



by Steve Sjogren

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same approach elsewhere with identical effectiveness.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out God was doing a sovereign work of evangelism then. Doing evangelism during the Jesus Movement was like fishing during a salmon run: About anyone with minimal availability could "catch fish."

Today we are no longer fishing in a salmon run.

The day of "easy evangelism" hasn't been with us for more than a decade. People aren't nearly as open to listening to evangelistic appeals as they once were. In their hearts, many non-Christians say, "You have no right to tell me about your God until you have shown me you have integrity." The scandals of prominent leaders in the Body of Christ have made it more difficult than ever to share the gospel. For whatever reason, unchurched people are jaded. It's tough sharing Jesus with skeptics.

Ten years after I came to Christ, I found myself in a spiritual environment very different from the fertile fields of the Jesus Movement era. After receiving training at a large church in southern California, I moved my family to Cincinnati, Ohio, to plant a new church. We began in this conservative, Midwestern community with five people.

During my first 18 months in Cincinnati I shared my vision for planting a church with 1,000 people. Yet for all that effort, we started our

first Sunday with 35 people. That's enough rejection to give Norman Vincent Peale a challenge. At that point we were unenthusiastic about evangelism. Mentioning the "E-word" caused us to feel guilty and reminded us of our failure at reaching out to the community.

Seeing Their Pain

One day while sitting at a restaurant, having just told a visitor our vision for starting a church—and being rejected again—I felt the Lord speak to me: *"If you will befriend My friends, then you'll have more people than you know what to do with..."*

Until that day, I wondered if there would be *any* people to pastor. Now God was saying I would have *more* people than I knew what to do with if I would befriend His "friends."

I began to look in Scripture for the kinds of people with whom Jesus interacted during His short ministry. I began to see something new: though Jesus loved everyone, He apparently *enjoyed* spending the better part of His time with three types of people: *the poor, the sick, and the lost*. Even the apostles came from the hurting of society. All the apostles came from Galilee, the most hurting part of Palestine.

I began to see Jesus' friends as the ones who are in pain—pain from bad decisions they have made, pain from rejection, and pain from living in a fallen world that knows little of God's acceptance, forgiveness, and love. Everyone has pain—those tension points that make life somewhere between difficult and impossible to live.

I realized that almost no one is having a good time in life. I went to the mall one day to go people watching. As I looked into the faces of person after person, I realized almost everyone is experiencing a significant level of misery. Jesus desires to touch and heal their pain. Somehow my job was to be around and minister to those people. But how? I'm too shy to go

door knocking. Besides, people seemed more skeptical than ever. I already had several hundred people tell me "no" to the invitation of being involved in this new church.

Then the idea began to form. If we could somehow lighten some of the pain these people are going through—maybe we would get their attention. By *serving our way into their hearts*, maybe we could gain their ears.

As the idea of servant evangelism crystallized, we organized an "absolutely free car wash." We stationed a couple of former cheerleaders on the corner with signs to direct dirty cars to the rest of the crew. We had several washers, some doing windows, some vacuuming, and a couple of "designated evangelists" to share with people why we were doing this. Amazingly, many wouldn't believe we would do something for free—no strings attached. The first car was a station wagon driven by a single mom with six squirming kids. She cried as we shared with her and prayed for her.

The owner of the second car turned out to be a well-known businessman. We told him we were doing this for free. He said, "That's nice." As we finished, he asked, "To whom shall I make out my check?"

"No sir," someone replied, "we aren't receiving any money for washing your car. We did this just because God loves you." It was one thing to see the mother cry, but I wasn't ready to see this powerful businessman wipe away the tears.

I believe he was touched because we went around all of his established defenses that had kept people—and God—away from his life. If we had "battled" at a philosophical or theological level, we would not have gotten through to this sophisticate. In a sense, we broke the rules and were not "fighting fair." We sneaked in the back door of his life where he was least expecting it—his heart—and made a significant impact.

When the afternoon was over, we had washed 40-plus cars. Surprisingly, almost everyone accepted prayer when we offered it. Our group stood in a circle, prayed, and cried together. We began to feel the pain of those we had served that day.

Since that time six years ago, we

have tried over 40 creative outreaches. Almost all of them have worked extremely well at putting us in touch with the community.

Reaching out to touch the community has been the key to the significant growth we have experienced. Last year alone we touched over 60,000 people in our community. Our fellowship has grown from 35 people six years ago to about 1,600 in three services on Sundays. We have also planted six other fellowships in the Cincinnati area. What has happened here has caused us to see evangelism with new eyes.



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to speak words of
love, we must first
willingly demon-
strate deeds of
love with the hurt-
ing people in our
cities.



Seeing the "Process"

Paul's statement transformed our view of evangelism: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow" (1 Cor. 3:6). Paul saw evangelism as a *process*, a view unlike our American mind-set that focuses mainly on "closing the deal." According to Paul's agricultural analogy, harvesting comes after much planting and watering. Americans naturally value the harvest aspect of evangelism. Our culture extols results and "the bottom line." Paul, however, valued the early stages of evangelism groundwork, as well as the final loop of the evangelism process.

Paul states a general principle of farming: the more you plant and water, the more you will eventually har-

vest. Because of the American church's credibility gap, we must first willingly demonstrate love before we'll earn the right to share the words of love with our society. We must learn to value what I call the "first 90 percent" of evangelism—the planting and watering—before we begin to see significant harvesting.

I define evangelism in this simple way:

Deeds of God's love
+
Words of God's love
+
Time

Deeds of kindness and love give us entrance into people's hearts. We design our deeds to relieve their pain and cause them to ask us, "Why are you doing this for me?" The deed of love or service is the initial seed planted in the hearts of people. As we serve people, we tell them of God's love by sharing the gospel message to whatever level they are open. Then, after a season (the amount of time is unique to each individual), the Holy Spirit begins to work on the hearts of those seekers.

This approach to evangelism puts the pressure squarely on God instead of pressuring people or a program. I don't think people can take that sort of pressure—I have found that people become guilt ridden when pressure for doing evangelism is put on their shoulders. We determine to have fun when going out to serve the community and leave the results with God. We have adopted a motto coined by George Bernard Shaw: "Anything worth doing is worth doing wrong."

To date we have seen many come into relationship with Christ. By coming to "pre-Christians" with a desire to serve them and relieve their pain, we avoid battling in a mental or verbal arena and go right to their hearts. I haven't seen much fruit in trying to convert people at a head-to-head level—apologetics, telling, arguing—but a heart-to-heart witness is hard to resist. As we go for the hearts of people, we bypass their defenses.

Paul echoed this thought: "God's kindness leads you toward repentance" (Rom. 2:4). Kindness is a key that opens hearts. Kindness opened one man's heart to God when we were doing a "free lawn care" outreach. We had loaded a couple of

mowers and rakes into a truck and drove around until we saw long grass. We approached his house and knocked on the door to tell him what we were up to. Through the screen door this man barked, "What do you want?" We gave him the brief explanation; without even looking up, his response was simply, "Yeah, whatever."

He sat motionlessly in front of the TV watching a Reds baseball game. We mowed enthusiastically and finished in about 30 minutes. We stopped by to tell him we were done and ask if we could pray for any needs in his life. He said he didn't have any needs. As we stepped away from the door, one young man in the group said he was sure this man was in great emotional need and that we ought to insist on praying for him. We turned around and prayed a simple little prayer, "Come Holy Spirit and touch this man's pain, whatever it is." The response was instant and surprising—he erupted in deep sobbing, grabbing the nearest person in the circle and wetting his shoulder with tears for some minutes. As the crying died down, he told us his son had been arrested the night before for stealing a car to support a drug habit. That day God's presence and power penetrated this man's pain and isolation in a tangible way—because we were willing to cut a little grass.

Getting Started

You and your church can begin to reach out to your city in significant ways through servant evangelism outreaches. This approach can be condensed in the phrase: "**Low Risk—High Anointing**" activity.

Risk has to do with the "cost" of the given outreach. Cost comes in a variety of ways other than money—emotional, time, energy. The "anointing" factor has to do with how much of God's blessing and presence in the given outreach is necessary for something significant to happen. I have done ministry that has been so heavily programmatic, there was little need for God to show up to insure success in the ministry. We need to sponsor outreaches that are easy enough for

the average layperson to succeed in and almost impossible to fail at. If our approach to ministry requires an Olympic level of skill, then we will have only a small percentage of our people reaching out.

In other words, it doesn't take much gifting or much money or even much boldness to begin to affect



Doing evangelism during the Jesus Movement was like fishing during a salmon run.



large numbers of people. But as we step out to do these acts of love, God in his mercy shows up in "high anointing" ways. So how do you get started in opening closed hearts to God's love?

1. Begin to ask the Lord to show you the pain of your city.

Ask the Lord for the gift of knowing and identifying your community's pain. Every city is unique in its problems, hurts, and pain. What Cincinnati feels as a need will differ from the needs of your city. Cincinnati has long and wet winters that leave road salt on cars. During the cold weather months we offer free de-salting washes. Cold also gives us a chance to give out free coffee at grocery stores. There's a park in Toledo where many parents walk with their families on pleasant summer days. A pastor there has photo teams that walk about the park offering to take a picture of the families for free—"just because God loves you." They place a sticker on the back of the picture with the

church name and phone number. I believe those families will save pictures taken of them for years. Every time they look at that picture, they recall the kindness of the Christians that served them.

One thing is for sure: As you begin to address that pain with the mercy and compassion of the Lord, you will draw a crowd. *Few of the unchurched are looking for church. Everyone is looking for relief from pain.*

2. Begin to meet the practical needs of your city.

In other words, scratch them where they itch. Robert Schuller says, "Find a hurt and heal it." As you begin to look at the needs in each stratum of your city, you'll begin to see some of what God sees.

A friend of mine pastors a church in a college town in Colorado. They do servant evangelism by going door-to-door in the dorms offering to clean dorm rooms for free "just because God loves you." They are beginning to see a lot of curious college students coming to their fellowship. A second outreach to the students is providing free tutoring and then praying for success on the upcoming test.

3. You step out first.

Most pastors I know aren't natural evangelists. However, we have all been called to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). Your people will *listen* to all you teach and talk about, but they really won't *do* more than you as the primary leader do. By nature, pastors are often more Bible "studiers" than Bible "doers." When I take personality inventories, I consistently come up a borderline introvert, but I find these low-risk outreaches feasible for me.

I look forward to mobilizing more outreaches into the community. We are now using our small groups as our primary force for doing these projects. Just think what could happen if it became commonplace for each small group to do an outreach like that monthly. It's exciting to consider the sort of impact a church could make if it's organized to serve its way into the hearts of the community. 🙌

PROJECT	CONCEPT	EQUIPMENT	PEOPLE NEEDED	COST	WEATHER
Outdoor Window Washing	Wash first-floor windows	Cards,* professional squeegees and cleaner, short ladder and buckets	2 or more	One-time purchase of squeegees—not too expensive	50° or more
Yard Cleanup	Look for messy yards	Cards, trash bags, rakes	2 or more	Minimal	
Easter Basket Giveaway	Every child wants an Easter basket	Cards, baskets vary. We put in candy, Christian literature, Christian tapes.	2 or more	Costs vary from \$3 to \$5 per basket	
Rainy Day Grocery Escort	Help shoppers to cars with packages	Cards, golf umbrellas	2 or more	Minimal	Rainy Days
Polaroid Pictures in the Park	Find lonely people or couples at the park and “shoot” them	Cards, cameras (stickers for back of photos are best)	2 or more	Film and initial outlay for cameras (about 75¢ per photo)	
Windshield Washing at Self-serve Gas Station	Revive the practice of free windshield washing with fill-up	Cards, squeegees, squirt bottles, red rags, cleaner	2 or more	Initial purchase of equipment—minimal	Prefer clear weather. If it's too hot the cleaner will evaporate.
House/ Apartment Repair	Fix broken things. Limit repairs to under 200 v. problems.	Cards, basic tool kit	2 or more capable repair people. Don't send unskilled—they can make things worse.	Limit your work to your budget. We do a lot of winterizing at a low cost.	
House/ Apartment/ Dorm Cleaning	Who <i>doesn't</i> need their place cleaned?	Cards, vacuum cleaners, brooms, trash bags	2 or more	Minimal	Any weather—may need to call ahead or work from referrals
Winter Car Wash	Spray off salt and road grime	Cards, coffee, wands to spray off underside of cars	10 or more	Minimal	Don't attempt this in weather below 20°—could freeze door locks
Summer Car Wash	Free car wash! We use banners that say “Free Car Wash—No Kidding”	Cards, basic wash equipment, banners. Can also serve drinks, play music, provide lawn chairs.	Minimum of 12/prefer 25-30. We do 2-3 cars at once. Designate an “evangelist” to talk to people.	Minimal—We often use a sports bar's parking lot and pay for the water.	Above 60°. Overcast days don't work well. People won't stop if it looks like rain.

Leaf Raking	Who likes to rake leaves? We do it for them.	Cards, rakes, bags	As few as 2—the more the merrier and easier	Minimal—You can own your own rake for \$3.98	About any type, but it's tough raking leaves in wet weather
Christmas Gift Wrap	Everyone needs Christ- mas gifts wrapped. Do it at the mall for free!	Cards, wrapping paper, tape, scissors, etc. Build simple kiosk or booth. For suppliers call 513-671-0422.	Lots of people needed. Depending upon mall traffic, you will need a variety. Use 3-10/shift.	Though costly, can cost as little as 10¢/gift with the right suppliers. Scissors, etc., can be used again.	If wrapping at an inside location, weather not a problem
Lawn Care	Find unkempt lawns and go for it	Cards; basic mowing or more, depending on your de- sire (edging, trimming, etc.)	2 or more	Cost of gasoline, oil, and bags	It's easier to mow dry grass than wet grass
Coke Giveaway in Traffic Jams	On a hot day, nothing re- freshes like a cold drink in Jesus' name	Cards, drinks, ice, clean plastic trash cans for storing cans on ice, table	Minimum of 10	About 10¢/unit buying in quantities. We give out 400+ drinks. Ice varies.	Warm or hot weather
Free Coffee at Grocery Stores	Set up tables at the store exit and serve hot coffee on cold days	Cards, table, 2 to 3 5-gal- lon containers, cream- ers, sugar, stirrers, sign—"Free Coffee"	3 or more	Minimal	Cool or cold weather (unless in Seattle, where coffee goes over year- round)
Free Coffee at Sporting Events	Hit football, basketball, hockey events in park- ing lot	Cards, table, 2 to 3 5-gal- lon containers, cream- ers, sugar, stirrers, sign	3 or more	Minimal	Cool or cold weather
Windshield Washing	Go to a shopping center, and hit every car in the lot	Squeegees, squirt bottles with cleaner, red shop rags, **cards	1 or more. It's more fun with more people.	Minimal	Does not work well in weather over 75°
Grocery Store Bag Packing	Go to a self-bagging gro- cery store and help peo- ple bag groceries	Cards, maybe matching aprons, button—"just because . . ."	2 or more	No cost	Good inclement weather project
Pictionary in the Park	Start playing Pictionary and strangers show up	Cards, white board and markers, Pictionary	5 or more	Minimal	Warm weather—spring or summer
Balloon Giveaway	Go to a park and give balloons and cards to children with parents	Cards, helium tanks, bal- loons	2 or more	Balloons and helium are about 10 to 15¢ per child	Any weather when peo- ple are at the park

*Cards should have your church's name, phone number, meeting times, and an easy-to-follow map on the back.

**This card reads: "While you were away from your car, people from the _____ church washed your windshield. We hope we did a good job."

Escaping Congregational Doldrums

Ancient mariners feared the doldrums. They could die of thirst or starvation if they were caught in the wrong latitudes for too long with no wind. Churches are much the same if they're caught without motivational winds. I once talked with a church member who had no hope that the church could continue. "There are no people left to come here," he sadly explained.

That seemed odd to me. The church was located in one of the most densely populated areas of a major city. What he was really saying, however, was, "The reason people used to come here no longer exists, and so no one is coming." On that score he was right. The problem was not an inadequate supply of people but rather an inability to connect the church's purpose to the people it touched.

The church that once went full steam ahead with a clear and definite sense of mission, the church that



by Bob Moeller

*Contributing Editor to Leadership Magazine,
Libertyville, Ill.*

once drew members almost effortlessly through a contagious spiritual life—that church may now be struggling, thirsting for a reason to exist. But how does that happen?

Caught in a Cultural Time Warp

Some churches that find their sails hanging listlessly have lost touch with their community's current needs.

I once heard of a well-meaning parishioner who suggested the

church lights needed to be on even on Sunday evenings when they weren't having services, as a witness to the community. Apart from the ethical question of possibly creating false appearances, I had trouble understanding the evangelistic value of such a luminous testimony.

Yet in my own parish, I received a phone call from a neighbor upset that the church had no special conscience—we were wasting energy by leaving lights on in the offices all night. I was struck by the changing attitudes even toward church lighting.

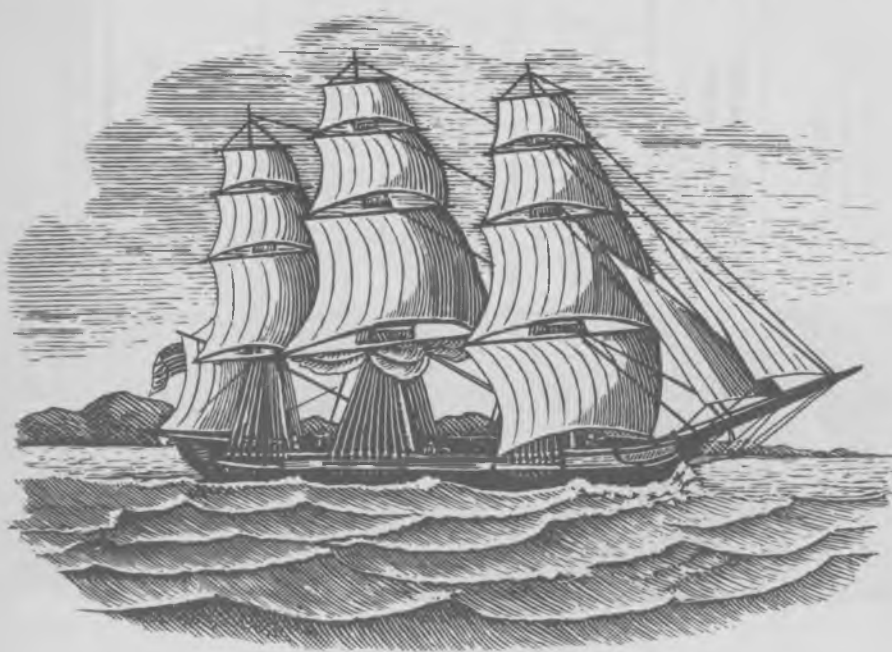
What drew people in the 1940s, 1950s, or even the 1970s may have little or no relevance in the 1980s or 1990s. Remember coffeehouses? They've gone the way of Volkswagen Beetles and hippies.

Families in the 1990s, when choosing a church, take a close look at the quality of the nursery, the cleanliness and attractiveness of the facility, and the learning options available during the week for their children. If these aren't cared for adequately, you won't see those parents next week.

While the gospel never changes, the cultural attitudes that shape how these truths are presented do change. Our challenge is to continually seek new ways to present the gospel to *this* generation, a challenge that often can breathe new life into a congregation.

One way of doing that is to develop an "outside-in" perspective by looking at a church's programs, facilities, and personnel as an outsider would. Our temptation is to evaluate the needs of our community from an "inside-out" perspective, which is hazardous to the future health and vitality of the church. An "outside-in" approach can help us avoid becoming painfully out of touch with the needs of the culture.

If church leaders don't address the changing world, what was once a vital church will become, within a gen-



eration, the equivalent of a religious historical society. We will meet to preserve the past, not to alter the future.

Unresolved Conflict, Unaddressed Sin

The captain of the *Titanic* refused to believe the ship was in trouble till water was ankle deep in the mailroom. Only then was it apparent the multilayered hull had been pierced, and the unsinkable ship was going to sink. Ships that could have arrived before the great ocean liner went down weren't summoned until it was too late.

Often there has been water in the mailroom of a church for some time, but no one was willing to acknowledge what it means. Perhaps a feud between families in the congregation has been brewing for months, but the pastor doesn't feel his position is secure enough to get involved. Attendance, giving, and visitor trends have all been headed down for several years, but no one wants to admit the church is hurting. Or, there has been a secret liaison going on between a man and a woman on the music committee, but no one wants to handle the potentially explosive issue.

These and a host of other situations occur in churches in one form or another all the time. But for a variety of reasons—fear, uncertainty of what to do—these problems are left unaddressed.

A pastor friend once learned that money from the benevolent fund was going to make alimony payments for one of the church members. Word of this had filtered out, and many in the congregation felt it was an inappropriate use of the fund. As a result, contributions to the fund dried up. But no one was willing to discuss the issue.

Churches and church leaders that are unwilling to deal with moral, ethical, or financial misconduct in the church pay an enormous price in the loss of energy and motivation that inevitably occurs.

The corrective, of course, is wise and courageous confrontation of sin and conflict. It's wonderful when revival sweeps a church and the ugly problems of sin and conflict seem to resolve themselves in an entirely supernatural fashion. But that's more the exception than the rule. In the midst of unresolved sin or conflict,

more often than not, someone has to take on the difficult and thankless task of confrontation before things get noticeably better.

Sometimes it's tough to get people to help with this task. On one occasion, an elder knew he would be involved in confronting a friend. Rather than do that, he slipped his resignation under the pastor's door, stopped coming to church, and was never seen on the premises again. The heat in the kitchen had sent him out for fast food permanently.

But instructions for church discipline and confrontation appear in the same New Testament Epistles that call for love and forbearance. The truth is that only tough love will resolve some issues that slowly hemorrhage the life from churches for years or decades.



**When a church
languishes, some-
times the causes
are hidden.**



I grew up in a church that was racially mixed long before it was acceptable. In fact, it was a source of bitter dispute in those days. Hundreds left because it was feared certain minority groups would take over.

It was not until the last of such opposition left that the new church was born. But from that point onward, a 90-year-old church took on the zest and enthusiasm of a new church plant. The long and sometimes acrimonious board meetings, the whisper campaigns, and the not-so-veiled threats to take the money and go elsewhere finally ended. When it did, the survivors watched as the church blossomed and was given a new life.

So the principle that some conflict must be escalated in order to resolve it can be true as a church struggles to gain new purpose and direction. It's no one's first choice, but at times it's the only viable option left when a

church finds itself adrift because of long-standing conflict or hidden sin.

Unrewarded Effort

A friend of mine as a child once painted his entire backyard fence during the heat of the summer. For his efforts his parents gave him a dime. Sometimes that also happens in the church. People in the various ministries give and give, year after year, and receive little or no recognition for doing so. The burnout rate in such settings stands alarmingly high.

This is particularly true in settings with an entrepreneurial leadership style. Launch one new ministry, and the attention turns to beginning another. Those in charge of making the program work are left to carry on alone. The excitement of the program fades into dull routine and weekly effort.

While the ministry itself may be effective, the sense of significance is gone because the leaders are wrapped up in new interests. The result: diligent workers are given the impression their sacrifice of time and energy is no longer important.

I'm well aware that our reward is in heaven, and our workers should seek the praise of God rather than men. But expressing appreciation for a job well done is also part of Christian virtue.

When we forget, we end up going through volunteers like aluminum soda cans in a college dorm. And with such a disposable attitude, often motivation and involvement are discarded as well.

But as important as it is to recognize and appreciate people's efforts, the even more significant strategy is to help people discover they can make a difference.

There is nothing more discouraging than feeling your work doesn't matter. One of the more cruel punishments inflicted on prisoners during World War II was to assign them to dig holes each day and then to fill them in at quitting time. That devastating psychological tactic cost many an individual his sanity and will to live.

Sadly, some people in church also arrive at the conclusion that their work is meaningless, an exercise in futility. They lose the will to try because they've lost the hope of making a difference.

During one pastorate, I visited a family that had left the church years earlier in anger but was still on the membership list. When I knocked, I was invited in, but it was clear their feelings toward the church were mixed at best. They spoke of how they had been unappreciated at the church and never intended to come back.

Not long afterward, the husband was diagnosed with brain cancer. It was a shock to everyone. He died within three months. I conducted the funeral, and in the follow-up counseling, I suggested to the widow that she get involved in the church's ministry to the poor of our neighborhood.

With some hesitation, she agreed. Each Tuesday morning we handed out clothing to approximately 100 people. Many were street indigents, bag ladies, and homeless families. Her job was to bring cookies and serve coffee to the people as they searched for clothing.



If church leaders don't address the changing world, what was once a vital church will become, within a generation, the equivalent of a religious historical society.



Though I knew the experience would help, the extent of her transformation amazed me. Her disappointment and hurt melted away week by week as she served coffee and cookies and helped distribute clothes. Instead of the painful memo-

ries of how the church had failed her, she was filled with the joy of knowing she was making a difference in people's lives.

The same is true for a church. Years of anger, frustration, and hurt can be healed by helping others with needs. It's hard to feel aimless when you see God at work through what you're doing.

Cures You Can't Control

Perhaps none of these cause a particular church's doldrums. Even when the cause remains unidentified, a number of cures can revive sagging spirits. Some might surprise you.

A churchwide crisis. The noted English satirist Samuel Johnson once said something to the effect that nothing clears your mind as effectively as the prospect of being hanged.

The same may be said of churches. Either an imminent or a present crisis can galvanize members into working as a committed and concerned group of believers once more.

In a church I once served, an elder's son died in his sleep while the man's hospitalized daughter was fighting for her life with a deadly viral disease. After the funeral, the entire church took on a spiritual seriousness that remained evident years later.

Often a lawsuit will accomplish the same mobilization of the troops. Or a building fire. I listened in amazement as a fellow pastor told how he'd planned to preach from Peter on the refining fire of God's work in our lives. The same week their new church building, only days from completion, burned to the ground. You can imagine how seriously the folks listened to his sermon the next Sunday.

The point, however, is that sometimes difficult and adverse circumstances can stir people to action. Adverse circumstances can become the opportunity for the people to search their hearts and recommit themselves to serving Christ in that church.

We obviously can't control such crises, but we can be alert to the ways they affect a church.

Likewise, there's a second uncontrollable remedy for congregational doldrums: *a profound spiritual experience in key leaders.*

There is no question as to the most sudden and dramatic change I ever witnessed in a congregation. I had

been given two churches to serve part time as I completed seminary. Each weekend I'd drive 125 miles to a farming community north of the Ohio River. The smaller church was about to celebrate its centennial. It was a lovely group—kind, hardworking, and faithful to attend the old frame church with its well-worn pews and slightly out-of-tune piano.



It's hard to feel aimless when you see God at work through what you're doing.



But many of the men felt only a cultural obligation to church or attended because their wives coaxed them. In rural life, you don't pry into one another's lives much, and things tend to remain as they have been throughout the years. But this church was about to be stood on its head, and me with it.

I had invited a professor from school to hold a weekend of meetings, which they referred to as a revival. It was actually as predictable as Veterans Day, and all that was meant by the term was an extra service on Friday and Saturday night. A Kleenex box was placed dutifully on the altar, just as it was every year for the one or two souls who might respond, but it had been years since anyone did.

The first night when the sermon was over, I thanked the speaker and dismissed the people. Usually such a benediction brought a stampede toward the door. That night no one moved. I got up and assured the people that everyone could leave now, that we were finished for the night. Not a person stirred. I turned in somewhat awkward amazement to the guest speaker. What do you do when people won't leave the church, even when you ask them to?

The old professor and I walked through the pews praying with people as they requested it. Something powerful was at work.

The next night the same thing happened. No one left following the benediction. We prayed with more people. It seemed something much larger than we had ever imagined was stirring.

We were right. A few weeks later, a farmer knocked at our door during supper. He was an ex-Marine with a reputation for being tightfisted and just plain mean. He was crying, holding an old Bible in his hands. Soon it was not uncommon to see many of the hard-shell cases weeping in church on Sunday mornings. The Spirit of God was at work, and no one knew why or how.

For the first time in half a century, the church started to fill up again, and a new education wing was added. I felt much like an observer in a rowboat as a tidal wave crashed over us. In all the years the professor had been traveling and speaking, he'd never seen anything like this either, he confessed.



Instructions for church discipline and confrontation appear in the same New Testament Epistles that call for love and forbearance.



Churches can be restored to life and health without warning when the Holy Spirit chooses to act in a powerful way. While we cannot depend on this to be the norm, we cannot rule it out, either. I learned a les-

son in that rural church about how big God was and how little I was.

What You Can Do

We've mentioned a number of things already that we can do to bring life back to a drifting congregation: reconnecting the church's ministry to the community's needs, courageously and lovingly addressing unresolved conflict and sin, taking time to recognize the efforts of church members and to help them see that their work makes a difference in the lives of others.

But by far the most important action we can take is persistent prayer.

Collegians have a term for their fellow students who exhibit study habits above and beyond the call of duty: Black and Deckers. The term refers to a line of solid-steel tools that often set the industry standard for durability and toughness.

Churches reawakened after years of slumbering apathy and ineffectiveness invariably have been influenced by people that qualify as "Black and Deckers" in their own right. They have prayed without ceasing for years on end. Intercession of this type differs from the brief invocation mumbled at the beginning of a board meeting or before taking an offering. This type of prayer continues for years and sometimes for decades, not infrequently occurring early in the morning or late at night.

The results may be years in coming. That's why so few people actually exercise this ministry in a given church. The patience, the faith, and the persistence it takes quickly thins out the ranks.

Yet, because God in His sovereignty seems to allot every church a Black and Decker or two—and possibly more—the hope remains for a spiritual breakthrough.

I've known such people of prayer. In general they aren't critical souls; they tend to save their complaints for the throne of heaven, where they pour out their concerns. They don't advertise their ministry; it's far too private and important to discuss on a casual basis. Rather, they tend to be discerning individuals who can assess the needs of any given situation with little outside input. Perhaps it's their gift of discernment that makes their prayer so powerful.

In each of my last two churches, after going through times of church-

wide difficulty, I later learned that two or three individuals had been praying, in some cases for years, that we would address the problems that were sapping our motivation. Their persistent prayer for renewal was eventually answered.



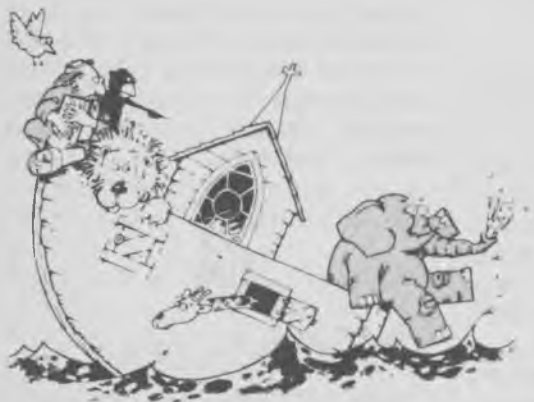
Churches reawakened after years of slumbering apathy and ineffectiveness invariably have been influenced by people that prayed.



When all is said and done, it is prayer that changes churches and events. But again, this isn't quick and easy prayer. No, this type of prayer is so difficult and so worthwhile that at times it even hurts. But the results speak for themselves.

Shortly after the death of Franklin Roosevelt in 1945, a newspaper columnist observed the irony of the late president's influence on the nation. Though he himself never fully recovered the use of his legs after his bout with polio, and though he spent much of his adult life in a wheelchair, it was FDR who taught a crippled nation how to walk again. Thrust into the presidency during the darkest days of the depression, he inspired hope and vision in a nation immobilized by despair and pessimism.

Pastors, too, even when themselves somewhat infirm, can help congregations crippled by apathy and malaise of spirit not only to walk again but to run. It's not easy, and it requires both the wind of God's Spirit and a crew that keeps the sails trimmed, but it can be done.



User-Friendly

Bibblesworth has created a truly “user friendly” church, Smerdley tells me. The whole business. Building, organization, worship service, everything. And a key part of it is the little electronic memobooks they’ve screwed to every pew. One can take sermon notes, write checks for the offering, call up verses from the Bible or a list of restaurants for Sunday dinner, or electronic-mail the staff from one’s seat.

Smerdley’s not quite ready to take on the whole thing, but Bibblesworth’s philosophy of worship has him hooked.

“Take music, for instance,” says Smerd. “This endless generational bickering over hymns versus choruses. Well, Bibblesworth’s got the perfect solution: Let the people choose the music.”

“Well,” said I, “we used to do that often. People just called out their favorite hymn number. Sometimes it got interesting. Some teenager would choose an obscure number just to hear it once. Or sometimes we got an accompaniment that combined ignorance, pride, and panic. But usually we were on familiar pages.”

“All passé in a user-friendly environ-

ment,” says Smerdley. “Bibblesworth’s got it just right. To start with, he’s got all congregational music on acetate. Projects it overhead. Has people looking up and singing instead of staring into a hymnal, mumbling. Now enter the advanced technology. Each hymn and chorus has a number in a two-list directory, divided by topic for convenience. This is put on disc. Then, this Sunday, you ask the folks simply to check the directory and punch in the numbers for the one hymn and seven choruses you need for next Sunday. So, Granny Jones pokes in Number 30, and one of your teens pokes in Number 540, plus seven chorus numbers each. These all go to the mainframe. It simply averages the eight sets of numbers and, voila, you’ve got next week’s congregational musicpak. The hymn will be Number 285.

“But low and high numbered stuff would never get sung,” said I.

“Got it covered,” Smerd says. “Bibblesworth’s computer randomly rotates numbers on all music and puts a newly generated directory into the pews every other week. Takes 10 minutes. But what’s important is, the people have chosen the music!”

“Not really,” I said. “In fact, not

even Bibblesworth has chosen. The machine chooses all of the music! It’s music by the numbers!”

“Ah,” says Smerd, “but the important point is that the people FEEL they have had a hand in it. That’s the real point, isn’t it?”

“But the machine chooses the music!” I said, measuredly.

Smerdley seemed to anticipate that one. “But your theology, like Bibblesworth’s, says that God is sovereign, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then,” says Smerdley, “it’s as Bibblesworth suggests: I AM guides IBM. We simply trust God to guide the machine in generating numbers.”

Danger of an explosion took us to another topic for a bit, but Smerdley just had to marvel again over Bibblesworth’s genius.

“How do you know what to preach?” he asked.

“Oh, I study Scripture prayerfully. I try to listen as I go calling among the congregation or as they come to me. I read stuff that I think can help me, and I watch some television. Or sometimes I use the lectionary for a stretch.”

WORSHIP

&

PREACHING

HELPS





Gary L. Durham

March/April/May 1995

Prepared by Gary L. Durham

INTRODUCTION

The power of the truth of Scripture is as limitless as the God who stands behind it. When we stand in the pulpit and trust in our own strength and wisdom, we succeed only in transmitting our weaknesses to our hearers. If we come trembling with a sense of total dependence because we are intent to be a transmitter of that which shall forever transcend us, we say more than we are able and our weaknesses communicate His strength.

In the final analysis, true ministry always eludes human definition. How could it be otherwise if true ministry is, as He promised it would be, a communication of His inaccessible life into our midst. The least saint who embraces the cross of Christ until self becomes transparent conveys the treasure of the knowledge of the glory of Christ through the sacrifice of His earthen vessel in redemptive affliction (cf. Col. 1:24-29). This, according to Paul, is ministry (cf. 2 Cor. 4:1-12).

To be a minister of the gospel demands the very best we have to give volitionally, intellectually, and emotionally. God has determined that He will not surrender the possession of truth to the passive mind or the divided heart. Dependence on the mystical presence of Christ in our preaching does not exempt us from the diligent and practical aspects of exegesis. The mystery of Christ lies above and beyond the diligent and practical, not below it.

True exegetical preaching is the travail to make our sermons a continual illustration of the meaning in a passage from God's Word. In this travail, we do not seek to be original or eloquent, but rather severely in love with truth. For the preacher is never more original or eloquent than when parroting meaningfully the very words of God with conviction. And this conviction cannot be counterfeited—for it is a witness of compulsion both to our hearts and to the hearts of our hearers by the Holy Spirit.

True ministry in the pulpit starts in the secret place of prayer and study. This is where we joyously afflict ourselves in order to draw deeply and abundantly from the wells of eternal life that we might refresh His Church. The exegetical sermon outlines I have given you in this issue are not so much finished products as dot-to-dot sketches for you to connect with your own material. At West Valley Church, I normally preach through a book of the Bible in longer series. Because of the three special Sundays (Palm Sunday, Easter, and Mother's Day), I decided to give you shorter unrelated series and messages. This has also resulted in greater diversity of style. Use them if you can; ignore them if you can't. Above all, join me in a commitment to seek His anointing to transmit life from our pulpits.

CHRISTIAN REACTION

by Gary L. Durham

Matt. 5:38-48

Mar. 5, 1995

INTRO:

You don't have to meditate long on these verses to see that Jesus is teaching us how He expects His followers to react under pressure. This teaching takes place within the greatest message ever preached on this planet, what we call the Sermon on the Mount. This great sermon, woven masterfully together by our Lord, deals with many different applications of truth to life. Jesus considered the issue of how His disciples respond under pressure an important enough matter for this greatest of sermons. Its timing, in regard to His disciples, is also an important detail. (First disciples called: Matt. 4:18-22.) Jesus sat His newly called disciples down and said to them: "Now these are the principles of my kingdom by which you are to live from this day forward." This is not some spiritual graduate school. These teachings, of which our study passage is one, are the foundation, the spiritual alphabet, of all Jesus is about.

I once read a statement by an "expert" in human behavior: we spend three-fourths of our time in reaction as compared to one-fourth of our time being the instigators of original action. We react three times more than we merely act. If this is true, it brings some insight as to why Jesus considered this an important teaching for His disciples: if we are less than Christian in this matter of reaction, then the major portion of our lives is a stumbling block to the cause of Christ.

So the directive of Jesus Christ is that Christians are to react differently.

I. What Are the Categories of Reaction? (vv. 38, 39a)

The first thing Jesus places before us is the issue of the different levels of reaction. Jesus only mentions two levels. The first we can call the level of revenge. The second is obviously Jesus' definition of Christian reaction. First, let's briefly touch on this first level of which Jesus speaks. The level of:

A. Revenge

"Eye for eye and tooth for tooth." Jesus' observation that they had been taught to react on this level is in reference to the teachers of the Law using Scripture out of its context. True, Mosaic law made this requirement in Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; and Deut. 19:21. However, these were instructions for the settlement of disputes and the blameworthy taking of life (and for blasphemy).

In other words, they were judicial instructions for just legal settlements in situations where one or both were already at fault in their attitudes and actions. They were not intended as the standard of personal relationship; the Law itself said, "Do not hate your brother in your heart. . . . Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neigh-

bor as yourself" (Lev. 19:17-18). As in all generations, those who choose to hate will often try to find justification. The important things to remember about revenge today are:

1. Revenge is the mature fruit of hatred. If we act in revenge, we have hatred in our hearts.
2. Revenge will dehumanize you. It causes people to do inhuman things to each other.
3. Revenge is a spiritual cancer. It ultimately takes the spiritual life of the one who harbors it.

B. Compromise

Knowing human nature, give it any two extremes and it will often try to find some middle ground between them. Many in organized religion have enough moral insight to realize the lowest level, that of revenge, is a dead-end street for anyone. On the other hand, they are not willing to live on the level Jesus so clearly explains and illustrates for us here. The almost automatic and unconscious response is to develop some middle ground, some compromise between these two *extremes*.

Before going on to consider Christian reaction, we will look at a couple of these compromises that commonly find their way into the church as substitutes for Christian reaction.

The first is:

1. Reasoning and rationalizing about one's rights

A person responding on this level will not hit back. That's open revenge. Rather, he will make a big fuss to draw everyone's attention to the fact that his rights have been trampled on. This is a disguised form of revenge. While not actually "hitting back," he is nonetheless trying to sway others' opinions to punish his "offender." The characteristics of such a person is that he justifies his actions with appeals to his "rights" and uses rationalizations about not letting people run over him—another truth out of context.

The next form of compromise often found in the church is:

2. Good conduct

Depending on personal, human strength. A person living on this level will not hit back or raise a commotion about his rights. Rather, he will gather all the strength he has personally and he will have a (speak with great effort) *good response*. He will bite his lip and not say the hurtful things he is really wishing to say. He will control his temper and not punch you in the nose. Many will watch and remark what a good Christian response he is having.

I admire the character and strength that it takes for such a response. I certainly prefer it to being chewed out or punched in the nose. As good as it is, it is not good enough. Why? Because it is dependent on mere human strength. One day a situation or

rapid string of them will come along that will be more than he can handle on his own. Suddenly everyone is stunned at what he says or does.

C. Christian

We now come to the level of reaction at which Jesus commands us to live as His disciples. Here we will need to depend on His grace. What is asked of us is clearly beyond us.

II. What Is the Christian Reaction? (vv. 39-42)

A. Defined

When Jesus says to us, "Do not resist an evil person," He gives us the context of His requirement: injustice—being wrongly treated. Notice that Christian reaction in such circumstances is cheek + cheek, garment + garment, mile + mile. In other words, transcend by God's grace and rise above anything the world or the devil throws at you. Let's look at the truth and perspective that makes this possible.

ILLUS. Consider Job: (1) God set the stage. He is omniscient and knew how Satan would respond. (2) God was in control. He did have a hedge around Job, and He commanded Satan as to how far he could go in each test (1:12; 2:6). (3) God had the last word and blessed Job twice as much as before. (4) God invested Job's life as Job would have wanted if he could have seen the unending blessings God could see flow through time and touch even us today. God followed the heart of His servant, not his limited wisdom.

The principle: *If* you are walking in obedience to God, nothing will ever come your way but that God allowed it (not necessarily caused it). He allows it only for three reasons: (1) your good; (2) another's good; and (3) God's glory (almost always all three at once).

B. Demonstrated.

The meaning of Jesus' illustrations.

1. Cheek plus cheek means: A matter of pride in our relationships—losing face.

ILLUS. There is a history behind the meaning of "to lose face" in Jesus' day. The male slave would rather be killed publicly than be publicly humiliated by being slapped like a woman. If God allowed the first "punch" at my *pride*, then I vote with Him and allow the second. He has already considered our response in what He has allowed.*

2. Garment plus garment means: Possessiveness about possessions in our relationships. God owns us and our possessions.

ILLUS. Concerning Job (Job 1:21), if God allowed the first garment.*

3. Mile plus mile means: Stubbornness in our relationships.

ILLUS. A church that had a split over what color to paint the sanctuary.*

4. Giving and loaning means: Priority in our relationships—people before things.*

III. What Is Christ-Action? (vv. 43-48)

A. The principle (vv. 43-44): Paul said it this way: "Do not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

B. The purpose: "That you may be sons [daughters] of your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:45).

C. The pagans: Even they love their own. We are not called to be natural but supernatural in our relationships (vv. 46-47).

D. The perfect: Perfect reactions by means of depending on and emulating our Father in heaven (the "sunshine" and the "rain").

E. The power: Not within, but from above.

CONCLUSION:

ILLUS. (True story) A wealthy Christian businessman was slandered by two other businessmen in town who agreed to confirm each other's lies to get business from him. This went on many years. They destroyed his business. He died a very poor man. At his funeral, they came in weeping and repentant.

One confessed that he had always greeted the two of them warmly and told them he was praying for them.

The other said, pointing to the casket: "To know that man's highest love, you had to be his greatest enemy." Does it sound familiar? (Reread verses 46-48.) Could this be said of you and me?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Worship Team

"Come Christians, Join to Sing" (Clydesdale)

Staff

Welcome/Announcements (congregation stands and greets one another)

Worship Team

"Victors in Christ"
"Rejoice, Rejoice"
"If God Be for Us"

Offering

"The Greatest Thing"
"My Jesus, I Love Thee"
"I Love You, Lord"

Staff

Prayer

Special Song

"Lord, Take Control of Me" (Johnson)

Pastor

"CHRISTIAN REACTION"

Our Reaction

*Means give the same kind of explanation of this principle as occurred the first time the * was used.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ABNEGATION

by Gary L. Durham

2 Cor. 3:12—4:12

Mar. 12, 1995

INTRO:

Have you ever wondered why unbelievers can almost never get the simple story and doctrines of the gospel right? Regardless of their intellect—which is sometimes formidable—they seem to get it all twisted and deformed. Unbelieving newsanchors, talk show hosts, university professors, scientists, politicians, etc., they all seem to struggle over a story we have all seen grade school children in our Sunday Schools master.

This was so puzzling to me until I took note of Paul's statement here in verse 4, which reveals the reason behind all the confusion over the gospel: "The god of this age [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." This verse tells us not only what the problem is but also, in very specific detail, what areas of their perception are affected.

In our study passage, Paul is concerned with how we are to minister to the world around us with the knowledge of the good news concerning the *glory* of Jesus Christ as God in the flesh—crucified, risen, and exalted for our salvation. What Paul teaches us with powerful imagery is that we shall never succeed at this commission (our "ministry"—v. 4:1) unless we are willing to prioritize it above even our own lives.

If Jesus thought men and women worth giving *His* life for, should we not have the same attitude about placing this all-important mission above our self—"Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42; cf. 1 John 3:16). Jesus made it irrevocably clear that His taking up of the Cross laid the same obligation on any who would be His disciple (Luke 9:23-25). This cross can be defined as nothing less than redemptive affliction—the abnegation of self for the sake of His mission to seek and save the lost.

It is true that Christ has already accomplished all that is needed in the provision of salvation. It is equally clear that He continues to perform through His Body—the Church—the application of this accomplished work for the building up of His Church through the redemption of the world (Col. 1:24-29). It is our willingness to abnegate self for His sake, through His grace, which determines His use of us to reflect the knowledge of His glory to those needing salvation.

Paul is about to teach us, through his own life, that true ministry never takes place without this abnegation. He lifts up his own experience of abnegation and says to us, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

What is Paul's abnegation?

I. We See the Situation (4:4)

As we have observed, we have a simple story with a problem. It is beautiful and wonderful, and it is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). But the very ones who need it are blind to its glory.

A. They have minds without "eyes."

When Paul informs us that the "minds" of unbelievers have been "blinded," he uses very exacting language. The Greek word for "blinded" is *tuphloō*. This word comes from the word *tuphlos*, which means to make opaque, as if smoky. Both of these words mean to make blind. When we go a little further in the history of these words, we find that they both come from the word *tuphōō*, which comes from the word for smoke (*tuphō*). It literally means to envelop with smoke. What is most revealing is that this word (*tuphōō*) is also figuratively used to mean to be inflated with self-conceit—high minded and filled with pride. Paul is saying that the uncrucified pride of the unbeliever, which keeps him independent of His grace, is used by Satan to fill his mind with smoke so he cannot see the truth about Jesus.

The word for "minds" is *noema*, which comes from the word *noieō*, denoting the exercise of the mind in thinking and perception. Paul is saying that unbelievers have smoky perception or smoke in their thinking concerning the gospel.

B. They have the Master unperceived. This means that the truth about our Lord the Master, Jesus Christ, which is so glorious to us, is unperceivable to them.

1. They see no gospel: "they cannot see the light of the gospel" (v. 4). As far as the unbeliever is concerned, he sees no good news in the Cross.

2. They see no glory: "they cannot see the light of the . . . glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (ibid). When they look at Jesus, they do not see God in the flesh. Maybe a good man, a teacher! Maybe an impostor or madman, but not God incarnate!

II. We See the Solution (vv. 5-6)

The good news is that God has a solution to this problem of smoky perception in the lives of unbelievers—such as we once were. It begins with:

A. The transparent self—read verse 5: Just as Christ made himself transparent so that the Father's glory could be seen, in like manner we are not to "preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." The first step in ministry is always to get self out of the way so that Christ can be seen. Paul knew this was Jesus' first requirement for His disciples. (cf. Luke 9:23, "must deny himself"). This alone is the true place of a servant of Jesus—"ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

B. It involves the transformed self—read verse 6: As Jesus submitted to the Father's plan to be transformed from His humiliation to His glorification by means of a redeeming Cross for humanity, so must we be transformed to embrace the light of the gospel. God has done this beginning with Jesus' sacrifice and victory communicated to His first disciples. As they imitated

Him by His grace, it is communicated continually outward until it reaches even to us.

Paul compares this sovereign act of redemption, by God through Christ to us, with His creative power in speaking the universe into existence. Just as He spoke light into existence, He has decreed the light of the gospel into our hearts—those of us who have chosen to believe. When we look at Jesus, we see the glory—God!

III. We See the Strategy (3:7—4:1)

Paul tells us in 4:1 that we have a ministry. He described this ministry in 3:7-18. (Take note of all the uses of the words “glory” and “glorious.”)

A. We have the revelation: the ministry—read 3:7-17: Moses brought a revelation that brought just condemnation. We minister a revelation of Jesus through His Spirit that brings glory and life.

B. We have the reflection: the message—read 3:18a: Our message to the world comes by reflecting His glory. They need to see Him, not us. This is our ministry (4:1).

C. We have the renovation: the metamorphoses—read 3:18b: The means by which we reflect His glory is continual transformation (*metamorphoo*, from which we get the English word *metamorphosis*; it means to be transformed from the inside to the outside) into His likeness—continually becoming like Him who can never be equaled. Only those being continually transformed can have a true ministry—reflecting more of Him and less of self each day.

IV. We See the Sine Qua Non (4:7-12)

Paul made an enlightening statement in 4:1. Concerning the fact of having such a ministry, he said, “We do not lose heart.” Remembering all he taught in the next six verses, we will then find that this statement not only follows his teaching on continual transformation into Christ likeness—which in the here and now means the continual application of the cross—but also anticipates verses 7 through 12. Here many believers try to bail out. But we mustn’t—without what he now shares, we can never have a ministry that will redeem the world.

A. We have the treasure—verse 7: The treasure is the knowledge of who Christ is, which we reflect to the world by our continual transformation. It is left in a “jar of clay” to show them where the “all surpassing power” comes from—not us, but God.

B. We have the translation—verses 8-10: “We are hard

pressed . . . but not crushed” and the world takes note that we should have been crushed. We are “perplexed, but not in despair [depression],” and they wonder why we have strength to not be depressed. We are “persecuted, but not abandoned,” and they say, “This is really strange.” We are “struck down, but not destroyed,” and they come asking, “Where does your strength come from?” We answer, “What you see is His strength, which you claim doesn’t exist. But now you know it must.” We have been used by God to translate the glory of His person and power into a realm they can comprehend—hardship and trouble. This is redemptive affliction for Christ’s sake—His kingdom.

C. We have the transposition—verses 10-12: Our mortal bodies have a purpose in the here and now—to make Jesus’ life visible. Through this we communicate His life to others by our “death”—affliction.

CONCLUSION:

Read 2 Cor. 12:7-10: Paul’s request. Jesus answers with a principle of ministry that could be paraphrased, “Where there is less of you, there can be more of Me.” It is not our talents we struggle most deeply with in surrender. It is the willingness to display our weaknesses. What is Paul’s response—glorying in his weaknesses for Christ’s sake. Will you?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER	
Worship Team	
	“Let Everything That Has Breath” Choir (Gomez/Brooks)
Worship Team and Congregation (standing)	
	“We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise” “Praise My Soul the King of Heaven” “Doxology” “Bless God”
Invocation (have congregation greet and be seated)	
Staff	
	Offering
Special Song	
	“Masterpiece” (Henderson/Patti/Gaither)
Pastor	
	Baby Dedications
Worship Team	
	“Jesus Loves Me” “O How He Loves You and Me”
Staff	
	Prayer
Pastor	
	“THE CHRISTIAN’S ABNEGATION”

THE CHRISTIAN'S AMBITION

by Gary L. Durham

Phil. 3:7-10

Mar. 19, 1995

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (vv. 10-11).

INTRO:

He seemed to be the hardest, most unmerciful of men. It was not enough that he had imprisoned thousands in the capital; he wanted to take his crusade against Jesus' disciples anywhere he could find them. The Word of God records the fact that he was destroying the church by dragging believers, both men and women, to prison by means of a house-to-house search (Acts 8:1-3). Now he is on his way with "murderous threats" (9:1) to *cleanse* Damascus of all disciples of Jesus Christ.

To him it was all very simple: They proclaimed a mere man to be God, and he did not believe Jesus of Nazareth to be God in the flesh. They were heretics of the worst kind—blasphemers to be punished.

But something happened on the road to Damascus that day that forever changed his perception of Jesus of Nazareth and, therefore, his view of every other person on the face of the earth. Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light and, while temporarily blinding his physical eyes, opened the eyes of his heart. For the first time he saw Jesus as He really is—the glorified Lord of glory.

Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was forever changed. He could never look at Jesus the same as before. Because he now saw so clearly the implications of the person of Jesus, he saw that the impact of what He did reached to every living man and woman. He could never look at anyone without looking at the potential of Christ's redeeming grace in their lives.

In 2 Cor. 5:11-21, especially verses 16-17, Paul gives us insight into how his perspective utterly changed. Note that his changed view of Jesus (no longer from a worldly point of view) changed his view of all men ("... if ... in Christ, ... a new creation ...").

To understand the nature of ministry and be compelled in ministry to others, we must first have a clear view of Christ. Paul had such a view. He understood the pattern of redemptive affliction that he saw in Christ. He understood that all true redemptive ministry through Christ's disciples and His Church must follow the same redemptive pattern.

It became Paul's ambition in life to follow these footprints of redemptive life. In this study, we look at how a Christian should embrace ministry through redemptive affliction for others. The life of this great apostle is our guide. Last week we saw the ministry principle of abnegation in Paul. Next we see:

The ambition of Paul—Read Phil. 3:10.

Our ambitions tell on us. God does not want to make us ambitionless, but He does want us to be ambitious

about the right things. Paul remained a very ambitious man—but how his ambitions were changed!

ILLUS. Watchman Nee, a great Chinese minister of the gospel, died in prison for his faith. Once he scratched a note to a friend that said, "I want nothing for myself, but I want everything for my Lord." This is the heart of one in love with his Lord—ambitious for Jesus and His kingdom.

I. We See the Life of Communion: Knowing the Person of Christ—"I Want to Know Christ"

A. Paul understood that Christianity is not merely propositional, but personal. It all begins in a personal relationship and knowledge of Jesus.

B. The word here for "know" in the Greek is *ginosko*. Two things about this word are important here:

1. It is in the aorist tense. *Ginosko*, when in the aorist, denotes definiteness. Paul wants a definite knowledge, a face-to-face knowledge of Christ.
2. *Ginosko* indicates a relationship between the person knowing and that which is known.*

C. Notice Paul's total dedication to this goal: Read Phil. 3:7-9.

1. Verse 7: Personal advantage is invested in the goal of knowing Christ.
2. Verse 8: Personal priority shows up: Knowing Christ makes everything else seem like rubbish in comparison.
3. Verse 9: Personal appropriation of the person of Christ takes place.

D. Paul was ambitious concerning the person of Christ. He wants nothing less than communion with Him.

1. Paul knew this is man's highest purpose—communion with God.
2. Communication with God can only be found through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

II. We See the Life of Conquest: Knowing the Power of Christ—"I Want to Know ... the Power of His Resurrection"

A. Jesus is nothing less than life! He came that we might have life, and have it to the full.

B. Jesus conquered man's enemy—death:

1. Death is defined: to be separated from the source of life (God).
2. Death is caused by sin, which expels us from God's presence.
3. But death also perpetuates man's sinful condition by keeping him from the resources of God, the life of God.
4. Jesus brought life to us and dealt with our sin so that we could receive life.

C. The life of the Christian can never be less than su-

pernatural. It must be resurrection life or we have no Christianity. Not only must Christ be raised, but *we* must be walking in resurrection newness of life right now (Rom. 6:4).

D. Paul was ambitious concerning the power of Christ because he was intent on conquest for Jesus' sake.

1. Paul was a great warrior of the Cross, and he wanted nothing less than total victory.
2. We can only have victory through the life of Jesus Christ. Rom. 5:10—Delivered (set at liberty) through His life. Here, and here alone, is conquest!

III. We See the Life of Crucifixion: Knowing the Passion of Christ—"I Want to Know . . . the Fellowship of Sharing in His Sufferings"

A. Here we begin to see inside the great heart of the apostle Paul. He knew there could be no identification with the Resurrection power of Christ without identification with the Passion of Christ—the crucified life of redemptive suffering.

B. No death, no resurrection. No Cross, no Christ.

C. Here the nature of Christ is made manifest to us. It is the only place where we can come to true fellowship with Christ. Fellowship comes through common ground, activity, and experience. Christ involves himself in only one thing here on this fallen planet—the salvation of people. Since He will not change, if we are to have fellowship with Him, we shall have to join Him.

D. He abides in resurrection life. The only door into fellowship with the Risen Lord is the Cross. We must embrace His death to embrace His life.

E. No wonder Paul was ambitious concerning the life of crucifixion with his Lord.



"We can agree to disagree, Pastor, s'long as we do it my way!"

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SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Staff

Welcome/Announcements
(have people stand and greet . . . stay standing for singing)

Worship Team

"Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart"
"Come and Rejoice"
"Majesty"

"To Thee We Ascribe Glory" (seat people)

Offering

"All I Want Is You, Lord" (Cymball/Hart)
(Choir and Solo)
"More of You"

Staff

Prayer

Pastor

"THE CHRISTIAN'S AMBITION"

Creative Worship Ideas

Usually I see the worship service as a funnel that narrows the focus of the worshiper. It begins wide with praise as we are reminded of the greatness of God. We focus on Him rather than on the things we spend most of our time doing each day. Then we narrow the focus. Most often I see prayer as the most narrow point of the funnel. It is the intimate touch of the Father as each one personally celebrates Him in his own time of prayer. If unhurried, it also allows Him time to renew our minds and refocus our hearts. Often we encourage our people to come to the altar, kneel in the pew, stand, or be seated—wherever the Lord would call them to prayer in each service. Once worshipers have been at the feet of Jesus, they are more ready to hear what He says through His Word.

*W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 628.

THE CHRISTIAN'S AFFLICTION

by Gary L. Durham

Col. 1:24-29

Mar. 26, 1995

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church" (v. 24).

INTRO:

(From Acts 9:10-19) Ananias was a little shaken. Surely this was not the Lord speaking to him. "Do what, Lord?"

He heard the instructions again. "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"'Lord,' Ananias answered [as if God needed educating], 'I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.'"

Now, surely under the circumstances, the Lord will let Ananias off the hook. But instead he hears: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

We saw last week that this "chosen instrument" in the person of Paul came to have as his highest ambition to enter into the redemptive affliction of Jesus. His ambitions were to know three things concerning Christ: (1) The Life of Communion: Knowing the Person of Christ—"I want to know Christ . . ."; (2) The Life of Conquest: Knowing the Power of Christ—"I want to know . . . the power of his resurrection . . ."; and (3) The Life of Crucifixion: Knowing the Passion of Christ—"I want to know . . . the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings . . ."

We should not think these statements from Phil. 3:10 are somehow a rare moment of Paul idealism. For as we read his writings, we find this attitude consistently with him. Our study passage this morning is one such example.

Paul takes us to the applicational aspect of his ambitions. Here we see the affliction of Paul—Col. 1:24. We do not like to hear about affliction. Yet, until we understand redemptive affliction, we are still outside the wonders of our faith. Until we move inside, through identification with Christ, we shall know nothing of His person. And to know nothing of Christ is to be left in the dark in all things!

I. We See the Life of Sacrifice: Rejoicing Affliction—"Now I Rejoice on What Was Suffered for You . . ."

A. Paul was not speaking figuratively here. He had suffered much for the Christians at Philippi. Paul had to take a cruel beating to get the church at Philippi started (Acts 16:11-40).

B. A life of sacrifice can never be only negative in its focus:

1. The negative focus is looking at what we give up in sacrifice. The negative focus is valid but cannot stand alone. But so many Christians never get beyond it.
2. True sacrifice to God is something that is offered joyously. It is not the things we sacrifice, but we ourselves that must come into His presence in total abandon. This is a great privilege—being able to approach God.
3. Paul considered the sacrifice of suffering for the sake of Christ a joyous thing.

C. The nature of love (agape) is others centered. This is Paul.

II. We See the Life of Suffering: Relational Affliction—" . . . And I Fill Up in My Flesh What Is Still Lacking in Regard to Christ's Afflictions"

A. Paul was *not* speaking of the sufferings that relate to the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. These are finished, and nothing can be added to them. They are perfect and without need of addition.

B. We have forgotten that the Scriptures speak of three kinds of redemptive travail that Christ involves himself in:

1. The Cross—Historic and never to be repeated.
2. His Intercession—Ongoing for us even now (Rom. 8:26-27, of the Spirit of Christ; v. 34, of Christ personally).
3. Vicarious Suffering—Through His Church, which is now His physical body here on earth (Christ's Spirit within His Church is analogous to His physical presence on this earth). Paul understood this all too well. Read Acts 9:4-6—Jesus made it clear that He personally identifies with His Body, the Church.
4. Paul had placed himself at Christ's disposal. He could carry on His ministry of redemption through Paul. Can He do the same through you?
5. Suffering can be redemptive. Can't we Christians see this? We claim we are saved by such redemptive suffering. But to see it we must move from a selfish focus to an others focus.

a. Read 2 Cor. 11:23-29. What a résumé!

b. Read Phil. 1:12-30. (Note vv. 12 and 29.) Phil. 2:1-18, which speaks of our conformity to Christ's humility, can only be truly understood in this context of redemptive suffering. This is so of all of Philippians. In verse 17, Paul refers to the "sacrifice and service coming from your [the Philippians'] faith." Do we have this expectation of our faith in Christ? Or do we expect becoming a Christian means the solution to all our problems—blessings

from God's hand that will veto all our difficulties? If we do, we know nothing of true Christianity.

6. To participate in Christ's great ongoing plan of redemption is the greatest privilege in the universe. No wonder Paul sought to be a channel of Christ's relational affliction—here is the glory!

III. We See the Life of Service: Redemptive Affliction—"... For the Sake of His Body, Which Is the Church"

A. Service to God is all bound up in service to Christ.

B. He has left you only one practical way to serve Him—through and to His Body.

1. You have to love your brother to love God (1 John 4:20-21).

2. The more you love God, the more you will love your brother. And the more you love your brother, the more you will love God.

3. Notice how Paul serves—Col. 1:25—2:5:

a. By commission—a calling (v. 25). Do you realize your calling? Every believer is called to ministry.

b. He ministers by the full Word of God (v. 25). This is the only tool for opening the human heart.

c. He discloses "the mystery" (v. 26). This is a personal mystery: "Christ" (v. 27a); this is a relational mystery: "in you" (v. 27b); this is a hopeful mystery: "the hope" (v. 27c); this is a glorious mystery: "of glory" (v. 27d). We have a wonderful mystery to unveil!

d. He proclaims "Him"—Christ (v. 28). This alone is true service to God or to man. Christ is what we need—every one of us. Nothing less! And there can be nothing more!

e. He "admonishes" (v. 28). Greek word for "admonishes" is *noutheteo*—it means to confront with truth with the purpose of bringing about change. It means also to remind of truths or commitments that are being neglected.

f. He "teaches" (v. 28c)—gives understanding.

g. He admonishes and teaches "... everyone with [in] all wisdom" (v. 28). He can do this because "in whom [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Read Col. 2:2-5: Paul's purpose in ("struggling") teaching Christ: That they may be:

(1) Encouraged in heart

(2) United in love

(3) Have full riches of complete understanding

(4) So as to know—Christ

(5) In whom is all wisdom and knowledge

(6) So that they may not be deceived

(7) And be orderly and firm in their faith in Christ

b. The prime directive (v. 28): To "present everyone perfect in Christ."

i. He serves only by the "energy" of Christ—Christ working through him.

4. This is how we must serve too! All for the sake of His Body—the Church. In this way we serve Christ as we serve each other.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Worship Team

"Come and Worship" (trio and worship leader)

Staff

Welcome/Announcements

(congregation stands, greets, and remains standing)

Worship Team

"Come, Worship the King"

"Come, Let Us Worship the King"

"O Worship the King" (in a 6/8 feel)
(seat congregation)

Offering

"We Are an Offering"

"Cleanse Me"

"A Pure Heart"

Staff

Prayer

Pastor

"THE CHRISTIAN'S AFFLICTION"

Creative Worship Ideas

Since there are a few things that every service must have, we are always looking for ways to remind ourselves that these things have significant meaning as a part of worship. The offering is one of these weekly events. Often we will sing a song that reminds us of the act of worship in which we are participating. One of my favorites is "We Are an Offering." I like to remind our people that while our giving is an act of obedience, it is also an act of love. It symbolizes the fact that once again we recognize He is our Provider and the Lord of everything, including our future and how He will provide for us as well.

THE CHRISTIAN'S AFFIRMATION

by Gary L. Durham

2 Cor. 4:1-12

Apr. 2, 1995

"For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (vv. 11-12).

INTRO:

(From Acts 14:1-20)

Their preaching in the city of Iconium had wonderful results—many were converted and the Lord did many miraculous signs and wonders to confirm the message of Christ through Paul and Barnabas. Yet the stubborn among their own countrymen became jealous and began to stir up the city. It resulted in the people being divided between loyalty to the apostles and to the Jews.

As always, it was not long until the Jews had laid plans to kill them. They found out about it and fled to the nearby Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe.

While Paul was preaching one of his first messages in the city of Lystra, he noticed a man listening who had been lame from birth. He also noticed, through the Spirit of the Lord, that he had faith to be healed. So he called out to him in the middle of his message, "Stand up on your feet!" Instantly the man jumped up and began to walk.

The people of the city began to shout that the gods had come visibly among them in human form. They thought Barnabas was Zeus and that Paul, the primary speaker, was Hermes. The priest of Zeus and the people came together at the city gates to offer sacrifices to them.

Paul and Barnabas finally understood what they were doing and ran in among the crowd tearing their clothes in the traditional sign of offense. They then explained again that they were only men like them and that the miracle they had seen was due to the power of the true God in the name of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the people were so intent on honoring them as gods that the apostles still had difficulty keeping the people from sacrificing to them.

This scene had hardly closed before some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium—two places from which Paul and Barnabas had been run out. They began to slander them and tell the people that Paul and Barnabas were evil and doing these miracles by demonic power.

Before Paul and Barnabas understood how quickly things had changed, the crowd attacked them. Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city for dead—a god to sacrifice to one moment, a demon to destroy the next!

The disciples gathered around him and prayed. The Lord healed Paul instantly, and he got up and went back into the city.

When Paul says, "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body" (2 Cor. 4:11), he is not speaking in abstractions. He had seen death up close many times in his ministry. This makes Paul's affirmation even more wonderful.

Returning now to the passage with which we began this series (2 Cor. 4), we move from Paul's abnegation, ambition, and affliction, to his affirmation of the basic principle by which life is transmitted to others in a fallen world: "So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (v. 12).

We see the affirmation of Paul (2 Cor. 4:11-12). This is one of my favorite passages. In 2 Cor. 4 we read many great truths for which Paul has laid a wonderful foundation in the previous passages. (Do a quick review from 2 Cor. 3:12—4:12, pointing out how our ministry of reflecting the glory of God is through our victory in the midst of trials brought upon our earthen vessels. It is this that points to the "all-surpassing power" of God within us. By means of our being hard pressed, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair [depression]; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed, we translate the reality of Jesus and His glory and power into the *visible* realm. Here, those blinded by Satan in their minds can see and respond to what is otherwise imperceptible to them.)

I. We See the Life of Transcription: The Imitation of Christ—"For We Who Are Alive Are Always Being Given Over to Death for Jesus' Sake"

A. A transcription is a duplicate, a carbon copy. "Christian" means "little Christ."

B. How is it that we have not understood this to mean an identification with the sacrificial lifestyle of Jesus?

C. The great secret of the universe is wrapped up in our imitation of the sacrificial life of Christ.

D. Living for Christ can be nothing less than what Paul shares with us in Rom. 12:1-2—we are to be living sacrifices.

II. We See the Life of Transparency: The Image of Christ—"... So That His Life May Be Revealed in Our Mortal Body"

A. This is nothing less than the transfiguration of the Church so that the glory of Christ may be seen!

B. Christ was transfigured and revealed the glory of the Father. The Church is to be transfigured and to reveal the glory of Christ through the manifestation of the Holy Spirit of Christ within us.

C. Redemptive suffering removes self and reveals Christ. Are we committed enough to the manifestation of the glory of Christ, which He said would draw all men to Him when He is lifted up, that we are willing to suffer if necessary?

D. We are even helped on to the manifestation of holiness by redemptive suffering. Holiness is not merely an

abstract thing—only inward. “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude [mind-set], because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

E. Holiness is provided by the Cross of the Lord Jesus. Holiness can only begin there. No amount of human suffering will make you holy in and of itself. *But* when holiness arms itself with the same attitude as Christ—redemptive suffering for others—then we move into a new realm of freedom and manifestation of the holy glory of God. Here is where we find the practical application of a death to selfishness—self-centeredness.

F. Suffering for others moves us beyond the natural-idealistic to the supernatural-realistic fast!

G. Here, and here alone, do we find the development of true transparency. Paul found this to be true in his case in 2 Cor. 12:7-10. Here he learned that where there is less of him, there could be more of Christ. And he learned it through redemptive suffering. Because he was in the battle for others, Satan was buffeting him.

III. We See the Life of Transposition: The Impartation of Christ—“So Then, Death Is at Work in Us, but Life Is at Work in You”

A. The redemptive equation aims at a transposition—that of the living dying, so the dying may live.

B. This is *the* principle of ministry. Yet so few seem to understand it.

C. So often we are busy redefining ministry as something done in a spotlight. God help us to grow up!

D. Ministry is to communicate life (Jesus’ life) to the dying. There is no way to do that except by a sacrificial dying on our part: an inconvenience, an offering up of ourself for others. If Jesus could not communicate life to us except by tasting death, what kind of pride is it in us that somehow thinks that we can?

E. The servant cannot be above his master! (Read John 15:18-23.)

F. To impart Christ to others will take a commitment to letting His supernatural life shine through in love and humility. This is done by the procedure Paul outlines for us in 2 Cor. 4:7-12 (refer back to message one, and make application).

G. Can you hear the call to ministry? Only the committed, in love with Jesus, will hear and respond under these circumstances.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Pastor

Baptism

(conclude with prayer of praise and ask congregation to stand and greet . . . and remain standing)

Worship Team

“Honor the Lord”

“Blessing and Honor”

“O for a Heart to Praise My God”

“A Perfect Heart” (seat congregation)

Offering

“My Father Watches Over Me” Choir (Gabriel/Fettke)

“Got Any Rivers to Cross?”

“Learning to Lean”

Staff

Prayer

Pastor

“THE CHRISTIAN’S AFFIRMATION”

Special Song

“Embrace the Cross” (Elliot)

Creative Worship Ideas

One of our favorite ways to begin a service is with the baptism of new believers. It brings an attitude and atmosphere of celebration, as we focus on the transforming power of the gospel. We prefer to have baptism often, even if it means only a few in each service rather than wait and do it once a quarter with a big group.

Beyond Belief



THE SADDEST WORDS IN THE BIBLE

by Gary L. Durham

Luke 19:28-44

Apr. 9, 1995

Palm Sunday

INTRO:

Besides Gethsemane, a private occasion, there are only two recorded occasions on which Jesus wept publicly: at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:35) and here in verse 41 as He came to the summit of the Mount of Olives and beheld the city of Jerusalem. His weeping tells us not only much about Jesus but also much about both occasions.

Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus reveals to us how much Jesus felt the tragedy of death's touch on man and creation. But the Author of Hope never stops at weeping. As a finite prelude to His own infinite victory over death, Jesus declared war on death by freeing Lazarus from its grip.

Jesus' weeping on the Mount of Olives was His response to the fact that this dying creation is addicted to death through self-autonomy. We were rejecting the Prince of Life in order to preserve our selfish ambitions. He came to offer life, but we clung to death.

Jesus understood the continued victims that death would claim because His people rejected Him. Deliverance and glory were only a humble yes away. But instead they chose the chasm of an infinite no—a chasm that only His eternal blood could span with a bridge of redemptive opportunity!

The direct relationship between the tomb of Lazarus and the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is linked by this issue of death. Jesus marched into Jerusalem for the final showdown of that which the tomb of Lazarus had been a mere dress rehearsal.

Because we have forgotten or have never known much concerning Jewish tradition at the time of Jesus, we fail to realize how conclusively Jesus provided all the proof of His deity for which they could ever possibly ask when He raised Lazarus from the dead. This proof was offered on their terms and made the answer to their own legalistic equations of tradition conform to the conclusion: Jesus of Nazareth = God in the flesh—Immanuel. Let's see why.

ILLUS. The Jews made much of their insights into Scripture as viewed through the eyes of history. They built tradition after tradition on their observation of how God had worked in the past and, therefore, would work in the future.

"After all," they reasoned, "our God has declared that He doesn't change. We have had enough history with Him to understand and chronicle many of His unchanging ways." They forgot that an infinite God need not change to eternally amaze us with His inaccessible, limitless facets.

One tradition among the many to which they had given birth stated that only God personally could raise a man who had been dead and in the grave more than three days. This tradition arose out of their observation that in all of recorded Scripture and history, no prophet

had ever been used by God to raise the dead from beyond this point. They reasoned that the spirit of the dead could stay somewhere near the grave for three days hoping for the unlikely arrival of a prophet who had the authority to reconstitute the soul by rejoining spirit and body. But after three days, the spirit moved across to the realms of Sheol from which only God could free him—and that in the general resurrection.

Notice how Jesus sets the stage to prove His deity on the grounds of their own tradition. When He received word that Lazarus was sick, Jesus purposely delayed going to Bethany. He tarried until He knew Lazarus was dead and the length of the journey to Bethany would cause Him to arrive after he had been in the grave for four days (John 11:1-44).

Jesus had purposely set this stage of confrontation with death to declare His deity on grounds that the Jews themselves must declare as valid. They had tried to discount His other events of rebuking death by saying they had not really died or were not dead very long.

This time such rationalizations would not be available to them. Lazarus was obviously well known. There were many Jews from Jerusalem who had come to Bethany to help Mary and Martha mourn. They were built-in witnesses who had been there for several days and could all verify the time of Lazarus' death and the fact of Jesus raising him after the three-day limit.

Notice the tremendous difference in the reaction of the people of Israel to this miracle. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem drew the large crowd it did because of this great event and what it said about Jesus: "Now the crowd that was with him when he had called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him" (John 12:17-18).

Jesus had taken on His critics' greatest possible challenge. Now they had no logical recourse. "So the Pharisees said to one another, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!'" (John 12:19).

They were now cornered into exposing their real hearts: "Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there [Lazarus' house in Bethany] and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (John 12:9-11).

In other words, they decided the evidence could not be refuted, so they wanted to bury it!

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the rulers had every evidence they needed to publicly meet Him as the long-

awaited Desire of the Ages—the One who gave meaning to their nation's very existence. Yet they rejected Him, even in the face of such undeniable and certain proof. Their response was to reject life in favor of self-autonomous death. They rejected their King (John 12:9-11).

Jesus is greeted by the masses as the Son of David, the long-awaited Messiah. But He knows the true heart of the nations is not with Him. As He comes to the crest of the Mount of Olives, Jesus stops—and a most amazing scene unfolds. In the midst of an uproar of rejoicing and “Hosannas,” He begins to weep for the desolation that He knows will soon come to this people. From His lips come what I believe to be the saddest words in the Bible, the saddest words almost anyone can hear concerning any matter. Words that reveal the loss of great glory and its replacement with inevitable destruction. “If you, even you, had only known. . . .”

I. If Only You Had Known the Glory God Had Planned (v. 42)

A. They should have known. They were daily students of the Scriptures who were bound in a national covenant with God and with each other, which made the arrival of Immanuel their primary and sole purpose for existence. If there is anything to which they should have been most attentive and submissive, it was the moment of His arrival. This and this alone was Israel's peace.

B. Like so many today, they were distracted with their own convenient interpretations of how *they* wanted things to be. In their blindness, with the Kingdom within arm's length, with thousands of years of tears and blood invested to bring them to this point, they walked right by and never even saw it.

When Jesus wept for Jerusalem and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace,” He was pointing to the fact that Israel had chosen a false path of salvation.

John 11:45-53 records a high-level meeting of the Sanhedrin that took place on the heels of Lazarus' resurrection and just before Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The central issue around which the Sanhedrin focused its concern was the survival of the Jewish nation. It is clear that they had lost sight of the whole purpose of the Jewish state in the first place. Israel's primary purpose was to carry the promise of Messiah in the womb of a covenanted nation “until He should come to whose right it is to rule.” When He came, their only possible significance was bound up in their opportunity to declare Him to the world. The only hope for the Jewish nation was and is in Jesus.

Blindness turns left when it should turn right. Caiaphas, the acting High Priest, made a rationalizing speech that was smooth reprobation (reversal of truth). He spoke up and said, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man

die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (vv. 49-50).

The intent of his speech was an unadulterated lie—a complete reversal of the truth. As the wisdom of God is always ahead of men, He was working His great mystery planned from before the creation of the world. He made Caiaphas speak more truth than he knew (vv. 51-53)! If only you had known the way of true redemption, Caiaphas, you would have stood in awe at the words the Almighty placed in your mouth!

C. When we say no to Jesus, either by rebellion or selfish neglect, the loss is always eternally enormous.

II. If Only You Had Known the Evil That Would Come (vv. 43-44)

When we miss the opportunities of the good, we are not left with some mere neutral. The absence of the good is a vacuum that will draw into itself every manner of destructive thing. Israel's rejection of life meant death. The loss of God's favor was the loss of His protection from a very real and merciless enemy.

This very specific prophecy that Jesus gives in verses 43 and 44, which is around 40 years prior to the fact, reads like an eyewitness account—and that it is! God sees the future better than we see the present or better than we understand the past.

III. If Only You Had Known the Time of God's Visitation (v. 44)

Jesus finishes with the words, “because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.” Any and every moment is too important to waste in neglect of eternal matters. How sad these words. The moment that generations had prayed and cried for had come. There were none to welcome it. Do not let the shouts of “Hosanna” fool you. They would soon be shouting, “Crucify him!” So is the destiny of all who reject Jesus' authority. Let us determine to truly welcome Jesus as King in our hearts where He longs to set up His kingdom. For today is the day of salvation and the time of God's visitation on us.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Worship Team	“There Is Power” Choir (Clydesdale) “We Have Overcome” “Victory in Jesus” “Are You Washed in the Blood?”
Staff	Welcome/Announcements/Offering
Special Song	“When His Kingdom Comes”
Pastor	“THE SADDEST WORDS IN THE BIBLE”
Pastor	Closing Prayer

THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION

by Gary L. Durham

John 20:1-31

Apr. 16, 1995

Easter

INTRO:

"Seeing is believing." At least that is what many people think to be true. We often believe because we see, and we often will not believe unless we see.

Sometimes this leads to a curious set of circumstances in the matters of human faith:

1. Faith springs out of the perception of fact, a sense that something is real or true. This is good, for that is how God made us to function.

2. Man's perception of life and its realities has been more than cut in half because of the Fall. The spiritual realm, which is not only the other side of reality but the source of all reality, is all but imperceptible to us. God, the Infinite Fact of reality and life, is all but totally unknown by many people. This would be true of all of us if it were not for His self-revelation to us.

3. We, therefore, place an unbalanced trust and dependence on our physical senses to give us our understanding of reality. Sight is the most dominant of our physical forms of perception.

4. This is why the terms we use to refer to sight are often used as metaphors to express the idea of comprehension.

ILLUS. For example, when we have studied a difficult math problem and have finally come to understand it, we say, "I see it now!" We don't, of course, mean that we have studied this math problem until we have come to some new stimulation of our optic nerve. We have merely equated understanding—mental perception—with the sense of sight because it is so often the means by which we do arrive at understanding.

Because of the faultiness of human perception, we are ever open to deception and our trust is often misplaced. When we are dealing with something as important as whether the resurrection of Jesus is a reality or not, then it is imperative that we know how to take advantage of the whole realm of perception.

ILLUS. My car starts knocking. I look under the hood, but I see nothing wrong. I ask my brother, Steve, who is a mechanical whiz, to look under the hood with me. He focuses his eye on the same place I do and immediately says, "I see the problem here." I look; I still don't see the problem. My eyes are as good as his. What is the difference? The quality of the perceiver. Technically, my eyes see the same thing as Steve's. But I am not trained to see and to perceive as he does.

Jesus knew how important seeing is to us. So He spent 40 days with the Early Church after His resurrection to provide the data, the physical facts, out of which would arise the faith of the Church.

He did not provide facts as a replacement for faith but as the ground of faith. Faith is based firmly on God's facts, His revealed truth. There is a sense in which seeing

is believing. Before we can properly understand in what way, we must understand more about the levels of seeing—the levels of perception. These levels are laid out very clearly for us in John 20. This whole chapter is based on the relationship of sight to faith. First, I want to go back to where the Resurrection was first seen:

I. The Resurrection Is Seen Through the Eyes of Divine Wisdom

- A. Jesus the Man trusts His Father in the face of death:
 - 1. Read Heb. 5:7, giving application of the statement "to the one who could save him from death."
 - 2. Read Acts 2:24, pointing out the importance of the statement, "But God raised him from the dead."
- B. Jesus the Man has the insight of trust:
 - 1. Read Heb. 12:2, giving application of the words, "who for the joy set before him endured the cross."
 - 2. Jesus demonstrates for us the principle that every victory must start with a vision of the rewards of faith and obedience to God's plan.

II. The Resurrection Is Seen Through the Eyes of History

History comes to us from witnesses. *So it is through their eyes that we see the events.*

John's account gives us some important information on how these witnesses came to be sure of the resurrection of Jesus.

- A. Seeing resulted from the act of observation (John 20:1, 5):
 - 1. Mary Magdalene "saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance" (John 20:1).
 - a. The Greek word here translated "saw" is the word *blepo*, which means to glance at with interest. It means that certain circumstances have been observed with interest, but no opinions or understanding have yet come as to what is observed. Mary saw the huge tomb stone rolled away, which would later be an important and wonderful fact to her. But now it was only an interesting and puzzling observation.
 - b. Mary went running back to Peter and John, not with the good news of the Lord's resurrection, but with the troubling fact of the disturbance of the grave and the missing body of Jesus (v. 2). She had observed, but she had not understood.
 - 2. John the apostle "bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in" (John 20:5).
 - a. The Greek word here translated "looked" is the same Greek word, *blepo*. John, like Mary, looked with interest as he glanced around at the empty shell of graveclothes. As yet there was no under-

standing. Interest? Yes. Questions? Yes! But mostly all unanswered at this stage of observation. This is an important stage of perception on our way to understanding the great fact of God's mighty work through Jesus Christ. It must be passed through by all who would come to a deeper understanding of our Lord and enter into the facts of faith.

b. Yet it is a tragic place to stop! So many in their "investigation" of the Christian facts upon which rest all our faith, have never gotten beyond the level of an interested glance. There is no glorious realization, no supernatural discovery, no life-directing encounter. They tell you, and they tell themselves, that they have seen. But they have not!

c. To see Jesus takes more than an interested glance. There must be a deeper "seeing." Such comes only from a heart so in love that it continues to pursue.

B. Seeing resulted from the act of examination (John 20:6-7):

1. Peter "saw the strips of linen lying there" (John 20:6).

The Greek word here translated "saw" is the Greek word *theoreo*, which means to carefully behold, to study with detailed interest. It often is used to mean a spectator—one who watches intently and in an involved manner. The detailed description that John here provides of the condition of the grave and the graveclothes shows how carefully Peter, and ultimately John, examined everything.

2. An unshakable faith must have facts. They are there for us. Do we avail ourselves of them, or do we build on the sand of mere emotion and religious convenience? We must care enough to examine our faith carefully (1 Pet. 3:15), building a sure foundation for faith. The Christian faith can bear up under the closest examination. We contend that we will not have a faith that cannot pass the test of historic validity. God *has* intervened in our history. It is the best documented fact of all history. Examine! Lay the foundations of an unshakable faith!

C. Seeing resulted in the fact of comprehension. Read John 20:8-9.

1. John the apostle "saw and believed" (John 20:8).

The Greek word translated here "saw" is the Greek word *eidon*, which is the second aorist of the Greek word *borao*, which means to see and to know; to

understand what you see. The examination of the facts of the tomb led to an inner "seeing" for John. The meaning of what he saw suddenly shouted at him, "He is risen!" John then moved to the third level of "seeing," that of understanding. Not that he understood how it could be that Jesus was alive; we still cannot understand that yet today. It was not an intellectual comprehension. Rather, it was the knowledge that "it is so," even if it was too wonderful for him to understand how.

III. The Resurrection Is Seen Through the Eyes of Faith

A. One man would not believe easily (John 20:24-31). Tell the story of Thomas:

1. Thomas said, "Unless I see [*eidon*—to see and understand for sure] the nail marks in his hands" (v. 25).

2. Jesus said, "Put your finger here; see [*eidon*] my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (v. 27).

B. "Because you have seen [*borao*—been able to stare at and discern clearly] me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen [*eidon*] and yet have believed" (v. 29).

C. "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (v. 31).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Worship Team

"The Easter Song" Choir
"Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"
"Hallelujah, Jesus Is Alive"
"He Lives"
"Because He Lives"
Invocation and Greeting

Staff

Welcome/Announcements/Offering

Worship Team

"Amen" Choir (Huff)
"And Can It Be?"
"Amazing Love"

Staff

Prayer

Pastor

"THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION"

UNDERSTANDING THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

by Gary L. Durham

Rom. 8:5-17

Apr. 23, 1995

INTRO:

Every Christian has the need for real assurance—assurance from God. But we must avoid falling into the dangers of false assurance. In the wonderful passage before us this morning, we are told that God provides this much-needed assurance in a way that removes fear of being deceived. We have a God who speaks. He is no dumb idol! We should not treat Him as one. We are told here that He witnesses to our spirit concerning our true sonship.

We must remember that this witness of the Spirit is no small matter for those who would be true children of God. It is, therefore, good to know what the Scriptures mean when it refers to the witness of the Spirit and how important it really is.

What is the witness of the Spirit? There are three aspects to what we call the witness of the Spirit:

I. We Have the Witness of Our Own Heart

A. Every known "Isaac" must be on the altar. We must cling to God above all earthly loves and hopes. Our trust must never be in His gifts, but in Him alone.

ILLUS. Make application of these principles with the story of Abraham and the offering of Isaac.

B. God is greater than our own hearts and knows all things, we are told in 1 John 3:20. While this passage is speaking of assurance, it also reminds us that God knows more about us than we know about ourselves. It is, therefore, not possible that God can put His stamp of approval on our hearts if our own hearts can truthfully condemn us.

II. We Have the Witness of God's Holy Word

The Holy Spirit is not two-faced. He will not say one thing in His Word and then say something different in your heart. If it does not line up with the Word, it is not from God!

ILLUS. I was once in a counseling session with a lady who had come to believe a false doctrine. She related to me a "wonderful experience" in which God had given her revelation and insight and a new "spiritual power." I listened carefully and then took her step by step through several passages that exposed that what she believed was error. She could not get around the clear truth of the Word as I helped her draw the obvious conclusions. She admitted that what I was saying was supported by Scripture, but I could see an angry resistance rising in her. Suddenly she glared at me and nearly shouted, "I don't care what the Bible says! I had an experience." It was then my task to help her see that God is not necessarily the source of all "wonderful" experiences.

In this day of emotion- and experience-based theology and convictions, we often hear people tell us that God told them to do something that is obviously out of step with the principles and teaching of God's Word. They

will say that they have "heard from the Spirit" or were "impressed of the Spirit." However, if it is not in harmony with the Word of God, we may concede that they have heard from "a spirit," but we cannot concede that they have heard from *the* Holy Spirit. John's admonishment in 1 John 4:1 is needed here: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God." We test them, according to John in the verses that follow (vv. 2-3), by discerning if the spirit acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. One necessary evidence of this acknowledgement is respect and submission for the authority of His Word as recorded in the Bible.

III. We Have the Witness of the Person of the Holy Spirit Himself

There are four key evidences, four fruits that accompany the inner "voice" of the Spirit. The witness of the Holy Spirit must *not* be relegated totally to the mystical inner assurance—as real as that may be. For in this, we can be deceived if it stands alone. God also gives us a pragmatic side to this witness.

ILLUS. As the presence of the sun in the sky results in illumination and warmth, so the true presence of the Holy Spirit results in the light of truth ruling the heart and the warmth of true life—which embraces righteousness alone—radiating from us.

Three of these four keys given us by Paul deal with this pragmatic balance to the mystical aspect of the true presence and witness of the Spirit.

A. Key One: We can have freedom from a carnal mind-set and habitual sinning (vv. 5-8). There are only two classifications here: those who live according to the sinful nature and those who live according to the Spirit (the nature of Jesus).

Only two resulting mind-sets exist here. For those controlled by the sinful nature, a mind-set that is dominated by this nature results in being filled with death (things separated from God's life) and further results in hostility to obey and please Him. Those controlled by the Spirit have a mind-set on what He desires, which is life and peace.

If the mind-set is right, by His grace the intent in conduct will be right—no willful sins leading to spiritual death.

When the mind-set is wrong, this is evidence of failure to appropriate the grace of His empowerment. As long as this is true of us, we are self-condemned to being out of step with God's will and unable to live pleasing to Him in heart and action. So freedom from a carnal mind-set and habitual sinning is both an inner and outer witness (evidence) of His presence.

B. Key two: We can have life to choose righteousness and power to express it through our physical bodies

(vv. 9-13). This key is a corollary to the first. The presence and control of the Holy Spirit will mean the expression of His life instead of our self-life. It will mean a crucifixion of selfishness and a resurrection of Christ-centeredness (the nature of Jesus, which is humility expressed in total dependence on the Father). Here the witness moves beyond negative freedom into the positive freedom of being *free* to choose righteousness. Without Him, we have no power or freedom to consistently choose. Here is the witness of a visible, positive freedom through the Spirit as He "give[s] life to [our] mortal bodies through his Spirit" (v. 11). This life brings not only the privilege but also the obligation to live by the Spirit (vv. 12-13).

C. Key three: We can have family affinity (vv. 14-15). The gratitude and joy of sins forgiven, the continual victory over the self-life by an unrelenting repentance from self to Jesus through a moment-by-moment embracing of His cross, removes every fearful repellent from the soul—except adoring awe. It results in the unhindered cry of sonship from our hearts by the Spirit. This love for God results in a love for His other children (1 John 4:7-21). This is the witness of true sonship through family affinity—re-created and restored affinity for the Father, and redeemed affinity for each other. Again we see the balance of an inward and outward witness.

D. Key four: We have Spirit-to-spirit knowledge (vv. 16-17).

ILLUS. As no amount of eloquence can adequately describe a beautiful sunrise to a person without sight, so we cannot explain the wonderful personal inner witness of the Spirit to those who have never experienced it. As you need not a single word if the blind man's eyes are opened—he now sees what you could not describe—even so they need no explanation who experience His inner witness. This witness cannot be conveyed from one to the other, but it can be shared by those who stand together beholding the same glory.

This is a Spirit-to-spirit communication resulting in an inner knowledge that is His voice of witness to our hearts. This witness also brings with it an assurance of our future inheritance. We are "coheirs with Christ" (v. 17). This certainty of an eternal hope of glory enables us to share in His sufferings. We no longer live for the merely temporal. We are willing to invest our lives for the eternal by "shar[ing] in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (v. 17).

The Son of God has the marks of the Cross on Him, and so must all true sons of God (Luke 14:27). Our ability

through His grace to suffer for lasting glory is a sign of a changed perspective that is accomplished and maintained by His abiding presence.

CONCLUSION:

Do you have the witness of God's Spirit by His definition? When we know every "Isaac" is on the altar; when we know we are walking in obedience to all His understood Word to us; when we have freedom from a carnal mind-set and habitual sinning and life to choose righteousness and power to express it through our physical bodies; when we have family affinity and a Spirit-to-spirit knowledge of His abiding presence, all this results in peace and joy in the Holy Spirit and an uninhibited sense of sonship expressed in love. After all, according to Paul, this is what the kingdom of God is all about! (Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Gal. 5:22).

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Staff

Welcome/Announcements
(have congregation stand and greet)

Worship Team

"Jesus Shall Reign"
"All Hail King Jesus"
"Now unto the King Eternal" (Sonnenberg)
"You Are Crowned with Many Crowns"
Offering
"Holy Ghost with Light Divine"
"Come, Holy Spirit"
"Where the Spirit of the Lord Is"

Staff

Prayer

Worship Team

"Sweet Anointing" Choir (Heath, Salazar)

Pastor

"UNDERSTANDING THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT"

Creative Worship Ideas

From time to time, we change our prayer time and ask our people to form groups of two to four and to share any needs and to pray together. This usually takes some extra time. Yet as your church grows, this personal touch can be a blessing. We keep music playing softly and begin to sing softly as the last few groups finish up. You can try it on a Sunday evening, and then introduce it for a morning service. It might be a little threatening for some at first, but they will soon learn to look forward to this kind of prayer. Imagine how much visitors will appreciate the fact that someone cared enough to pray with them!

MAINTAINING THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

by Gary L. Durham

Rom. 8:5-17

Apr. 30, 1995

INTRO:

The apostle Paul informs us that it is God's verdict on our life, not our own, which is ultimately of true importance. Paul declares, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor. 4:4). Paul understood our own hearts can sometimes deceive us and give us either false confidence or false condemnation. Either can be devastating. We must not lean on our own understanding but in all our ways submit to Him (cf. Prov. 3:5-6).

Paul also said, "I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 9:1). Notice that Paul looks for the confirmation of the Holy Spirit in his conscience, not just the witness of his own conscience alone. He had learned this attitude from our Lord. While Jesus was on this earth, even though He declared that His judgment—were He to judge—would be righteous and correct, He referred all judgment to His Father (cf. John 12:47-50). Jesus said, "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30).

If even our Lord, who is perfect, set such an example, then we who are very imperfect should understand our need to depend on the witness of the Holy Spirit rather than our own "conscientious" perception. This truth brings us to our present study.

Having secured a better scriptural understanding of the witness of the Spirit, we now turn to the issue of its importance. Is this merely a luxury or is it a necessity? Must it be maintained or can we merely enjoy it if it is there, but not "sweat it" if it is not? Every Christian must know the scriptural answer to these questions.

How important is it to maintain the witness of the Spirit?

I. What Is the Conscientious Necessity?

The human conscience is a function of our spirit. It is an innate (inborn) capacity to detect our moral responsibility to God and other moral beings. However, we must understand that the functional structure of our spirits that God intended is not present in fallen man until he comes back to total dependence on the Spirit of God.

There are three primary attributes of our spirit, and these attributes have an authority structure that God designed into our spiritual nature for their proper function. Only God can set right this authority structure because it starts with Him. These three functional attributes are communion, cognition, and conscience—in this functional order.

Man's highest created purpose is to commune with God. Out of this communion comes everything else man needs. Original man had this; fallen man can only have it through Jesus Christ and His blood. Communion originally gave birth to knowledge for cognition. Cognition, in this spiritual sense, is the capacity to know. But this ca-

capacity was intended to depend on communion with God—either directly or indirectly—for the knowledge it acquires. All man's acquisition of knowledge stood accountable to the God of truth. Cognition, then, was and should be directly tied to communion.

As we stated earlier, conscience is an innate capacity to detect our moral responsibilities to God and other moral beings. This capacity depends on cognition to be filled with true moral knowledge. In unfallen man, communion leads to cognition (knowledge), which leads to conscience (moral illumination). But in fallen man, who is spiritually dead (separated from God who alone is the Source of life) and blind or deceived concerning most spiritual reality, the loss of communion leads to ignorance of truth and a morally darkened conscience. This is why people within a culture without the truth of God's Word can often *conscientiously* do things that we know to be an offense to God and a sin against others. While all men have at least a faint moral illumination, fallen human conscience is in need of redemptive illumination, and that can only come through the saving merits of the blood of Jesus Christ, which fits us for the reception of the Holy Spirit and the restoration of communion with God. Through this restored communion He then "guides [us] into all truth" (John 16:13).

This "guiding" into all truth denotes not only the filling of our capacity of cognition with knowledge but also the filling of our conscience with moral light—the opening of our understanding to His Word and truth. As we determined in our study last week, there is a very moral and objective side to the witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The transformation and empowerment to live in holiness, which is the objective witness of His presence, begins here through us submitting to the Spirit being Master over our conscience.

Heb. 12:14 informs us that "without holiness no one will see the Lord." If we would aspire to this necessary holiness of life—without which there is apparently no eternal life—it must begin by allowing God's definition of sinfulness and holiness to fill and direct our lives through a conscience that confirms all things through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 9:1). This is the first reason the witness of the Holy Spirit is a necessity and not an option. To be without it is to be susceptible not only to the human error of immoral perception, but even to demonically inspired heresy, which is designed by our enemy to seduce us to pride while masquerading as truth.

II. What Is the Ontological Necessity?

The witness of the Spirit comes to us—is there—because it is the evidence of His presence. He always witnesses to His presence (v. 16) and to His work. To lose the witness of the Spirit is evidence that we have lost His abiding presence. I am not here speaking of losing merely our emotional awareness on a temporary basis. This

sometimes happens to all of us. Rather, I speak of the actual withdrawal of the Holy Spirit's approval from our life.

A. If we walk away from His reproofs too often, we soon lose the witness and therefore the approval and presence of the Holy Spirit.

We must see that one cannot exist without the other. It is an ontological impossibility to have His indwelling presence without Him making himself known to you. There is no scriptural record of anyone being filled with the Spirit and not knowing it—filled on the sly. There are, however, many examples of the Spirit of God being grieved away and the person not taking note of it.

ILLUS. In Judges 16:20, we are told that Samson's disobedience caused the Spirit of the Lord to depart from him. He did not realize it and therefore fell into the hand of the enemy.

B. According to the Scriptures there can be no salvation except by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. (Read Rom. 8:9b.)

There is no standing with God outside of Him. To be separated from the Spirit is to be separated from God (He is God!). The conclusion is unavoidable. We *must* maintain the witness of the Spirit to maintain known salvation—it is what God says that matters!

III. What Is the Relational Necessity?

To live and keep in step with the Spirit, we must have a certain attitude and response to the light of truth that the Spirit will bring. Our attitude should be that of desiring truth. Our response should be that of obedience to truth.

IV. What Is the Immutable Necessity?

My changing perspective and your changing perspective are not necessarily God's changing perspective.

A. If God ever required you and me to crucify something to keep in step with His Spirit, it is not likely He would ever take it back. Read Gal. 2:18: This means we become rebels before God if we build back into our lives what we once destroyed at His direction.

B. The problem is that we often start backing up on God and not walking in the light of His personal dealings with us. When we do this, we lose true spiritual illumination. A moral blindness returns that makes *serpents* look like *bunny rabbits*. We then start embracing what we once clearly knew to be spiritually dangerous.

ILLUS. When I was a young boy, my father pastored most of the time in the city. But our family roots were in the country. My grandparents (my mother's parents) lived in the country on a large dairy farm in the Ozarks. How my two younger brothers and I loved to spend time there.

We always kept our ears open in case Grandfather said

to our father, "Harold, would you like to go hunting tonight?" Now in the Ozarks this usually means "coon" (raccoon) hunting. All three of us boys would immediately begin begging to go. It meant being able to stay out in the woods all night, run with the hounds, tree the coon, etc. It was great fun for boys. You might call it a *very* informal fox hunt!

I had my favorite place when I went walking through the woods at night with Grandfather. He always carried a large lantern that seemed to turn the area around him to near daylight. This was good for a young boy who needed to avoid holes and rocks and, most of all, duck the limbs that came speeding at him from those in front. As long as I walked by Grandfather, I had no problem avoiding the *pain*. But if my attention became distracted and Grandfather got several yards ahead, when I turned to go in his direction I discovered that the light from the lantern no longer helped but hindered me. It was like a great headlight shining in my eyes—I couldn't see anything in that direction. It was worse than darkness. I would stumble over every rock and into every hole, and every limb found its mark! I couldn't wait to get back *in* the light instead of walking *behind* it.

It is like this with God. You start letting distance come between you and Him through disobedient neglect or rebellion and you will become so blind you will constantly stumble—you will travel blind.

CONCLUSION:

Read 1 John 1:7. Walking in the light—obedience—is absolutely necessary if we are to have fellowship with God—which includes His witness. If we have not maintained a clear conscience before Him in this matter, it is time to seek the cleansing blood.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Worship Team

"Blessed Be the Lord"

"Bless His Holy Name"

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

"Bless the Lord, O My Soul"

Staff

Announcements/Offering

Worship Team

"He Loves Me"

"I Am Loved"

We Receive New Members

Staff

Prayer

Worship Team

"Called to Holiness" Choir (Lues/Borop/Tippitt)

Pastor

"MAINTAINING THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT"

Closing Song

"The Light of the World Is Jesus"

RENEWAL OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

by Gary L. Durham

Rom. 8:5-17

May 7, 1995

INTRO:

A college man walked into a photography studio with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. This involved removing it from the frame. In doing this, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back of my photograph: "My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed "Diane" and contained a P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back."*

If we are to have a confident love relationship with God, it will mean there can be no P.S. in our commitment to Him. If there has been a P.S., you can be sure that sooner or later the Spirit of God will confront us concerning our need to "give up everything" to be Christ's disciple (Luke 14:33).

If we draw back and try to reserve a P.S. in our covenant of surrender, we will find that the Holy Spirit will withdraw His approval and replace it with the needed conviction. If we persist in disobedience, we have made an idol of that issue and we will fall under God's judgment. This judgment can be many things. When the Israelites forgot God and tested Him, the Word tells us that God sent "leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:15, KJV). I have heard the confession of many a "Christian" with leanness in their souls because they walked behind the light of the Holy Spirit and tried to rationalize His revelations instead of reconciling with the truth.

As we concluded in last Sunday's study, the witness of the Holy Spirit is not a luxury or an option for the true Christian. We learned that His presence and His witness go together. To lose one is to lose both. Of course, there can be no salvation outside the abiding presence of the Spirit of God.

This is why holiness is not optional. There can be no sufficient commitment that falls short of being severely in love with Jesus. Any truly born-again believer will be drawn to holiness and the cleansing blood that is its only means, like iron to a magnet. Such is not only a crisis but a relationship into which we enter. It is maintained and thus validated by our continuous obedience to Him by His grace. Holiness becomes the characteristic desire of the redeemed soul.

Every true believer longs to be filled with righteousness. If we lack this longing, we call the validity of our relationship with God into serious question. Jesus never used any halfhearted language to describe the commitment He demands. He always embedded His articulations in the most demanding and absolute language one can imagine. Our love for Him must be without rival—no self-saving P.S.!

If this witness is so vitally important, then if you have lost it, it is imperative that you renew it. This morning we are going to trace very clearly the path of renewal.

How do we renew the witness of the Spirit?

I. Step One: Ask Forgiveness

We cannot bypass this step. Every way I know of to grieve the Spirit involves the need to ask forgiveness. In this matter, you cannot, so to speak, jump from a 10-story building and duck in at the third floor.

A. We must admit that it is sin that grieves the Holy Spirit. It will bring about separation from His presence and witness (spiritual death) if it is not confessed and forgiveness sought. We must not involve ourselves in label switching. We must call sin, sin.

B. In the holiness church, we have sometimes been reticent to admit our need to be forgiven. We often try to deal with our willfulness as only a matter of sanctification. That it is! But it is more. The only ways I know to take self off the altar is either by willful (known) rebellion, neglect, or unbelief. All of these need the cleansing blood of Jesus in forgiveness before we can move on to the deeper issue of crucifying the self-life. The issue of not trusting Him and resorting to submission to self is certainly at the root of all of these. This lack to trusting Him (unbelief) is what Jesus said is the ultimate issue that will bring condemnation for the unrepentant in the end (John 3:18).

II. Step Two: Repentance

Go back to the place you broke fellowship by disobedience and renew it by obedience. Trying to avoid the issue of obedience is useless if we would go on with God. Forgiveness must always include repentance, or we are only playing games. Where we break fellowship with God is where we must return and renew it.

A. Jesus' first and primary message was one of repentance (Matt. 4:17). It is not enough to seek to be forgiven, without dealing with the issues that stand between us and God.

B. Repentance is more than forgiveness. It is a change of mind and attitude.

III. Our English word "repent" has its root in the Latin word *pentir*, which means to be sorry (*pentir* comes from *paenitere*). It means a change (reversal) of mind resulting in a change of direction. It was sometimes used in connotation to denote returning to sanity from insanity—a saving of the mind. In fact, among early Latin Christians the idea of repentance carried with it the thought of a return to moral sanity. Anyone who would not repent was considered to not be of a sound mind.

In fact, the idea that has been accepted in practice by some people in the more formal confessional churches that confession without repentance (admitting sin without any real resolve to appropriate God's grace to forsake it) is accepted by God, is unscriptural.

ILLUS. The word “confess” also has Latin roots. The prefix *con* means to perform jointly, and *fess* comes from the Latin *fari*, which means to speak. It means “to say the same thing as.” In other words, to admit that God’s judgment on my sin is right and to say the same thing He says about it—that it is sin and that it should be eradicated from my life.

If I say the same thing about a sin as the Spirit of God does, then I must agree that it is to be renounced and forsaken. Thus to confess is more than to admit guilt. Until my attitude toward my sin is the same as God’s, I have not truly *confessed*. I must come to the place where I see my sin in the light of His holiness and thus loath it so much, like Isaiah. I cry out with a deep sense of my need for cleansing (Isa. 6:1-7). Thank God for the remedy of a burning, purging coal from off His altar!

ILLUS. When I was a young teen and also young in my faith, I would often allow issues to come between God and me because I didn’t want to give something up or didn’t want to discipline myself in some matter. How patiently the Spirit of God would continue to call to me while I continued to act as if I didn’t hear Him—much like many of us did when our parents called us home to do homework and we wanted to stay and play ball with the fellows! “Oh, were you calling me?” we would say after father or mother finally came to get us. We had actually heard them calling all along.

My parents were never really fooled, and God certainly isn’t fooled when we play such games with Him. We only deceive ourselves! When finally I would come to God, under the weight of guilt and conviction, and ask for forgiveness, I often tried to avoid the real issue. I wanted forgiveness. I wanted to feel peace and assurance again. I wanted the witness of the Spirit that all was right between Him and me. But I didn’t want to face the real issue and repent and obey. But because of His great love for me, He never let me sidestep the real problem. He would gently point me back to the place I had said no to Him and would insist that I say yes.

I soon learned that the only place I could renew fellowship with God was where I had broken it. He had not moved. He was still waiting for me on the pathway of surrender to His will, which alone leads to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21-23). It was I who must return. Only then could I truly receive the forgiveness He wished to bestow on me.

If we have lost the clear witness of His presence, it cannot be renewed until we deal with the issue(s) that has brought separation.

III. Step Three: Renew the Yes of “Yeses”

Jesus requires all who would follow Him to deny themselves—to give Him an all-encompassing “Yes!” It is a yes that means yes to all I now understand and a promise to say yes to all He shall show me to be His will in my tomorrows.

A. The covenant of “Yes” must be made. The Christian life is nothing less than a covenant with God to say yes to anything and everything He might ask of me. When we have broken that covenant, we must renew it.

B. This covenant is not reserved for the Spirit-filled life of holiness. If we are indeed saved, we have surrendered to Jesus as Lord and Master—there is no salvation without this surrender. It is true that after we are forgiven, justified, regenerated, adopted into His family, and indwelt by His Spirit—for even newborn believers have the Spirit of God (cf. Rom. 8:9; John 20:21-22)—then He will turn His illuminating presence upon the inner stronghold of our self-life. We will learn that there is need for a deeper cleansing and surrender than we ever dreamed necessary. In sanctification we are called upon to allow Him to apply this covenant of yes even deeper. The crucifixion of self-autonomy, which will bring down the stronghold of carnal rule, is but a crisis of surrender to a deeper application of the covenant of His Lordship in my life.

C. Saying yes to Jesus is the only way to truly say no to the world, the flesh, and the devil. A deep total yes to God is the positive that will maintain the necessary negative of being dead to self and the world. Since God has promised to empower any righteous choice, we can be certain that a comprehensive yes to Him will be *funded* by His grace, when a mere no to the world or self will often limp along on the meager reserves of self.

CONCLUSION:

Read 2 Cor. 13:5. We should have the joy of finding His witness. But if we do not, or we are uncertain, then it is time to seek until we do.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Special Song	“Let Us Praise the Almighty”
Worship Team	“Let There Be Praise” “Revive Us Again”
Staff	“Let There Be Glory and Honor and Praises”
	Invocation (congregation greets and is seated) Offering
Worship Team	“Revival in the Land” Choir (Morris/Hart)
Pastor	“RENEWAL OF THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT”
Special Song	“Touch Your People Once Again” “Spirit of the Living God” (with congregation)
Prayer	

*James S. Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), 97-98.

BEAUTY MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

by Gary L. Durham

1 Pet. 3:1-6

May 14, 1995

Mother's Day

INTRO:

ILLUS. "When Robert Ingersoll, the notorious skeptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, 'Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn't he?'"

"The other said, 'No, I don't think he did. Ingersoll did not explain my mother's life, and until he can explain my mother's life I will stand by my mother's God.'"

The millions of transformed lives through the centuries cannot be explained away by skeptical twistings and turnings. A changed life makes irrefutable evidence. By the way, neither can Christianity be explained away on intellectual grounds. When all the truth is known, Christianity always wins hands down.

The son or daughter who has a godly mother is blessed with one of the two best possible means of understanding the truth and meaning to life and loving its God—the other being a godly father. Nothing can take the place of the example of godly parents. Little can compensate for the lack of them.

In our study passage, we have before us the most effective beauty program in the world—rather, in the universe: God's beauty program. Notice seven facts about true beauty—beauty by God's definition:

I. True Beauty Has Its Place: The Residence of the Beauty (vv. 3-4)

A. True beauty does not come from without (v. 3). Mere outward appearance is never satisfying. It is even held in contempt as false. For example:

ILLUS. Plastic grapes do not satisfy. There is nothing within. When I was an evangelist, we were often guests in people's homes for dinner.

Once during a visit, while waiting on the meal, to our bewilderment we noticed that the plastic grapes on a decorative piece on an end table were disappearing. As we watched, we discovered that my son Ryan, then almost two years old, was eating them. Even though he found them rather tasteless and tough, he was hungry and was managing to get them down. He was too young and inexperienced to be sure what real grapes should taste like and did not realize he had hold of counterfeits.

Many people today seem so ignorant and childish about beauty that they don't seem to realize that putting all the emphasis on the external will not produce real beauty and only opens them to deception.

B. True beauty can only be developed from within (v. 4). God grows beauty from the inside out. Christians are *transformed* (*metamorphoo*, from which we get the English word *metamorphosis*, meaning to change from inside to outside) by the renewing of their minds (Rom. 12:1-2).

II. True Beauty Has Its Permanence

The eternity of this beauty: "unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (v. 4).

ILLUS. We had a rose in a vase on our table. So gloriously beautiful one day. A few days later, so marred, withered, and ugly. This is the destiny of outward beauty in this world.

True, unfading beauty comes from two things:

A. A gentle spirit: A spirit not striving with others. It comes from being at peace with God and His plan.

B. A quiet spirit: A trusting and wise spirit. It comes from trusting God to do what He has said He will do. Thus, our spirit is not like troubled water in a storm. We are rather like the quiet waters of a deep, undisturbed pool.

True beauty's permanence is also seen in that this inner beauty will one day produce eternal, unfading, outward beauty such as this world has never been able to even dream. It is truly permanent—eternal.

III. True Beauty Has Its Preciousness

The worth of the beauty: "great worth" (v. 4).

A. This kind of beauty has present and lasting worth. Beauty produced now is of true value. What beauty produces eternally is of lasting worth.

B. Value comes from two things: Endurance—that which lasts. Usefulness—that which produces what is truly and ultimately desired or needed. These characteristics alone can give something true beauty.

ILLUS. Diamonds are valuable because they *last*. They are also *useful*. In industry, certain materials necessary to our technology could not be cut or used without diamonds for tools. True beauty is like diamonds—lasting and useful.

IV. True Beauty Has Its Preeminence

The superiority of the beauty "in God's sight" (v. 4).

A. We must learn where the authority to ascribe true worth resides—with an all-wise God.

B. When God says that something has great worth, you can mark it down. It does!

1. The Word says that outward "charm is deceptive, and [outward] beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised" (Prov. 31:30).

2. We are told that this fear of the Lord produces a more valuable kind of beauty—from within. It is of great worth in God's sight.

V. True Beauty Has Its Patterns

The examples of this beauty: "holy women of the past" (v. 5).

ILLUS. Remember that Sarah was so beautiful at 89 years

old that Abraham lied because of her beauty. King Abimelech decided to marry her, and would have, if God had not stopped him (Gen. 20).

A. Peter points to the pattern for this kind of beauty to be developed. It is *godly* women, not *gaudy* women.

B. We conform to those whom we idolize. Be careful who you admire!

VI. True Beauty Has Its Posture

The source of the beauty: "submissive to their own husbands" (v. 5).

A. The term "submissive" is the Greek word *bupotas-so*, which means "to put under" or "to come under rank." This refers to a proper respect for the functional authority structure of the family and God's design for our place (our rank) within its functional structure.

B. The word "own" used before husband not only denotes ownership but denotes singleness. They did not allow any other circumstance or person to come between them and obedience to their husbands as is right in the Lord. (Make application: boss, career, etc.)

C. The joyful subjection of the beauty is expressed: "obeyed Abraham and called him her master" (v. 6). Sarah didn't simply submit, but she gave joyful reverence. She must have understood that this reverence was part of what gives the next and final attribute to inner beauty.

VII. True Beauty Has Its Power

The effect of this beauty (vv. 1-2).

A. Notice the relationship between "submission" and the power to change another.

1. It is so powerful that it can change without a word! Ladies, your inner beauty can give a life-changing speech 24 hours a day that will have 1,000 times the influence of any words. It will get past the defensiveness.

2. Servanthood is always honored by God, whether in a mother, a father, or a child.

B. Notice the paradox: When women seek inappropriate authority, they lose true power or become a damaging power. When they choose to submit in true humility to God's role for them, they gain enormous lasting influence for good.

ILLUS. Just as a speedboat gets nowhere trying to speed down an airport runway, so a woman is not fitted to be a man (nor a man a woman) or to be fully successful at roles that she is not blessed by God in filling.

The most powerful, influential person to ever walk this planet was our Lord Jesus Christ. He made this great impact through His humility—submission and obedience to His Father's plan and design (Phil. 2:5-11).

C. When it says that Sarah "obeyed Abraham and called him her master" (v. 6), we begin to see one of the reasons she had such power to influence him at many critical moments in their lives. She was not perfect. Some of her advice was good and confirmed by God; other advice was not so good.

1. It was her idea for Abraham to have Ishmael through Hagar (Gen. 16)—not good advice. Isaac and Ishmael are still having conflict in the Middle East today.

2. She realized it would be necessary for Hagar and Ishmael to be sent away if the promised blessing by God was not to be foiled (Gen. 21). God confirmed her wisdom and told Abraham to follow it and promised to make Ishmael also into a great nation of people.

3. She had influence enough to help cause two races of people to come into existence—Jews and Arabs.

CONCLUSION:

"You are her daughters *if* you do what is right and do not give way to fear" (v. 6, emphasis added). "You are her daughters" is tantamount to saying: "You will have the same nature and the same results as she." Notice that it is all conditioned on two antecedents—"if you":

1. "Do what is right"; obey God and His design.

2. "Do not give way to fear"; don't let the world and the devil make you fearful that you will somehow miss out on life or be an unfulfilled slave. Satan is a liar. The world who listens to him is deceived. So don't listen to either one! Listen to God and develop true beauty!

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Worship Team

"He Is the Amen" Choir (David Ritter)

Staff

Welcome/Announcements/Greeting Time

Worship Team

"Rejoice and Be Exceedingly Glad"

"Crown Him King of Kings"

"O God Our Help in Ages Past"

"You Are My God" (seat congregation)

Offering

Ladies Trio

"Christlike Medley" (Fettke)

Pastor

"BEAUTY MORE THAN SKIN DEEP"

Closing prayer

*James S. Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1988), 381.

RIGHTEOUSNESS VS. SINFULNESS

by Gary L. Durham

1 John 2:28—3:10

May 21, 1995

INTRO:

It seems that we have become afraid to draw certain lines of distinction between those who are saved and those who are not saved. The Scriptures, however, do draw such lines. These distinctions could not be made by us. Only God can make such determinations. But they have been made by God and we are obligated to submit to them.

God has established these distinctions between those who are His children and those who are not His children, not only for our personal knowledge and assurance, but also for our protection—both individually and collectively (as a Body)—from satanic counterfeiting. John, in his first letter, devoted much time in making these lines of demarcation visible for us. The whole of 1 John could be studied, without any violence to John's intent, from the point of view that he is answering the question: "Who is and who is not a child of God?"

In this short series, we are going to limit ourselves to John's treatment of this question from 2:28 through 3:24. This first message deals with only 2:28—3:10. (This passage all belongs together; don't let the chapter division fool you.)

The line of demarcation that John sets before us in these verses could be called: The line of righteousness vs. sinfulness. John introduces this line by pointing to an important truth (v. 28).

1. We must abide (continue) in Jesus to have confidence before Him at His appearing.

2. We must have a relationship with Jesus and not merely an experience of Jesus. As Jesus taught us in Matt. 7:15-23—one of His revelations of the standard by which we will be judged when we stand before Him—the dividing line will be a matter of His intimate relationship and knowledge of us. This same passage makes it abundantly clear that He does not have such a relationship with us unless it is evidenced by us bearing good fruit (vv. 17-20) and by us doing the will of the Father (v. 21).

John introduces the thesis that he is going to develop over these next few verses (v. 29). That thesis is: We know God is righteous; therefore, we know that those who do what is right must be born of Him. Or we could say it this way:

I. Like Begets Like: The Positive Side (v. 29)

This is John's main premise on which he builds all his following thoughts.

A. In 3:1, we are like Him because:

1. We have received God's gracious love.
2. We are misunderstood and rejected like Jesus.

B. In 3:2, we are like Him because:

1. We have a destiny beyond this world.
2. We are being transformed into His likeness.
3. We are certain of being made like Him "for we

shall see him as he is." Until we are transformed, our limited perception cannot "perceive him as he is." Because we have been promised that we shall be with Him and certainly see His glory (John 17:24), then we are sure that we will be transformed into His likeness. Premise: Like perceives like.

C. In 3:3, we are like Him because:

1. We are filled with a compelling hope of being made like Him.
2. This hope compels us to seek this likeness through purity (holiness) now. The one with this hope "purifies [*bagnizei*—cleanses, sanctifies] himself [by means of God's provision in Christ] just as he is pure [*bagnos*—clean, perfect]." His perfection gives direction to our moral aim.

II. Like Begets Like: The Negative Side

This is the negative form of John's premise: Sin is lawlessness (law breaking); those who sin are breaking the law.

A. This lawlessness cannot be excused. Jesus has provided a remedy (v. 5).

1. The central purpose of Jesus' coming is to take away (*airo*—to loosen and carry away, remove by expiation) our sins. We cannot deny that He has done this without calling Jesus a failure.

2. He has come to make us like himself, and He was sinless.

3. We must, therefore, begin on the path of separation from sinful conduct.

B. Therefore, there are two logical conclusions (v. 6):

1. No true Christian will live a life of practicing sin. If there is no sin in Jesus, and we are to aim at being pure as He is pure, then we must forsake all sinful practices.

2. Anyone who does continue in a life of practicing sin is not a true Christian (has never been).

C. John begins with a warning against false teaching about God's tolerance toward sinful practice in the life of His children (vv. 7-9). He introduces this with the warning, "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray." There will be those who will try to water down the grace of God into a license to practice sin. This is deception. As Paul would say, "By no means!" (Rom. 6:2). The grace of God is not only Jesus dying to make an atonement for our sins (we certainly do not deserve even this), but, wonderful news, it is also His Spirit bringing His deathless life within us and shedding abroad His nature (*agape*—divine love) in our hearts (5:5, 10). There is a transforming grace by which we are changed from death to life. We are enabled to walk in newness of life in the here and now with our fruits unto holiness (6:4-7, 14, 22).

1. John drives this warning home with the logical

assertion: Righteousness (right conduct, not merely abstract righteousness) is the sign of His presence and control in a life (v. 7). His presence in our lives not only *imputes* righteousness to us but also *imparts* it to us through His grace of ongoing transformation and continual empowerment.

2. John points out that the opposite is also true: Sinful conduct is a sign of the devil's presence and control in a life (v. 8). They are not children of God. This is John's whole point!

3. John reminds us again: Jesus and His manifestation in the flesh is about nothing less than the destruction of the devil's *work* (willful rebellious conduct toward God and His holiness)(v. 8). So we cannot talk about being His children when we are not yet free from such conduct. He has provided for such freedom! There is no excuse.

4. The life (seed) of God excludes the willfully rebellious, sinful life (v. 9). The nature of Jesus is to always submit to the Father's will (Luke 22:42; John 5:30). If His life (nature) is in us, we will have the same desire ruling our life even though we cannot be as perfect in the performance of it as Jesus.

5. John makes a logical deduction (v. 9). It could be pictured like this: *Born of God* cancels *Sinful life*. *Sinful life* cancels *Born of God*.

a. This is a logical assertion by John. He declares as self-evident the fact that you cannot have an honest thief or a truthful liar. You cannot have a pure immoral person. Such concepts are mere foolishness.

b. You cannot have a sin-practicing saint (holy one). John's word for "cannot" in the statement, "He cannot go on sinning," is the Greek phrase—*ou dunatai*. *Ou* is an absolute negative meaning "no absolutely," and *dunatai* means "to be possible." So this phrase means "absolutely not possible." John is saying it is not logically possible to have these two opposites existing at the same time. They are mutually exclusive.

III. The Conclusion of the Matter Is a Test of Conduct

John now makes the application of his conclusions in this matter of the distinguishing line of righteousness vs. sinfulness. His application is powerfully revealing concerning how important this line is to the matter of who is and who is not a child of God.

A. John points out that this line is a primary means by which the Church can identify who is a child of God and who is a child of the devil (v. 10). So he says, "Here is how we know." We must not try to explain away this very absolute conclusion by John. If we do, we are left with no way to protect the Church of Jesus Christ from Satan's impostors. We forever blur any distinction between God's children and the children of the devil. We unavoidably blaspheme the power of Jesus Christ to affect any such distinction. For if He cannot, He is a failure. God forbid!

Notice the colon following this statement. What it means is "what now follows is the test."

B. John now gives us the test (v. 10). He gives a twofold key for identification by giving us the conclusion of what he has just taught from 2:28 through 3:10. Then he gives us a second conclusion that we must follow if that conclusion be true. This second conclusion will be his point of demarcation for the second line of distinction between God and Satan's children (which we will study next week).

1. The first test is sinful conduct. Those who practice sin are not God's children—period!

2. The second test is lack of love for God's people. This is unlike Jesus and cannot come from His nature. If we don't love Christ's Body, the Church, we do not love Him.

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Staff	Welcome/Announcements/Greeting Time
Worship Team	"Lord, I Lift Your Name on High"
	"Praise Ye, the Lord the Almighty"
	"Thou Art Worthy, Great Jehovah"
	(seat congregation)
	Offering
	"You Are My Hiding Place" Choir (Fettke)
	"In Thee, O Lord, I Put My Trust"
	("Be Still and Know That I Am God")
Staff	Prayer
Special Song	"The Refiner's Fire"
Pastor	"RIGHTEOUSNESS VS. SINFULNESS"
Our Response	

LOVE BY GOD'S DEFINITION

by Gary L. Durham

1 John 3:11-24

May 28, 1995

INTRO:

Last week we studied 1 John 2:28—3:10. There we saw the first line of demarcation that John gives for the protection of the Church from satanic counterfeits through being able to determine who is and who is not a child of God. We identified the first line as the line of: righteousness vs. sinfulness.

We saw last week in verse 10 that John drew a backward-looking conclusion and a forward-looking conclusion from his arguments and teaching. The backward-looking conclusion, which had to do with his previous teaching, was that the first test is: sinful conduct. Those who practice sin are not God's children. Period!

John then gave a forward-looking conclusion, which becomes his premise for what he is about to teach us in 3:11—4:21. This teaching on the second line of demarcation is divided into two sections (3:11-24 and 4:7-21) with a parenthetical teaching on discerning of spirits between them (4:1-6). Today we examine only the first of these sections on the second line of demarcation. According to John this line is: The visible presence of divine love in our lives—love by God's definition.

John introduces this truth in verse 11 with the great message that Jesus gave on His final night: "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another."

What kind of love is in view here? John is going to teach us.

I. We See a Love That Comes from Above (v. 11)

When John points back to Jesus' message of loving (*agapao*) one another, he says a mouthful in a few words. You will recall that John records in his Gospel more of Jesus' words on that final night before the Cross than any other of the Gospels. What he recorded is that Jesus gave a very important and clear command: "A new command I give you: have Divine Love for one another. As I have Divine Love for you, so you must have Divine Love for one another" (John 13:34, author's translation).

John then records the fact that Jesus returned again to this instruction with even greater emphasis in John 15:9-17. In the middle of this passage, and again at the end of it, Jesus says, "My primary command to you is this: have Divine Love for each other as I have had Divine Love for you. This is my primary command: have Divine Love for each other" (vv. 12, 17, author's translation).

ILLUS. When Jesus says in 13:34 and in 15:12 of John "This is my command," the Greek word for *command* is *entole*. This is one of the strongest words Jesus could possibly use. It is a military term used to give the one all-important command—the prime directive of all the orders. It also means this is the sum-total, the most important thing yet said. When a general wanted to make the prime directive of their mission clear, he would say, "This is the

entole: . . ." By means of this, and for this purpose, all else will be done.

In John 15:17, Jesus uses a related word to leave a final impact on His disciples. The Greek word for *command* here is *entellomia*. It comes from *en* and *tello*. *En*, which is a prime prefix that means to do something from a fixed position or by means of certain instrumentality. In this case, it suggests "by means of" or, more forcefully, "from this fixed (commanded) position." *Tello* (which comes from *tellos*) means a point aimed at, to set out for a definite point or goal. So when Jesus uses the term *entellomia*, He is saying: "This is My commanded goal for you to aim at. This is all-important!"

A. Agape is not of this world. It comes only from God. Some may wonder why Jesus would make so strong a statement concerning what seems to be horizontal command. But you must remember that He did not say that we are to have human love for each other, but divine love (*agape*). This is really a vertical command with a practical, horizontal application. Jesus knew we could not love each other in this way on our own. We would have to come to Him for divine love. But He also wanted us to know that the goal of this divine love is to be seen on the practical level—in our relationships to each other.

B. Jesus has bound His disciples to treating each other in a way that will daily send them to the Father seeking divine empowerment.

C. This is why divine love is the hallmark of a true Christian. As Jesus said in John 13:35 following this command, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have Divine Love for one another" (author's translation). This is the very thing Jesus prayed for a few moments later in His High Priestly prayer in John 17:20-26. He prayed that His Church would be brought to complete unity through divine love, "so that the world may believe that you [Father] have sent me" (v. 21). A lot depends on our possessing this divine love—the whole issue of Jesus and His kingdom being made known to humankind.

John begins by telling us that a true Christian must have divine love for his brothers and sisters. If he does not, he cannot love God (cf. 1 John 4:19-21). This is the message that Jesus taught from the beginning to the end.

II. We See a Love That Has No Rivalry (vv. 12-15)

A. John points out: Rivalry tends to murder (v. 12). Cain is the example of rivalry polluting love.

1. There is murder of body: Cain murdered his brother physically.

2. There is murder of character: we can murder by slander and hatred.

B. John points out: Those with a spirit of rivalry will lash out at those more righteous than themselves (v. 12). This is why Cain murdered Abel.

C. John concludes: Rivalry is the way of the world (v. 13). The world is of the spirit of Cain—Cain’s “children.” Do not be surprised at the world’s hatred (cf. John 15:18-25; 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12).

D. John points out: Assurance of our salvation comes when we are free from the ways of death (v. 14). Love is the way of life. Hatred and strife are the ways of death.

E. John concludes: Hatred and a spirit of murder go together, but eternal life will not mix with them (v. 15).

John points us to God’s definition of this Love, which brings such assurance of salvation and eternal life:

III. We See a Love That Is Defined by the Person of Jesus (vv. 16-20)

John is now concerned that we understand God’s definition of divine love. So he points us to the standard with the words: “This is how we know what Divine Love is: . . .” (author’s translation). That standard is Jesus Christ himself.

A. Jesus’ love is a sacrificial love (v. 16): John doesn’t pause in making the highest possible application of this principle. If we have divine love, which is the spirit of Jesus himself within us, then we will do as He did. He laid down His life for us. Then it follows that we should be willing to lay down our lives for each other.

B. Jesus’ love is a love of demonstration (vv. 17-18): This love chooses *action* and *truth* as its mediums to communicate, not mere words. It doesn’t speak without doing and it doesn’t speak without meaning.

C. Jesus’ love is a love of assurance (vv. 19-20): These actions of love bring assurance even when our heart is confused or accused by the enemy. We can be at rest, for we have the visible evidence of His presence in our lives. We could never live this way without Him!

IV. We See a Love That Offers Up Obedience (vv. 21-24)

A. In verses 21 and 22, the statements “hearts do not condemn us” and “because we obey his commands and do what pleases him” must go together in our thinking. They mean the same thing! Only obedience gives us a life free from condemnation. “We have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask,” is in the context of a life of total obedience: one who seeks His glory first.

B. John becomes very emphatic (v. 23).

ILLUS. The English phrase “this is his command” is in the Greek *he entole bautou*. *He* is the definite article “the,” *entole* means “prime directive,” and *bautou* is a strong term for “His” emphasizing “belonging to him.” This is John’s emphatic way of saying: “And this is the specific command that is His”—what follows is uniquely identified with Jesus. The commands are:

1. “believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ”: Make Jesus the Foundation of our hope and the Source of our continuous transformation and power to live in divine love.
2. “Love one another as he commanded [*entole*] us.” The Church is His Body, so to love the Church is to love Him. To not love the Church is to fail to love Christ.

C. John now gives us the objective part of our assurance of salvation (v. 24): The power for obedience demonstrates that we live in dependence on His life and His life is in us.

D. John then gives us the personal (subjective) witness to this assurance (v. 24): The Spirit of Jesus Christ is the Spirit of divine love, truth, and obedience (Rom. 5:5; 8:16; John 14:15).

CONCLUSION:

Where does this second line of demarcation find us? Do we pass the test of divine I Love?

SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Staff	Welcome/Announcements/Greet
Worship Team	“Great Is the Lord” “How Great, How Glorious” “How Great Thou Art” (seat congregation) Offering “Almighty God” Choir (Nelson/McHugh/Barker) “I Worship You, Almighty God” “I Stand in Awe of You”
Staff	Prayer
Pastor	“LOVE BY GOD’S DEFINITION”
Closing Song	“I Am Loved”

Food for Your Spirit



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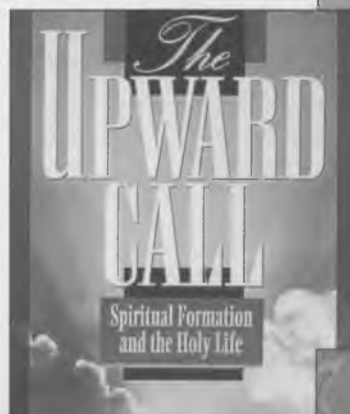
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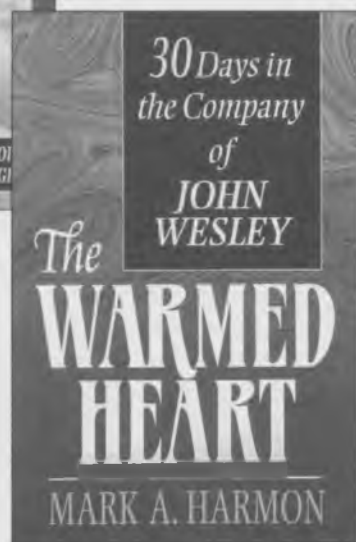
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