

Gospel Herald

and The Sunday School Times

Summer Quarter 2019

A Challenge for the Church:



Fully Including the Disabled into the Body of Christ

Gospel Herald and The Sunday School Times



NONDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIAN QUARTERLY

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Indispensable and Necessary Parts

BY DON RUFF

WE know that the Bible teaches about the importance of each believer and how each part of the body of the church must depend on the others in order to function properly. We are mutually dependent.

Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 12. He said that all the individual parts of the human body are important in order for the whole body to function properly. In verse 22, Paul wrote that if one removed a body part because it appeared weak, the body would cease to be whole.

We often think of this teaching in terms of those church members who serve inconspicuously. They stay in the background. They do not seem important, but they are vitally important. They need to be treated with honor and respect even if they are not leaders of the church.

While that is a suitable application for that passage, have you ever read
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about the body of Christ in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12 and thought about a fellow believer who has a disability (or multiple ones)? In this quarter's *Gospel Herald* and *The Sunday School Times*, Dr. Deuel tackles the topic of fully including those with disabilities into the work of the church (p. 4).

Each of us is made in the image of God. In the Old Testament, God warned not to curse the blind or mislead them (Lev. 19:14; Deut. 27:18). We must not marginalize those in the body of Christ who have disabilities. They have received the same grace as every other believer, and they can be used in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring God glory in the edification of the saints and in the salvation of the lost. Every part of the body of Christ matters. We are all in this together, no matter how strong or weak we may seem. ★

OUR DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

1. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired by God, are inerrant in the original writings, are the Word of God, and the final authority in faith and conduct.
2. We believe in one God, the Creator of man and all things, eternally existing in three Persons in a threefold relationship, that of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, and is God incarnate, the God-Man.
4. We believe that man was created in the image of God; that he sinned and thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God; that Adam's sin is imputed to the whole race of mankind; that all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners before God in thought, word, and deed.
5. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures as a substitutionary sacrifice, and that all who believe on Him are freely justified before God and stand before Him accepted in the character and merit of Jesus Christ.
6. We believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, in His ascension into heaven, and that in His present glorified body He is the Head of the church, the Lord of the individual believer, the High Priest over the house of God, and the Advocate in the family of God.
7. We believe in the personal, imminent, pretribulation, and premillennial second coming of Christ; first to receive His own to Himself, and later to set up His earthly kingdom and to reign over redeemed Israel and all nations; that is, to bring peace and blessing to the whole world.
8. We believe that all who by faith receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour are born again of the Holy Spirit and Word of God, receive the Holy Spirit and a new nature, and also are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ.
9. We believe that God is the spiritual Father of only those who trust His Son, Jesus Christ, as Saviour, and that only those saved through faith in Christ are spiritual brothers.
10. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust; the everlasting blessedness of the saved and the everlasting punishment of the unsaved.

—Union Gospel Press Division

Including People with Disabling Conditions in Your Church

BY DAVE DEUEL, PH.D.



AFTER church one Sunday morning, Kevin and Ruth, parents of a child with disabling conditions, approached their pastor deeply troubled and said, “Pastor, shouldn’t our church include people with disabling conditions like our three-year-old daughter? It crushes us to see her left out because of her disability.”

Sympathetically, the pastor responded, “I really haven’t thought much about it. I assumed that we did include them simply because we didn’t exclude them, at least not intentionally. But since you asked, and since your daughter needs to participate fully in church, I’m going to look into your question. But please bear with me. In addition to our regular services, I have a wedding to conduct next Saturday and a funeral this Wednesday. I need to spend time with the grieving family.”

They understood the pastor’s situation, and they offered to start and lead a ministry to those with disabilities. They considered asking another couple in their church, Josh and Amy, to help, since their toddler-aged son was also disabled.

They also informed the pastor that they had other friends who had kids with disabling conditions and did not attend church. They believed that

many would attend church if their children were included. While the pastor studied and considered a biblical response to disabilities, they looked around for good materials and organizations that assist busy churches and their pastors with starting and developing disability ministries.

Two weeks later, the pastor texted the two couples, inviting them to meet together. When they gathered in his office, their pastor excitedly reported that he had learned the following from studying disability in Scripture: The church needs to include people with disabling conditions, develop a plan to meet disability needs, and prioritize biblical goals for including people with disabling conditions. Greater detail of each point is the focus of the remainder of this article.

INCLUDE PEOPLE WITH DISABLING CONDITIONS

God’s Word calls us to serve people with disabling conditions. His law provides for and protects people with disabilities (Lev. 19:14; cf. Deut. 27:18). Job proved that he understood God’s heart for the disabled when he said, “I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame” (Job 29:15). Job knew that to neglect the needs of those with disabling conditions is to ignore

God’s heart.

Similarly, King David invited Mephibosheth, lame from the time he was a baby, to his dinner table and treated him like a son (II Sam. 9). The wise king knew what God’s law teaches us about caring for people with disabling conditions as Mephibosheth’s.

Giving alms, a provision that God instituted (Deut. 15:7-8), supported those that could not provide for themselves or for their families. In the New Testament, we read that a man who was lame was begging for alms when Peter healed him (Acts 3:2-10).

Gleaning was another way that God wove His care for those in need into the fabric of Israel’s society. God commanded that at harvest time, His people should leave crops in a field’s corner for gleaners who could not produce their own food (Lev. 19:9).

Jesus healed and advocated care for people with disabling conditions. In Luke 14, a passage deeply rooted in the law concerning Sabbath observances, Jesus instructed religious leaders that they would be far better off inviting people with disabling conditions to a banquet than they would be to invite wealthy friends (vss. 12-14)! One might hope that something could be gained from wealthy friends in this

life, but when judgment day comes, it would be better to invite people with disabilities. Caring for people with disabling conditions will be rewarded!

Thoughtfulness toward the needy, a fruit of the Spirit-led life, is also rooted in God's law. The Apostle Paul explained true spirituality when he quoted God's law: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. 5:14). He then further explained, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (vss. 22-23). Which of these Spirit-led traits include treating well those people with disabling conditions? They all do.

As Scripture teaches, human need calls us to service in loving others. The needs of people with disabling conditions are shocking. Fifteen percent of the world's population (about one billion people) live with a disability; 20 percent of the world's poorest people have a disabling condition; 80 percent live in developing countries; unemployment among people with disabilities is as high as 80 percent in some countries ("Disability and Development," hiproweb.org).

Among those with disabling conditions, the global literacy rate for adults is 3 percent and as low as 1 percent for women. Thirty percent of street youth have some kind of disability. Ninety percent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school, and for every one child killed in warfare, three are injured and acquire a disability ("Fact Sheet on Persons with Disabilities," un.org).

In disasters, studies demonstrate that people with disabilities are two to four times less likely to survive ("Disability-inclusive Humanitarian Action," un.org). Because they typically live at or below the poverty level in most countries, they make their homes in less expensive and more dangerous places such as on mountainsides, in flood plains, or near earthquake faults.

The two families listened attentively to the pastor and were saddened to hear how people with disabling conditions suffer throughout the world. Then Amy responded, "Pastor, it's clear that Scripture calls us to serve people with disabling conditions as a response to His love for us. So our primary goal is to include them fully in church life. After researching this

subject, we have learned a lot about starting a ministry for people with disabilities in churches like ours."

DEVELOP A PLAN TO MEET DISABILITY NEEDS

Amy continued, "Disability ministry specialists tell us that we need to answer a question. Should churches start a ministry specifically for people with disabling conditions, or should they include people with disabilities in *all* of the church's ministries? The second option is sometimes referred to as 'full inclusion.' As parents of children with disabling conditions, we think that full inclusion is the best option for our children as well as for our church.

"There also needs to be a ministry for the parents of children with disabling conditions. That would allow families to encourage one another, pray for one another, share referrals regarding physicians and other specialists, discuss ideas and resources for family caregiving, and work together on behalf of disabled children in the church and community. But of course, each family would also stay involved with any of the church's ministries they are currently involved in."

The pastor told the two couples, "I like the idea of full inclusion. Isn't that what the church is supposed to do—include everyone? But it seems like we need a form of inclusion that *actively works* toward including and does not just *passively wait* for it.

"I also see the wisdom of having a parent group. After all, even pastors get together in groups for mutual support. In fact, at a pastor's meeting last week, a pastor friend whose church started a disability parent group told me that groups are the best source of enthusiastic and committed disability workers. What is more, can anyone else care for a child with a disability better than the child's parent? Let's do both options. I'll leave it up to you to lead the parent ministry. But I'm curious. How do you start a parent group?"

Amy responded, "We have learned that if we keep our focus on the group's spiritual needs but do not neglect disability needs, parents will want to take part." She continued by sharing what she had learned about starting a parent group from the *Beyond Suffering* curriculum produced by the Christian Institute on Disability at Joni and Friends. The following are the steps a church can

take in starting a group for parents of children with disabling conditions.

Before the group meets for the first time, the church should strategically select a small group of committed people who will help start, maintain, and stay with the group. The greater the diversity in this group, the broader the ministry's reach into the community will be. This first step requires vision. The group should feed their vision with good reading, interacting with committed and creative disability workers, and regularly praying together. These practices will sustain the core group even when the going gets tough.

Select leaders whose lives are consistent with your church's convictions, particularly when it comes to personal character. Parents who are considered veterans in caring for children with disabilities often make effective encouragers and intuitive counselors with a passion for shepherding entire families (and we must not leave out siblings!). Finally, the church should consider each leader's ability to counsel others because the group will look to its leaders as personal models of how to parent and how to serve others.

A church should choose a simple organizational structure consistent with its policy and should be certain that the ministry focuses on the needs of people with disabilities and their families. If the group enjoys being together, a natural structure often emerges very quickly. The internet offers a generous source of information about organizing parent groups. For these decisions, it is best for a group to work with a reliable disability organization.

A group should meet for the first time as a core group of enthusiastic parents focused on the needs of others. Including a mixture of ages and years of experience in the core group allows the group to blend the wisdom of age with the enthusiasm of youth. In that meeting, the group should discuss how soon to schedule meetings and should consider future special speakers, such as qualified local educators, medical providers, or disability specialists.

Keep a portion of the meetings informal, relaxing, and enjoyable. While we need to be efficient, people must enjoy themselves and not feel pushed when attending group functions. Nothing will drive families off quicker than if they feel left out, pressured, or embarrassed. Be sensitive and

(Continued on page 7)

What I Learned About My Heavenly Father When I Became a Father

BY LESLIE PURYEAR

I PICKED up the phone at work and heard my wife's shouting voice, "It's time! We've got to go now!"

"Be right there!" I answered.

I jumped up from my desk and quickly told my manager that my wife was having the baby, and I sprinted for the parking lot and my car. The tires squealed as I sped out of the parking lot and onto the highway. My house was only five miles from my work, but I did not let the short distance deter me from flying fast and low.

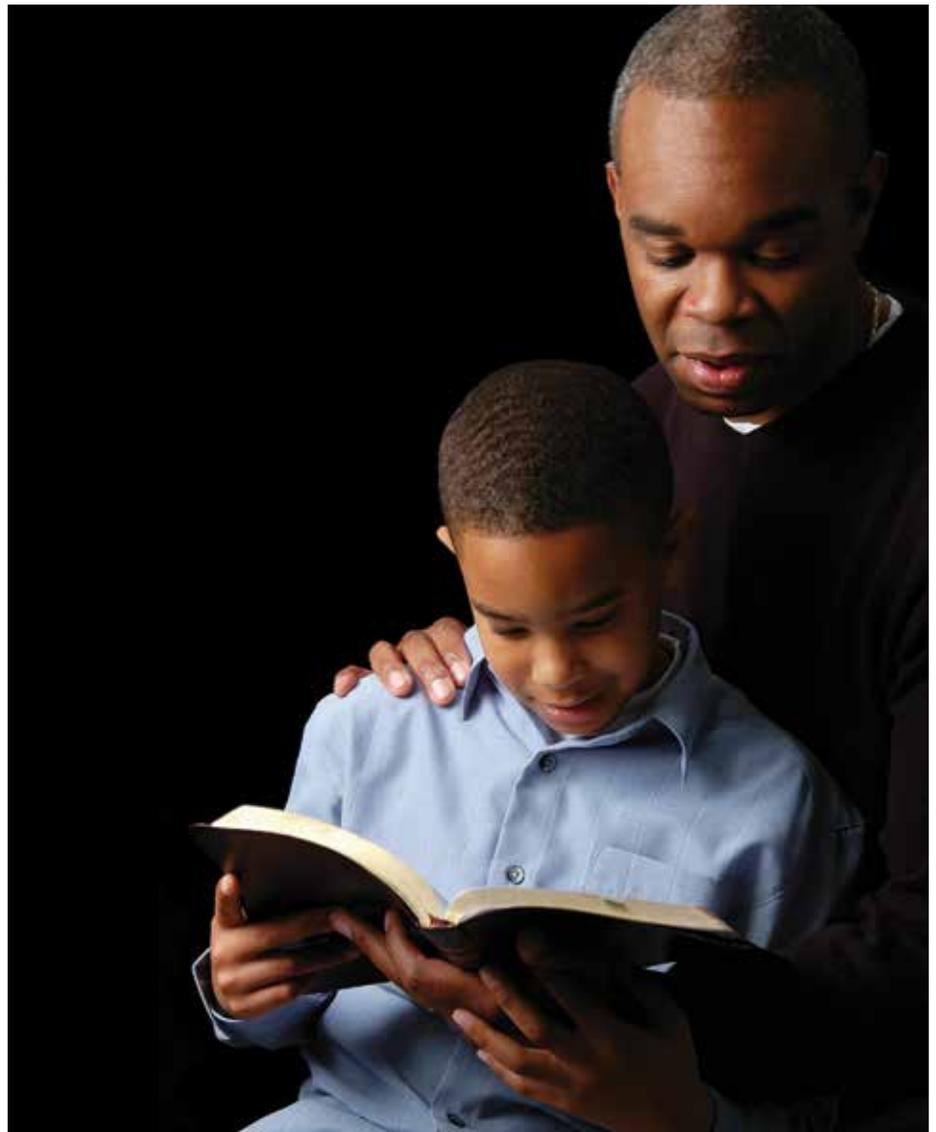
As I rounded the corner from the freeway to our housing development, I noticed the speedometer was trembling at ninety miles per hour. When I got to my home, I slammed on the brakes as I pulled into our driveway. My wife was waiting at the door.

Hurriedly, I took her to the car and then ran back into the house to get the bag for her stay in the hospital. We made it to the hospital in record time. An orderly wheeled my wife away as I took care of the admission duties.

For the purpose of context, this was in the 1970s, and things were vastly different than the present day. We did not know the gender of the baby ahead of time. A normal maternity hospital stay was a week. Fathers were not allowed in the birthing room. They had to wait outside the maternity section until the baby was born. This was our first baby, and we were both so excited. We were going to be parents!

I sat down in the waiting room by myself. Apparently, no one else was having a baby at that time. I tried to relax, but I kept crossing and uncrossing my legs while I shifted in the chair from side to side. To say that I was anxious would be an understatement of what I was actually feeling.

After the first hour of waiting, my



joyful anticipation began to settle down. My wife and I had talked about our preparations for the day when the baby would come home. We had every detail planned—feeding schedule, nap time, rotation schedule for getting up at night when the baby cried, and so on. We had it down pat.

But I began to realize that our whole world was about to change. Do not get me wrong, I was certain the changes were going to be positive. I had thought about what it means to become a father, and the time had come before I knew it. It was a lot easier to imagine being a father, but it was something quite different to realize that the dream had become a reality.

As a father, I would have to protect my child. I would have to ensure that there would be food on the table and a roof over our heads. Although these responsibilities were there when it was

only my wife and me, somehow these things were more important with the addition of a child. I would love this child with all of my heart. As a father, I would be willing to make any sacrifice for my baby.

As I continued to wait for the arrival of my child, I thought about how my impending fatherhood gave me a greater understanding of my Heavenly Father. I love my child, and God loves His children. He provides for and protects all His children.

The psalmist wrote about God's protection in Psalm 121:1-8: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper:

the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”

He will teach His children. He will guide them in their lives. We read in Psalm 32:8 what God inspired David to write, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.”

God will provide for all of their needs. Matthew 6:26 reminds us of His complete provision: “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”

He will never forsake His children. Isaiah 41:10-13 encourages us that He will always be with His people: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.”

I remember thinking then that when my baby came home, he would depend on my wife and me to do everything for him because for quite some time he would be able to do nothing for himself. He would be completely dependent on us. Our Father in heaven wants us to depend on Him. He has greater knowledge and wisdom than we will ever have. When we seek God’s guidance and obey His instructions, we will be better off than trying to live our lives on our own.

Earlier, I said that I would be willing to make any sacrifice for my baby. Any sacrifice I might make would pale in comparison to the greatest sacrifice made for us by our Heavenly Father. He loves us so much that He sacrificed His Son to save us from our sins. God’s willingness to make such a sacrifice for me helped me to gain a greater and deeper understanding of His vast love for me.

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God has demonstrated His love forever through His Son dying on the cross. The Father has provided the pathway for any person to become His child. Every person is His creation, but not every person is His child.

This truth is taught in John 1:12: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

We become a child of God when we trust in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Just as my child will have all of the rights of inheritance from my wife and me, so will a child of the King have the rights of spiritual inheritance through Him. Colossians 3:24 clarifies this for us: “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.”

Through Jesus Christ, God is creating His family. First Peter 2:9-10 describes God’s family. We read there that believers “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Our first child was a boy. As of this writing, he is forty-five years old and has a family of his own. We would never claim that we have been perfect parents, but he has turned out well. He is a kind, generous person, and we are very proud of the man he has become. We taught him many things, but the most important thing we taught him was to become a child of God by receiving Christ as his Saviour. He is saved and is serving the Lord in his home and church.

Fatherhood is a tremendous responsibility. It is not to be taken lightly. Children need fathers in the home.

Some people say that children do not come with an instruction manual, but there is a wonderful instruction book available to all. The Bible has all of the instructions we need to raise our children to be godly men and women.

The best model of fatherhood is found in the Bible. Our Heavenly Father is the greatest example of how to be a father. Let Him be your guide. He wants a deeper relationship with His children. ★

Including People with Disabling Conditions in Your Church

(Continued from page 5)

include everyone. Parents of children with disabling conditions go through a lot. When visiting, they should feel uplifted and part of the group.

Establish a policy about making referrals to physicians, specialists, and other human services people and organizations. If done carefully, the group will be the best source of information and an ideal context for discussion. But an atmosphere of objectivity must be cultivated, and the group should show no tolerance for attacking specialists.

Understand that a pastor’s schedule is usually full, and he might not be able to be as involved as he might like. But be sure to get his full support for the success of the ministry.

MAKE SPIRITUAL ISSUES A PRIORITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABLING CONDITIONS

The pastor added to the discussion, “I can wholeheartedly support this plan. You have helped me see that the primary goal of a ministry to those with disabling conditions is to make our church be a church for them. Above all, we must focus our disability ministry on spiritual growth. People with disabling conditions need to be evangelized, disciplined, and trained to serve in the church just like anyone else. We love people with disabling conditions best by helping them to grow spiritually and to serve in the church. But we must first include them fully, and that may require considering accessibility and personal assistance.”

In a blog entry titled “Disabilities” at biblereasons.com, Fritz Chery wrote, “God uses the disabled for His glory. God allows some people to be disabled to show His awesome love for all of creation and to help us imitate His love. God uses the disabled to teach us things and to accomplish His purposes in our lives. His ways are higher than our ways. God remains perfect, good, loving, kind, and just. There are people who are blind who see better than people with eyesight. There are people who are deaf who can hear better than people with good hearing. Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” ★

Think Before You Ink!

BY A. KOSHY MUTHALALY, PH.D.

VERY recently, I talked with a young lady before one of my adult studies classes started at the Christian university where I teach. We started talking about the subject of body piercings and tattoos. She had one of the latter that was very visible. At one point in our discussion, I asked her if she regretted getting a tattoo. I was taken aback a bit when she responded that she did not regret it. In fact, she went on to tell me that she planned to get more.

I wonder why people do this sort of thing. I understand that the stoic, older generation does not appreciate when someone colors his hair bright purple or makes any other significant alterations of his appearance. I also know that some young people do not seek permission from their parents before they do such things because they often are unlikely to get that permission. And when someone alters his appearance, it is often done only to get some acceptance or attention with peers.

I want to make it clear that I am not bashing those who have tattoos and piercings on their bodies. The reality is that times are changing, and much of this is being accepted in our society and is part of the norm for those growing into adulthood in recent years. However, it seems that there needs to be a reasonable discussion about body art and piercings. We cannot ignore the reasons behind why people alter their appearance. Some get tattoos because they want attention and acceptance from those who are their friends and companions. For those needing the attention they feel they are lacking, altering their appearance is an easy way to achieve that.

One problem with altering appearance with tattoos and body piercing (especially earlobe stretching) is that, for the most part, they are irreversible if not incredibly difficult to reverse. Many times, intense regret follows such actions, and the piercing or tattoo in question becomes a permanent reminder of something that has now marked a person for life. Hopefully, this

article will help the reader to see what the Bible says about matters like this.

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is important to realize that the Bible talks about the human body being the temple of the Holy Spirit. Although I Corinthians 6:19-20 does not directly apply to tattoos and piercings, it does remind us that the body is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. That verse is a reminder that we are to respect that which God has given to us. Imagine this. Our holy God has chosen to dwell in our finite human bodies through His Holy Spirit to show us how much He cares about us human beings. He has chosen to take an active part in our lives in this manner.

In verse 20, Paul goes on to stress that we are not our own and that we belong to God. This means that these physical bodies of ours are but rentals for a time in this world and that we do not actually own them. We are but caretakers of something solemn and sacred, created for us by God Himself. We are, therefore, called to be good stewards of our human bodies.

We can ask ourselves whether God would bless the use of our bodies in such a way. Can we say that the tattoo or body piercing is for His glory? First Corinthians 10:31 teaches us that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, it should be for the glory of God. It is true that we often paint and polish, shower and shave, and powder and perfume ourselves to make our human bodies presentable. That can make the whole matter of tattoos even more complex and somewhat difficult to discuss.

The chapter of the Bible that directly addresses this matter of tattoos is Leviticus 19 (in particular, verse 28), and it might help us in this discussion. In Leviticus 19, we read of holy God, who was laying down some rules for the way He expected His people to live. The people of Israel were to be identified with holiness like their Heavenly Father. They were part of His covenantal family. They were, indeed, His very own people. The principle here is that they were

to be different from the people among whom they lived. They were not to take part in the pagan customs practiced by the people groups surrounding them.

One of the pagan customs had to do with disfiguring their bodies. Leviticus 19:28 states that the “cuttings in the flesh” were done “for the dead.” This indicates that these cuttings possibly were a part of rituals that accompanied the burial of the dead or possibly with rituals of grieving for the dead. Perhaps the tattooing mentioned there also was tied into mourning the dead. Historians say that in ancient times, tattoos were made by puncturing the skin and pouring ink into the wounds to make words or images.

God’s purpose in making the commands we find in Leviticus 19 is the call for uniquely different and holy behavior. The people of God were not to be like the Gentiles around them because they were God’s covenant people. They were to be governed by the holy law of God. The reader will remember the time when the Israelites asked for a king. There might have been nothing wrong with asking for a king, *per se*, but what we can read in this section is the motivation behind asking for a king. They wanted a king to lead them “like all the nations” around them (I Sam. 8:5). What the Israelites asked for was a violation of the foundation for God’s covenant with them. *He* was their leader, their Lord. Because He is holy, He called for His people to stand out from the Gentiles around them.

Tying this together with the New Testament, the church is referred to as the *ekklesia* or the “called-out” people of God. In short, the real issue therefore is not whether we have a tattoo, because that is not going to keep us from heaven, but whether we are living for the Lord and not being shaped by the world around us. Ephesians 4:17 reminds us that “ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk.”

We must examine carefully whether the Bible says anything about tattoos and Christians. The answer is simply that the Bible does not directly say

much at all. We cannot take out of context what God commanded in the Old Testament, but the New Testament does call for caution about what those without Christ think about the followers of Christ (Eph. 5:17; Titus 2:7-8).

Tattoos and body piercings are external in nature. In that respect, they are simply superficial. But often what is displayed externally can mirror something that is going on deep within the person. The serious call of the Bible to the people of God today is that

we take care of the “inner man” (cf. Rom. 7:22-23; II Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16).

If we as children of God seek to follow our Lord, then we must ask ourselves how our actions impact our walk with our God in holiness. God can take care of our mistakes when we surrender our lives to Him. The next time we see someone with tattoos, let us not make assumptions without knowledge. We have received the grace of God, so let us show grace. After all, not having tattoos and body

piercings is not an indication of holiness. It is the heart that matters.

When we get to heaven, we can be sure that no one will ask us whether we have any tattoos! Our God looks on believers with mercy. When we turn our lives over to Him, the external marks may remain, but the grace of God fills our internal beings and helps us know the incomparable love of God for us (Eph. 3:19) that goes far beyond anything that is external in nature. That is how much He loves us! ★

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Bowels of Mercies

BY DARRELL W. MCKAY, M.A.

SPLAGCHNON

IN the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul teaches that the old nature of a sinner has died with Christ and that a believer is a new creation (3:10) because he has been raised with Christ. After that has occurred, lifestyle changes are in order for believers. With terminology suggesting a change of spiritual wardrobe, Paul wrote about removing items like “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication” and putting on certain items more becoming of a believer (Col. 3:8-14).

The first spiritual garment a believer is to put on is “bowels of mercies” (vs. 12). The term “bowels” in the New Testament can mean intestines, which is the common connotation of the word today. But back then, it more often meant the inner part of a person—from where one’s emotions and feelings emanate. What Paul was getting at was that those who have been made new through faith in Christ should no longer display the emotions and actions of the old nature and instead should display those which are befitting a disciple of Christ. The word “heart” is often used today to refer to the seat of the emotions and is a good way to think of what the word “bowels” meant before it was translated.

So how does having “bowels of mercies” make a believer like Christ?

Consider the following. The Greek word in verb form (*splagchnizomai*) is often used of Jesus where it has the meaning of compassionate feelings toward people in distress. For example, in the context of Jesus healing a leper, we read, “And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean” (Mark 1:41). Later, in the account of Jesus feeding the five thousand we read, “And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd” (Mark 6:34). Still later, when He fed the four thousand, He said to His disciples, “I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat” (Mark 8:2). Other examples can be cited from Matthew 9:36, Mark 9:22, and Luke 7:13.

Clearly, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, was at His very core a compassionate being and sympathized with the ill, the needy, and the downtrodden. Adding sinners to that list would be very appropriate since sinners were His reason for coming to pay the price of sin. Every believer finds compassion in the eyes of God, especially when turning to Christ in faith.

Returning to the book of Colossians, Paul lists two spiritual wardrobes from which to choose. The first was a ward-

robe of clothes fit only for a dead person, belonging to the “old man.” When a person receives new life in Christ, there is a totally new wardrobe available to clothe the “new man.” The very first garment mentioned is “bowels of mercies,” meaning a heart of compassion. All the other spiritual clothes that Paul mentions are important, but the foundation garment, if you will, is compassion. The ability to commiserate with those in need is fundamental for a disciple of Jesus.

However, just having compassion or pity is not enough, at least if we are taking seriously our discipleship with Jesus. Jesus not only had compassion for others, but compassion moved Him to do something in response to their needs. How that should work out in our lives depends on a number of things, such as spiritual gifts, talents, economic situation, opportunities, and the like. Here are some suggestions: There are food banks that need donations, shut-ins that need help at home or perhaps transportation to a doctor, and there are those who cannot find employment or whose work provides less than the needed income to raise a family. There are those who need tutoring, mentoring, or training in some life skill that will help prepare them for the workplace. Why not become the hands and feet of Jesus today and do what you can to show compassion by helping someone in need? ★

The Judge of All the Earth

BY JOHN AVERY

THERE is a vivid and intense story contained within the verses of Genesis 18 and 19. Three mysterious men visited Abraham and Sarah and announced that the aged and barren Sarah would give birth to a son. Then the men got up to leave, looking toward Sodom. They were on their way to examine the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham walked with the men to send them on their journey. But he stayed behind on the rim of the valley that overlooked those cities.

As Abraham watched, his visitors descended into the valley. He then had an interesting bargaining session with the Lord. Sodom and Gomorrah had earned the reputation of being the vilest cities on earth. God had announced His plan to visit them, assess their sin, and then deal with it. However, Abraham had a problem with that plan. His nephew Lot, along with Lot's family, lived in Sodom. Abraham begged God not to destroy the cities for the sake of those who might be living righteously there (Gen. 18:23). He had Lot and his family in mind. Abraham's argument hinged on his faith in God's justice (vs. 25).

Underlying all the names and titles of God is a truth on which Abraham instinctively depended. God always acts in ways that are consistent with His character. In this case, His righteousness will always be expressed in His judgments. It is God's nature to dispense true justice when He acts as Judge. Abraham's question was rhetorical; he did not ask it because he doubted the answer, but as an appeal to God to express His nature.

Abraham whittled the numbers down. "Please, would you spare the city if there are fifty righteous people in it? Forty-five? Forty? Thirty? Twenty? Ten?" Each time, God agreed.

CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

This encounter between God and Abraham is often used as an example of the power of intercessory prayer to influence God. It is certainly true that prayer changes things, but something more significant was happening

during that cliff-top experience.

Take Abraham's meeting with the Judge of all the earth as a model for a better kind of prayer. There is no mention of a special location, language, or posture. The Lord had manifested as one of three rather human-looking visitors. Abraham interacted with Him in an ordinary way. The Judge of all the earth is accessible and approachable.

But notice the flow of the conversation. The Lord shows Abraham a situation on earth. Abraham thinks he has a reasonable grasp of what needs to happen—spare the righteous. He presents his request to God based on his presuppositions. God seems to agree to his terms. But then comes a twist that is so often missed in the teaching that focuses on how intercession influences God.

Perhaps the twist is missed because it comes later in chapter 19. Two angels tell Lot and his family to escape from Sodom. As the tiny group runs for their lives, God rains fire and brimstone on the two cities. The cities were *not* spared because Lot's household comprised *less than ten* righteous people. Abraham's sticking point was irrelevant because the number was too high. And that could make this chapter a poor example for the power of intercessory prayer. I suggest that there is another lesson.

What we do learn is that conversation with God, which is what prayer really is, does more to change *our* minds than it does to alter God's mind. Abraham ended up learning a life-changing lesson. Our conversations with God about the situations around us should leave us understanding more of the character and nature of God.

It helps if we go to prayer with a Bible in hand. Scripture is our objective standard for the will and ways of God. If we listen to God and read relevant passages, then we can discover more of God's will as we talk to Him. When we know who God is and what He is like, we have a better idea of His will for a situation. Then we are ready to start interceding according to His will (I John 5:14-15).

Let us change the way we pray so that we listen to God more and then pray back to Him according to His will and what He shows us. That is the recipe for effective prayer.

BLESSING THE NATIONS

So, what was the lesson that the Lord had arranged for Abraham to learn? If we read Genesis 18 carefully, we find it in verses 17 through 19.

God wanted Abraham to see how He dealt with sinful Sodom and Gomorrah so that Abraham could learn about justice and judgment (or righteousness and justice). Why was that lesson important? Because God had chosen Abraham to teach his descendants to live godly lives in righteousness and justice.

That is the best way for all to live. There can be no doubt that the vivid events made a deep impression on Abraham. They were bound to be high on the list of stories that Abraham passed on to his sons and grandsons.

Abraham needed to pass this lesson on because of the high calling placed on him and his descendants. At the time of Abraham's interaction with God in Genesis 12:1-3, God said that He would make Abraham into a great nation that would bless all the families of the earth. God repeated His promise several times.

God showed Abraham that evil will not go unpunished; eventually there will be a reckoning. The Righteous God will not tolerate evil (Hab. 1:13). Justice requires that evil must be punished. Abraham's descendants needed to take sin seriously. They needed to warn others to resist the temptation to evil. The Judge of all the earth is patient, but He disciplines the wayward.

There is another aspect to the nature of the Judge of all the earth—He does what is right. He was willing to spare as few as ten righteous people. God takes the tiniest remnant under the wings of His mercy. There is assurance that every single sinner who repents will receive mercy from God. The Judge of all the earth is just, righteous, and merciful.

DISCIPLING THE NATIONS

We are meant to pass the same truths on to our children and to the rest of the world. Abraham was the father of faith-filled people. As followers of Jesus, we are direct faith descendants of Abraham and have inherited God's prophetic

(Continued on page 17)

Faith for the Family Finances

BY WILLIAM LINTON

NO man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [money]” (Matt. 6:24).

BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING

In Matthew 6:25, we learn about how we ought not to let concern over the physical needs of this life rule our lives (for purposes of this article to be applied to finances) (cf. Phil. 4:6-7). This is not to suggest we should discard using wisdom with regard to our spending habits, but it is an understanding of who God is and His perspective on how Christians should live in this world. Our freedom in Jesus provides not just a freedom from our sins but also a freedom from earthly concerns, such as our finances. Why is this the case? We should focus our attention on making disciples of all nations, which starts in our own homes. That is job number one for all believers.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

While we ought to be good stewards of everything God provides for us, including money, all the earthly things we have are just tools with which He equips us to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and take care of our families.

It is all about the intentions of our hearts and the true God of our lives. We read in Mark 12:43-44, “And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.” Now, I do not believe the point of this teaching is to give all of our money to the church, thus making our families destitute, but He was speaking about how the way in which we use our finances reveals what is important to us. In this case, the widow revealed from her heart that she trusted in God more than she trusted in the things of this world. She looked to God as her provider. She did not place trust in herself or her money. Therefore we ought

to spend our money as good stewards, remembering that everything we have is God’s and is from Him. God is most interested in the intentions of our hearts. Our giving should be an act of worship, as it is an outward act of obedience, trust, and love. Further, we see in James 2:26 that our faith is revealed through our actions: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

LOVE IS THE MOTIVATION TO GIVE

Again, it is the intent of our hearts that interests Jesus the most, in this case, with regard to how we use the money God has given us to steward. We learn from II Corinthians 9:6-7, “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” We give from our hearts so that we can receive the blessing of a life free from materialistic concerns.

In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul referred to the money being given that would supply for the needs of the saints to feed the poor and further the gospel. Providing the money was to be done out of love for others, and that love, no doubt, would follow the prescription for what we read in I Corinthians 13:4-5: “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.” It is clear that charity, or love, is to be our motivation for what we do with the money God has given us.

HOW TO GIVE

Many people want to know the Bible’s formula for how much to give in return to God as an act of worship to Him. Traditionally, it has been taught that giving 10 percent to the church is the standard. The word “tithing” refers to the dedication of a tenth of what someone produced or earned. The paying of tithes in ancient Israel was an important part of religious worship. The Israelites were to give a tenth of

their produce and livestock to support the Levites and priests in worship to the Lord (Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-28). Tithes were also collected to help those in need (Deut. 26:12).

The Levites and priests had no means of income, so they relied on the other tribes of Israel to support them. When each of the eleven tribes gave their 10 percent, then there would be enough for the Levites, strangers, and the poor. In Deuteronomy 26:12-19, we read Moses’ words explaining to Israel that they were God’s covenant people, and that they had agreed to obey every commandment in order to be His people and receive His blessings. Giving back to God a portion of that with which He had blessed them was part of their relationship with Him.

In the New Testament, several verses mention tithing (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42; Heb. 7:5), but the focus in those passages refers back to the Old Testament system. There are no specific verses concerning what the New Testament church did about tithing.

However, the New Testament does have much to say about giving. And it appears that many in the church today either wrongfully think they do not have to give to the church or incorrectly think that the Bible prescribes that they can stop at a tenth. Christ’s work on the cross has liberated believers from the law, but that frees them even more to serve Him, including through giving.

We are commanded to support those who preach the gospel (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7; I Cor. 9:6-14; I Tim. 5:17-18). We are also called to be generous to those in need (II Cor. 8:9; I Tim. 6:17-19). In Acts 4:32 we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.” In the full context of Acts, believers took care of each other’s needs. The money was put at the feet of the apostles who then distributed it to those in need.

In addition, remember, “for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Cor. 6:20). Our money and even our very lives belong to God. As we overcome the concept of personal ownership and replace it with stewardship, we can better learn how to use our finances and our lives.

(Continued on page 17)

Haran: Abraham's Ancestral Home

BY LARRY V. CRUTCHFIELD, PH.D.

A DIVINE CALL TO NEW LANDS

Scripture first places “Abram” (meaning “exalted father”) and the rest of his family “in Ur of the Chaldees” (Gen. 11:28). This Sumerian city, one of the greatest in southern Mesopotamia, was located some 220 miles southeast of modern Baghdad. While living in Ur, Abram was first called by God to go to Canaan (Gen. 15:7; Neh. 9:7).

Following the divine call, Abram and his family set out for Canaan (Gen. 11:31-32). They traveled the long northern route to Haran in upper Mesopotamia, no doubt to keep their livestock near the abundant water of the Euphrates River. Their animals would not have survived a much more direct westerly route to Canaan across the Arabian desert.

Why the family chose to reside in Haran and how long they remained there is not stated. Perhaps the health of Abraham’s father, Terah, had declined during the roughly 500-mile journey and he was unable to go on to Canaan. Whatever the reason, Terah eventually died in Haran.

It was later in Canaan that Abram’s name was changed to “Abraham,” meaning “father of a multitude.” The new name also alluded to the fact that Abraham would become the “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5).

Abraham had married Sarai (Sarah)

in Ur, but the couple remained childless during their sojourn at Haran. In time, the patriarch received and responded to a second divine call to go to Canaan (Acts 7:2-4). While residing there, Abraham eventually sought a wife for his firstborn son, Isaac—not in Canaan, but back in Haran (Gen. 24). It was in Haran, too, that Jacob married Leah and Rachel and raised eleven of his twelve sons, founders of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 29—31).

THE ANCIENT CITY OF HARAN

Today, the ancient city of Haran is located around ten miles north of the Syrian border in modern Turkey. In Scripture, the geographical names, “Padan-aram” (cf. Gen. 28:2) or simply “Padan” (48:7) are closely associated with Haran. While the meaning of these names is uncertain, it seems clear that they refer either to Haran itself or to the region around the city.

The name “Haran” is evidently from *harranu*, an Akkadian word meaning “highway.” The name is most appropriate, for the city was located on a very important commercial trade route. This highway connected Mesopotamia from the south and east with Asia Minor and the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

In addition to being an important commercial center in northern Mesopotamia, Haran was also well-known

as a focal point in the region for worshipping Sin, the moon god (also worshipped at Ur). The city’s importance as a trading partner with other nations on the east-west caravan highway and its standing as a center for moon god worship enabled Haran to thrive in the ancient world for around a thousand years following the patriarchal period. Taken together, this spanned approximately three-and-a-half millennia!

But as the *Archaeological Study Bible* notes, “This city is best known for its links with the Biblical patriarchs, who lived during the Middle Bronze Age (first half of the second millennium B.C.). Mari texts attest that Haran was thriving during this time” (Garrett, gen. ed. “Archaeological Sites: Haran.” Zondervan).

The city of Haran has been continuously occupied from the middle of the third millennium B.C. to the present. Consequently, on the plus side, its location has never been forgotten or lost. On the negative side, however, uninterrupted occupation has meant limited excavation of the site at best.

DIVERSE ARCHAEOLOGY AND HARAN

E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison summarized excavation efforts at Haran this way: “The unbroken occupation of the site has had limited archaeological investigation.



T. E. Lawrence surveyed the position, but actual digging, and that of limited scope, did not begin until the Anglo-Turkish expedition of 1951-52. Apart from a few [late] Babylonian inscriptions, little of Biblical interest was found” (Blaklock and Harrison, gen. eds. *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*. Zondervan).

In spite of this imposing obstacle, however, diverse avenues of unexpected archaeological discovery regarding Haran have proven very rewarding. As LaMoine F. DeVries wrote: “Information about the features of the city itself is limited due to the [necessarily] very brief excavation of the site; nonetheless, our understanding of the life, history, and culture of Haran is enhanced by other sources, including biblical and extra-biblical [documentary records]” (*Cities of the Biblical World*, Hendricks Publishers).

Howard F. Vos stated further that the archaeology of Mesopotamia “commands interest among students of general culture [as well as the biblical]. Civilization began in Mesopotamia. Development of the city-state, the origin of writing, formulation of law codes . . . and much more apparently must be attributed to early Mesopotamians” (*Archaeology in Bible Lands*, Moody Press). Vos’s reference to “the origin of writing”—and what that invention made possible—is of greatest importance here.

Excavations at several sites in Mesopotamia have unearthed great artifacts and monuments to be sure. But sometimes, the most significant discovery made by an archaeologist is something quite different and, perhaps for some, visually less satisfying. But the recovery of an extensive clay tablet archive (sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands) can throw open the door to understanding an ancient people’s cultural practices and beliefs.

CLAY TABLETS, HANDHELD RECORDS

This is how one writer describes the development of written records in the ancient Near East: “In ancient Mesopotamia the most commonly used writing material was the clay tablet (cf. Isa. 30:8). The earliest ones were produced at the Sumerian city of Uruk during the fourth millennium B.C. SUMMER QUARTER 2019

Clay was available in such abundance and was so easy to mold into writing tablets that there was no obstacle to producing a great quantity of such tablets. Thus, over a half million tablet-documents have been discovered to date from the ancient Near East” (Garrett, “Cuneiform and Clay Tablets in the Ancient Near East.” *Archaeological Study Bible*).

Originally, writing was a type of pictographic script. In time, however, it became much more abstract and thus allowed for more complex written communication, until “by the third millennium B.C. cuneiform had been invented. Cuneiform (Latin for ‘wedge-shaped’) is so named for the shape of the mark made by a reed stylus, triangular at one end, that was pressed into wet clay to make wedge-shaped lines” (Garrett).

THE BIBLE, NUZI TABLETS, AND HARAN

A cuneiform clay tablet archive of this kind (dating to about 1500-1350 B.C.) was uncovered at the ancient city of Nuzi (now called Yorghan Tepe). The site is located east of the Tigris River, about ten miles southeast of Kirkuk (Iraq) in northern Mesopotamia. Although Nuzi is not mentioned in the Bible and is a good distance from Haran, during the second millennium B.C., the Hurrians ruled both cities. For this reason, “it is not surprising that the Nuzi archives and the Biblical stories of the patriarchs reflect common customs and legal arrangements” (Garrett, “Archaeological Sites: Nuzi,” *Archaeological Study Bible*).

At Nuzi, for example, a servant could be adopted as an heir by a childless couple. Such was the case with Abram and his servant Eliezer (Gen. 15:2-3). As another solution to the problem of childlessness, Nuzi legal texts also allowed a wife to give her husband her maidservant as a surrogate to produce an heir. The wife could adopt an heir born in this manner, but could also later replace the maidservant’s son if she gave birth to a son of her own (see the accounts of Sarah and Hagar, Genesis 16:1-4, 21:8-10 and the somewhat similar situation with Leah and Rachel’s maidservants in Genesis 30:1-13) (Garrett).

With regard to marital arrangements, “Marriage contracts discovered in

Nuzi demonstrate that brothers could arrange for their sister’s marriage, although she often had the option to agree or disagree with the proposed union (cf. [Gen.] 24:29-60)” (Garrett). If a father arranged the marriage, however, the daughter’s consent was not required (cf. Gen. 29:16-30). The Israelite practice of Levirate marriage (as in the case of Judah and Tamar; see Gen. 38) is also paralleled in the Nuzi tablets (Garrett).

At one time, Bible critics mistakenly “assumed that a later editor had added the notes that Laban gave named maidservants to his daughters when they married [Zilpah to Leah and Bilhah to Rachel; ([Gen.] 29:22-24, 28-29)].” But after the Nuzi tablets were found, Bible scholars “discovered Nuzi marriage contracts stipulating that the bride was to be given a handmaiden, whose name was duly recorded in the contract” (Garrett).

Another interesting parallel between Scripture and the Nuzi tablets concerns Rachel’s theft of Laban’s household idols (cf. Gen. 31:22-37). As for why she took the idols, “An individual family’s household idols were considered highly important in Nuzi and were handed down to the principal heir. If the inheritance were disputed in court, possession of the family idols could be accepted as proof that the deceased had intended the possessor to be his heir. Thus, Rachel’s theft of the family idols could have been construed as a serious crime, an attempt to secure Laban’s wealth for her husband and possible future children” (Garrett).

DISCOVERIES THAT DEMAND A VERDICT

Josh McDowell summarized the tremendous importance of archaeological discoveries like these by saying: “Much of this evidence came from excavations at Nuzu [Nuzi] and Mari. Light was shed on Hebrew poetry and language from work at Ugarit. Mosaic legislation was seen in Hittite, Assyrian, Sumerian and Eshunna codes. Through these we are able to see the life of the Hebrew against the surrounding world and as [William F.] Albright says, ‘This is a contribution before which everything else must fade into insignificance’” (*Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, Vol. I, Campus Crusade for Christ). ★

Psalm 95: The Power of Praise

BY ROBERT A. FERGUSON JR.

SOMETIMES we may wonder what benefit praise and worship has for us. Does God want us to praise Him to satisfy His ego, as some skeptics charge? No, God is not an egomaniac in the sky who needs us to grovel at His feet. This certainly is not what praise is.

Allow me to propose a very practical reason for Christians to praise the Lord. It is good for us to do so. There is power in praise. God is certainly worthy of our praise and adoration, and it is good for us to give it to Him. Doing so takes our attention off ourselves and places it on whom it rightfully belongs, which is the Lord our God.

In the first two verses of Psalm 95, the psalmist makes a call for corporate praise. We are not only to praise the Lord, but we are to do so publicly with other believers. Notice how he wrote, “*Let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise. . . . Let us come before His presence*” (vss. 1-2; emphasis added). There is something very powerful about worshipping the Lord together with a group of other believers. It is definitely good to praise the Lord when you are alone at home or driving in your car, but there is something special about lifting up our voices in concert with other people.

God wants us to lift our voices together to Him. He is the Rock of our salvation, immovable to the point where He cannot be shaken. Jesus is the Cornerstone on which our lives are built (1 Pet. 2:7), and He is worthy of our praise. We must come into the Lord’s presence with thanksgiving in our hearts because it is His great love and mercy that allows us to be in His presence in the first place.

The greatest reason to praise the Lord, however, is because He is a great God (Ps. 95:3). There is no one like Him and no one who can be compared to Him (cf. Mic. 7:18). He is the great King who is above all other so-called gods. He deserves all the praise that we can give Him.

In God’s hands are the depths of the earth (Ps. 95:4). His hands are the most powerful. The whole world rests

safely in them. He is not only the Creator of all things but also the Sustainer, holding everything up by the “word of his power” (Heb. 1:3). You cannot go so low that God cannot reach you and lift you up. If you find yourself in the valley, praise the Lord because He is with you, and He is the One who will take you through that valley and then bring you out.

The heights of the heavens also belong to Him. God not only descends to the lowest places of the earth, but He also ascends to the highest mountain top and beyond. There is nowhere in all of creation where His glory does not shine.

The sea also belongs to the Lord (Ps. 95:5). He hollowed out the earth and formed the seas and oceans. If you are standing on the bank of what appears to be a sea that cannot be crossed, God can split that sea and let you walk on dry ground. There are no circumstances that are too difficult for Him.

The Lord is a marvelous Creator who displays His glory in His creation. He paints a beautiful picture twice a day that is more stunning than any art gallery. Each one is a unique work that will never be reproduced. The sky is His canvas, and the paintings are free to anyone who will take the time to appreciate them. I am referring to the sunrise and sunset. The next time you admire a beautiful landscape or stare at the starry sky, take the time to worship the One who created it all (cf. Ps. 95:6).

We should be glad to call the Lord our God. He is our Shepherd, and we are His sheep (Ps. 95:7). We live in His pasture, and He cares for us. He feeds, nurtures, and protects us. He does not do this because He is under some obligation to do so. He cares for us because He loves us, and we are to love Him in return. Because of His kindness and goodness toward us, we fall down before Him in love and adoration.

The psalm transitions from reasons to praise the Lord to a warning. The warning is to those who think they do not owe God anything, who think they do not need Him. If God is dealing

with you in any way, then it is wise to come to Him in humility. Do not harden your heart against Him (vs. 8). That is a recipe for disaster. No one can stand against the Lord.

The Israelites that came out of Egypt proved to be a rebellious group who grumbled against God. They praised Him sporadically, such as when He parted the Red Sea and allowed them to pass through on dry land (Exod. 14 and 15). However, they mostly complained and were guilty of great unbelief. No matter what God did for them, they so often refused to trust Him.

God put up with that generation for forty years before they died in the wilderness (Ps. 95:10). Future generations, ours included, are warned not to be as they were. They did not praise God for His wondrous works, but they moaned and groaned every time they faced hardship. Instead of remembering all that He had done for them, they spent forty years wandering and complaining.

God certainly was not pleased with that generation of Israelites, and their unbelief prevented them from entering the Promised Land (Ps. 95:11; cf. Heb. 3:13-19). God does not want us to praise Him simply to stroke His ego, but He does want us to recognize from where our blessings come. God does not owe us anything, yet He richly lavishes grace upon us without measure. A wise person will keep this in mind and return thanks to the One who gives us so much. He is a great God who is worthy of our worship.

The Lord is a magnificent, radiant, and spectacular God who gave His only Son so that we could have eternal life. He did not withhold the splendor of heaven from us but rather invites us to come to Him in faith. Those who have any understanding of the greatness of God will gladly praise Him for His matchless grace.

The gates of heaven stand wide open to those who love and trust the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us enter into His presence with praise on our lips and thanksgiving in our hearts. Praise the Lord! ★



I Thank You, God

His hand is ever leading me;
His mercies never cease.
He gives me shelter with His wings
And covers me with grace.
My heart rejoices in Him;
I know He is my Lord.
I have His precious promises;
They're written in His Word.
His blessings are so freely given
When in Him I abide.

He always is beside me
When in His love I hide.
He is a Friend who's always true
Through sorrow, joy, or pain.
He loves me, oh, so tenderly;
His love will never change.
Help me, dear God, to trust You
more
When dark may be my way,
For You have never failed me.
I thank You, God, today. ★
—Kathy J. Moore.

BIBLE BOOKMARK

Prayer's Purpose

BY G. A. DOWNES

Q. What is the purpose of prayer?

A. We read in the Bible that prayer to the Lord is for His glory (cf. Phil. 4:19). For the natural man (cf. I Cor. 2:2-16), however, prayer becomes just another lucky charm. He confesses that “he was lucky” after he receives his request. There are many who fit this category to whom God is just another unknown means to an end to get one’s wishes and desires. Prayer, for the natural man, does not give glory to God; it brings glory to himself, and Satan enjoys God being ignored. Satan wants to receive the glory.

Now let us be honest, Satan gives pleasures to those who follow him, but the price is more than anyone would really want to pay. How do we know

when prayers are made to give glory to God or are made with selfish intent, giving place to the devil (cf. Eph. 4:27-30)? The Bible gives us the answer: “If I regard iniquity (sin) in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18); “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas. 5:16).

God’s concern is not that we should have an abundance of this world’s wealth or even that we have authority and power over others, but that we have eternal life free from all pain and suffering. We read in I Timothy 2:4-5, “[God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and

one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” And John 3:16 reveals God’s heart for us: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Our purpose for praying should not be a means of getting something. It is a place of communicating with God on a personal level, just as a child and his father share in the pleasures of life, and the child learns from the love that the father gives. God desires to give His children all the spiritual and temporal sustenance they need (cf. Matt. 7:11).

It is often taught that prayer to God should be like talking to a best friend. A best friend is one who is always ready to reach out to you when you are in need, no matter what the cost. God has reached out to all, not because we deserve it, but because His love goes beyond all boundaries. God should be your best Friend.

There are many stories about soldiers who, during a time of war when their buddies were threatened with certain death, would put themselves in harm’s way and give their own lives for their comrades. God, through His Son, did that for us. “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:7-8).

Now read the heart of David when Absalom, David’s own son, rebelled against his father’s authority and was killed by David’s general, Joab. “And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (II Sam. 18:33). David had such great love for his son that he wished it would have been himself that had died. This is the kind of love that God gave us when Jesus died on the cross.

God’s love for us gives us purpose to pray to Him. In Luke 15, Jesus gave us an example of a father’s love. In the parable of the prodigal son, we read of the young man who left home to indulge himself with the world’s treasures. He lost everything, even his own self-respect, and when he realized what he had done, he remembered his father’s love and went home to seek his

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Tara's Defining Moment

BY PRISCILLA TATE GILMORE



Tara Sun Aman

TARA SUN AMAN'S life, as she had known it, came to a quick halt the summer before her freshman year at Silverton High School. What happened to her caused her to wonder about God's plans for her life.

"At fourteen," Tara began, "I enjoyed performing classical ballet and jazz at the small studio near my home in Silverton, Oregon. And I looked forward to meeting new friends and participating in activities in high school. But the weekend before Memorial Day, I went to the beach at Pacific City with my family and suffered from extreme tiredness, lack of energy, head and body aches, and a sore throat. Not being active was weird. Staying in bed for the weekend didn't feel right. I felt awful.

"When I arrived home from the beach, I wasn't able to work on the family's hazelnut farm. I still ached all over."

Tara's pain put emotional and physical stress on her family. Her mom knew she needed medical help, so she took Tara to their primary care physician. The doctor thought Tara was suffering from symptoms of the flu, and he sent her home.

Because the pain was persistent, Tara saw numerous doctors over the

next four weeks. Each arrived at the same conclusion as the primary care physician. They provided no relief from the constant pain.

Next, Tara visited an infectious diseases specialist. After performing a blood draw, he diagnosed her with mononucleosis. The physician believed that the virus had been living dormant in Tara's body. Her aches and pains intensified for another month.

At the end of that month, Tara's primary care physician referred her to a pediatric rheumatologist at Randall Children's Hospital in Portland, Oregon. The rheumatologist diagnosed Tara with amplified pain syndrome. It was his belief that the mono virus brought on the syndrome.

Amplified pain syndrome is the diagnosis given to children with Tara's symptoms. But for those that do not grow out of the amplified pain, it is referred to as fibromyalgia. Tara's fibromyalgia was incurable, but treatment had been proven to help.

Tara said, "When the doctor diagnosed me with fibro, I never had anything limit me. I was glad that it wasn't cancer, but I was frustrated with God and didn't understand why this was happening. I had a lot of questions and was anxious about the pain. I was drained physically and emotionally. I felt like a flatline. Dull."

Because treatment had proven effective in some cases, the doctor referred Tara to a psychiatrist and recommended physical and occupational therapy sessions.

"Even before stepping into the psychiatrist's office," Tara said, "I was on edge and didn't have the best attitude. Then when I answered the doctor's questions, I sensed that she didn't believe me and thought the pain was all in my head. That is the last thing you want to hear when you *truly* are in pain. Going to see the psychiatrist was probably one of the more painful things I had to do along my journey of rehabilitation."

After visiting the psychiatrist, Tara had to push herself during the physical and occupational therapy treatments.

During the physical therapy sessions in Portland, Tara did muscle-strengthening techniques that included lots of cardio and moving to divert the pain. The occupational therapist focused on things that would get Tara back to her normal routine and help produce a quality of life. It included strategies to reduce pain that did not require physical exercise.

In addition to performing muscle-strengthening techniques, the therapist required Tara to undergo intense physical logic-based therapy. Tara said, "It was weird because I was a dancer and had been in peak physical condition before fibro. Now, because my body ached so much, I couldn't even do a push-up. The things the counselor wanted me to do in physical and occupational therapy were painful. I dreaded going because it hurt.

"Because therapy sessions were scheduled every day, I wasn't able to attend Silverton High for the first semester of my freshman year. I had anxiety with school because I wasn't able to hang out with kids. I couldn't make the friends I wanted or needed since transferring from middle school to Silverton High."

Tara was still in therapy during the second semester, but she felt well enough to attend classes. "But," said Tara, "I didn't go to all my classes because I had to leave school at noon and travel to Portland. I was fortunate to have my study hall teacher help me with English and math.

"In spite of the teacher's help, I had no joy for my whole freshman year. I never really was depressed but grieved a lot. I was sad," Tara said.

Finally, Tara attended all the classes for her sophomore year. *And* she returned to dancing. "Dancing felt good," Tara said. "But there were days when I didn't want to get out of bed for school or dancing. I hurt. Before bed and in the morning, the pain was the worst."

In the mornings, Tara's mom tried to motivate her. She would ask, "What do you want to wear today?"

"Later, I realized how hard it was for my mom to push me," Tara said. "Mom believed that the best thing was to keep moving. I knew I needed to push through the pain and get on with life and to school. It was difficult.

"At school, it was hard to do the simplest things. Just sitting in the classroom, I got migraine headaches from the noise and light from the windows.

"And learning how to juggle life presented a problem. I couldn't arrange my

schedule like I wanted it. High school was supposed to be full of a lot of stuff going on. The doctor said I needed to keep active, but because of the disease, I had to sit down and figure out what I could do and couldn't do. Fibro limited me. It bummed me out because I was used to being around people and friends and doing things. I tired easily because I had no energy. I realized that I couldn't go to school all day, and then I had to pick one thing for the day. If I overdid it one day, then the next day, I would suffer the consequences and be in bed for the whole day. There were days when I was not ready to fully accept that I had fibromyalgia.

"Schoolwork was difficult. There were times when I got 'fibro fog.' It was a feeling of being in a haze like there was nothing in my brain. It became hard to focus just on one thing. I got fibro fog from overstimulation, stress, or lack of sleep.

"Mom told me not to get stressed. But it had been hard to learn that lesson because I've always been on top of my school work. When I can't or wasn't able to make straight As, it frustrated me.

"And there was another thing I had to learn. When the doctor diagnosed me, the disease affected my faith. I hung out with the wrong group of kids at school," Tara said. "I didn't open my Bible. But one night, God grabbed me, and the Lord confronted me. I couldn't believe what I had done. I realized how much I had lost because of my attitude and actions. I was ashamed. Before fibro, I had never gone through anything bad. My faith and love for the Lord had never been tested.

"In my junior year, I rededicated my life to Christ and realized it was my defining moment. I knew how much I had lost, including spiritual ground in my relationship with Jesus. I didn't want that to happen ever again. At that moment, I started to have a real relationship with Christ. For the first time, I understood God's love.

"My dad always told me," Tara said, "that I would grow up, go to college, and get married. I would not always be living with my parents. For those reasons, I needed to have my own relationship with Christ. It made me think."

Tara recently told her youth pastor, "I wouldn't ask God to not make me sick. If it happened all over again, I would accept the diagnosis this time. Even though the pain is awful, I am thankful for where fibro has taken me.

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If I wouldn't have gone through the trials, even the visit to the psychiatrist's office, I wouldn't have come to lean on Jesus for everything. I understand now that the ups and downs that happened were stepping stones I had to take. The ups and downs got me to where I am today, stronger in faith and deeper in love with Jesus. God has given me peace about the experiences."

Tara opened her Bible and read, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then I am strong' (II Cor. 12:8-10).

"It sums up my anger, rebellion, and ultimate submission to God," Tara said. "Prior to rededicating my life to Jesus, I didn't accept my weakness."

During her sophomore year, Tara rebelled, made bad decisions, and met the wrong people. And she lost her mom and dad's trust. Privileges and her phone were taken away. Tara wanted their trust back, but she had to prove it by showing and living her new restored faith in Jesus.

Tara relies on God daily, every moment, even in the moments of pain. He is her Rock. Getting fibromyalgia required waiting on and trusting in God. "God has been teaching me to rest in His promises," Tara said. "There were times when I was tempted to be anxious and take things into my own hands, but today He is teaching me, slowly, to put my ultimate trust in Him and wait in all situations."

Fibromyalgia pain threatens to keep Tara home from school and dance and work on the family farm. But rather than submitting to the pain, Tara turns to God to help her through the suffering.

She quoted a favorite verse, "'For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal'" (II Cor. 4:16-18).

Even though Tara is in constant pain, she has learned how to handle the attacks, migraines, and pain in her abdominal muscles. "The headaches happened every day or every other day in the beginning, but now they happen two or three times a month." She laughs. "That was all for the month of July."

Today, Tara walks with Jesus. She doesn't know God's plans, but she has learned to trust Him for everything. ★

SERMON

The Judge of All the Earth

(Continued from page 10)

promise to him (Rom. 4:13-16). We must take seriously His mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20).

The lesson should be ingrained in our hearts and minds. God punishes sin. He did so fully when He sent Jesus to die on the cross. The crucifixion was an act of holy and just judgment on sin. It was also a demonstration of expansive mercy towards everyone who puts their trust in Jesus' death as a substitute for their sins. ★

Faith for the Family Finances

(Continued from page 11)

LOVE OF MONEY

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6:10).

Godly giving is not like investing. With investing, there's always the possibility of getting a larger financial gain or the risk of losing it all. However, the word "giving" directly implies a one-way street in which a person gives with no thought of receiving any return ever. Our giving is to be done out of love for God and others and not for the expectation of something in return. Considering all of this, there is actually an immediate blessing or return when we give in that giving naturally feels good, especially when giving with a cheerful heart (II Cor. 9:7). In addition, we can receive the blessing of the freedom to trust Jesus with our finances.

In conclusion, Christians need to give what they can, according to their circumstances and how the Spirit leads them. Giving should be done in a selfless manner, in faith, and with love. ★

The Unity of Love

BY JAMES T. WOOD

WHEN Jesus prayed for all believers, He prayed “that they all may be one” (John 17:21), yet today there are, according to estimates by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, as many as 41,000 Christian denominations. While the numbers are inflated by researchers differentiating between churches in different cultures, there remains a large number of churches and denominations. That leaves us to wonder how God responded to the prayer of Jesus that all believers be one.

THE UNITY OF THE TRINITY

When Jesus offered His prayer, He clarified what He meant by “one.” Jesus prayed, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

The Gospel of John begins with the stunning idea that God became a human (John 1:1, 14) and the rest of the Gospel unpacks the idea of what that revelation means for believers. By the last days of His life, Jesus had made it clear to His disciples that the relationship He had to the Father was the model for the relationship of every believer with the Father. Jesus, as God in the flesh, showed us what it means to be one with the Father and that such a thing is possible for human beings to do (and, in fact, was made possible by the Holy Spirit—John 14:16). The unity of the Trinity, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, shows us that the unity of believers is possible.

SIN, SHAME, AND DISUNITY

The very first consequence of the very first sin was shame. After Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil but before God pronounced the curse upon them, the serpent, and the earth, they sewed together fig leaves to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3:7). When God came to the Garden, they hid. Sin had driven a wedge between God and humanity. Shame made Adam and Eve fear the One who loved them. The unity between God and humanity had been shattered.

The second sin recorded in Scripture was caused by shame. The sons of Adam and Eve brought offerings to God. Abel brought the best of his flocks, and Cain brought crops that he had raised (Gen. 4:3-4). Cain’s offering was not accepted, but Abel’s was. We know that offerings of grain were commanded by God (Lev. 2), so the type of offering Cain brought was not the problem, but rather that Cain did not bring the best of his crops to God as did Abel (Gen. 4:3). God rebuked Cain, but instead of seeing his actions as wrong, Cain saw himself as a bad person. He was ashamed, and to quell his shame, he killed his brother.

Shame is the lie that we are not worthy and not loveable. Shame drives us from the presence of God and from each other. Shame prevents us from being open to correction, from being able to repent, and from experiencing unity with God or with God’s people. Shame is the opposite of the sorrow God wishes us to feel when we have sinned and we seek repentance. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (II Cor. 7:10).

GRACE, LOVE, AND UNITY

Sin and shame divided God from humanity and humanity from one another. The grace of God, through Jesus Christ, undoes the work of sin, erases shame, and makes unity possible.

The first three chapters of Ephesians describe what God has done for Christians, and the last three prescribe our response. The beginning of that response is to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3).

Unity is a product of the love that Christians show to one another, we are able to show that love because the Spirit dwells within us, and the Spirit dwells within us because of the grace of God through Jesus Christ that removes our sin and shame (Rom.

1:16). The unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit is both the model and means for Christian unity. As we are being formed into the image of Christ (Gal. 4:19), the shame of sin is eroded and replaced with love, grace, and unity.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

If God has been forming unity into believers, how can there be so many different groups of Christians after two millennia?

Unity is not the same as uniformity or sameness. Our model of unity, the Trinity, is made up of three distinct Persons. The Trinity is the uniqueness of each Person brought together as Three-in-One as opposed to just one. Just as humans are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), we were made to reflect not only the unity of the Trinity but also its wondrous diversity.

God’s creation is full of endless wonder and variety. There are thousands of species of plants and animals, with more being discovered all the time. It is no wonder that within the people of God there is similar wonder and variety reflecting the endless beauty of God’s image in His people.

The mark of unity is not in all believers attending the same church or denomination. After He prayed for the unity of all believers, Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). There may be 41,000 groups within Christianity, but our unity is found in love, and our unity is shown to all the world by our diverse love for one another. ★

BIBLE BOOKMARK

Prayer’s Purpose

(Continued from page 15)

forgiveness. His father had been waiting with a heavy heart, and his love for his son was evidenced in his forgiveness and in welcoming the son home.

God desires our prayers. He enjoys fellowship with His children. He loves us and wants to share that love with those who will acknowledge Him as Saviour and Friend. ★

If you have a question about the Bible that you would like us to answer, please send it to: Bible Bookmark, Union Gospel Press, P.O. Box 6059, Cleveland, Ohio 44101, or e-mail us at theoed@uniongospelpress.com (subject line: Bible Bookmark).

Victory Through Obedience

BY JENIFER MUSSELMAN

ALTHOUGH we are secure in Jesus Christ (John 10:28-29), we Christians may often feel defeated in our daily walk. It need not be so. When a lost person makes the decision to trust the gospel message and place his faith in the risen Saviour for the redemption of his sins, he has won the ultimate victory over sin and death. God assures the Christian that he lives and has his being in a place of victory: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:57).

Christians not only have eternal victory through Christ, but they can walk through this world in victory. The caveat is that victory is defined by God. According to Scripture, victorious living is a life centered in God's will. This type of victory is best exemplified by Christ. Wherever Jesus walked and whatever He said and did, He was victorious. He conquered the temptations of pride, power, and physical weakness (Luke 4:1-13). He also won the battle against hesitancy toward the suffering He would face on the cross by surrendering to God's will (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36).

Every Christian can walk in victory and joy by following Christ's example. Jesus was triumphant by three means: He submitted by faith to His Father's character, exercised truly connective prayer, and always obeyed God's will. For the Christian who would model his life after the Saviour, these three things can be viewed as submitting to God's will through abiding in His Word, connective prayer through Christ, and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

Submitting to God's will requires that we take His Word seriously. In Ephesians 6, Paul speaks of the supernatural war that is all around us. He admonishes us to be prepared for this war by taking advantage of the full armor of God (vss. 10-19). Dressing in the full armor of God daily not only protects the Christian, but it reminds him to be on the alert. But still, even after being saved by a perfect Saviour and being dressed in the full armor, there is more we must do. In order to have victory in our journey, we must trust God's goodness at our deepest core. We can do this by coming daily to His Word. Scripture fully equips us

for every good work (II Tim. 3:16).

Through the Spirit and Scripture, God works to mold each believer's character even as He deepens our trust in Him. Through the Bible, the Christian is given a glimpse of the world from God's perspective. What a privilege! Scripture reveals God's wonderful, trustworthy character. Jesus, as the second Person of the Trinity, trusted God's character, fully knowing He is always good, righteous, holy, and unchanging. God's Word is His manual for walking in obedience in Christ's footsteps. The Bible teaches us to reach the lost, pray for and serve one another, and look to Jesus for hope and endurance (Heb. 12:1-4). Scripture encourages us to submit to God and to trust His character even when we do not understand His will.

When Jesus announced His upcoming crucifixion, Peter objected, and he ultimately denied knowing Jesus because of pride and fear (Matt. 16:22; 26:69-74). Had Peter known God as Jesus did, he would have trusted God's way, even when it seemed contrary to what we would think is sensible. Scripture assures the Christian he can submit to God without fear or doubt because His way is perfect and His Word is true (Ps. 18:30; cf. Prov. 30:5). Jesus also promised that through the Word, a believer will be set free by Him (John 8:31-32).

Triumphant living also comes through ongoing submission to God through Christ as Lord over our lives. Truly connecting with Jesus through prayer is the primary means by which we get our marching orders each day. It is essential to having a healthy relationship with Him. Sometimes as we go through our day on the run, we may send "prayer flares" up to God. While this may be done in reverence, it does not exemplify the deep, abiding communication Christ had with God while here on earth. Deep, abiding communication is essential to submitting in faithful victory to God's will.

Intentionally setting aside a time to be alone with Jesus—to fully focus upon Him and be still before the throne of grace—quiets the spirit. This kind of prayer is a means of abiding in Christ (cf. John 15:7). It opens a channel

through which God can commune with His beloved child. Quietly abiding in prayer with the One who went to the cross for us is a refreshing and empowering privilege. It is an opportunity to confess and repent of sin, allowing His forgiveness to wash over us. It also invites His presence to envelop and calm us (cf. Matt. 11:28).

Andrew Murray, a South African Christian pastor and writer, wrote about Daniel's faithful prayer, "We must understand that we have no power on our own to maintain our spiritual life. We need to receive daily, new grace from heaven through our fellowship with the Lord Jesus. . . . We must take time to come into God's presence, to feel our weakness and our need, and to wait on God through His Holy Spirit to renew our fellowship with Him" (*Teach Me to Pray*. Barbour Publishing, Inc.).

When we submit ourselves to God's Word and abide in our relationship with Jesus, we are led to submit to the power and working of the Holy Spirit, who teaches all things (John 14:26; cf. I John 2:20-27). The Holy Spirit acts within us so that we may eagerly surrender and trust in obedience to God's will (Rom. 8:26-27). Obedience to the Spirit's leading will result in victorious living as we journey toward home. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who collaborated against Adolph Hitler in Nazi Germany, contended, "Only believers obey and only the obedient believe" (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 4. First Fortress Press).

Bonhoeffer knew that our victory ultimately lies elsewhere. It is awaiting us in our heavenly home. He understood that Christ conquered when He arose from the grave (Luke 24:6). Having accepted Jesus as Saviour, remained in His Word, and obeyed the Holy Spirit, Dietrich Bonhoeffer trusted God's perfect will, and he submitted to it.

While imprisoned by the Nazis shortly before his death, Bonhoeffer wrote these words in a poem:

When this cup You give is filled to brimming
With bitter suffering, hard to understand,
We take it thankfully and without trembling,
Out of so good and so beloved a hand

(printed in *Letter and Papers from Prison*).

God's will led Bonhoeffer to the hangman's noose, the earthly culmination of his fight against the evil of Nazism. Yet because the grave could not hold his Saviour, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is alive today, safe in his eternal reward. ★

Ministering with Puppets: How to Start Your Own Troupe

BY VICTORIA RODER



PUPPET ministry is a fun and valuable tool for teaching the Word of God to children and adults. The use of music, plays, props, costumes, and signs enhances the experience for those ministering and those experiencing the performance. Puppetry is a nonthreatening way to reach people that might not attend a traditional church service. It is a nontraditional technique to plant the seeds of biblical truth.

God assures us in Isaiah 55:11 that His Word will not return empty but will accomplish what He desires, and it will achieve the purpose for which He sent it. This verse takes a little pressure off of us as flawed humans, but keep in mind that we need to prepare for our ministry. That means get organized, be enthusiastic, and give God your best.

I will be sharing six items involved in starting a puppet ministry, including a list of supplies that you will need to purchase or create. I will also share resource sites to help with whatever

option you choose. I will provide a few fund-raising ideas to encourage you to help financially support your own program so that you are not a burden on your church budget.

THE MISSION AND MISSION FIELD

Foremost, our mission in ministry should always be to share the Word of God and the truth of salvation through our Saviour, Jesus Christ. With that mission in mind, our puppet troupe decided that regardless of where we would minister—in churches or in our community—we would not take God out of our program. Our goal was to be a ministry, sharing the good news of eternal life in Christ Jesus.

We did lose a few public opportunities because of our decision not to compromise our mission, but God provided us with the other opportunities and the privilege to share our faith with people we would have not encountered inside the walls of our own church.

SEEK COUNCIL, GUIDANCE, AND PERMISSION

“Commit thy work unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established” (Prov.16:3). Always take your ideas to God in prayer and follow His council. Next, follow the proper chain of command in your church to gain support for your ministry. Find out who it is that you need to present your ideas to: the pastor, a youth leader, or a committee.

With at least the backing of another adult to assist with your puppet ministry, present your mission to your church body. Include your mission statement in your puppet ministry presentation. Communicate to them how a puppet ministry ministers to others and also to those in the troupe and how the scripts, the songs, and interaction between those involved in the ministry will contribute toward keeping God’s Word in your minds, on your tongues, in your actions, and in your hearts.

When presenting your puppet ministry plans, include a budget for the necessary items to begin the ministry. Be sure to present your fund-raising ideas to reassure your church that the puppet ministry will help support itself. As our troupe ventured out to other churches and into the community, we were blessed with freewill offerings. When performing in the community, we asked for a small, reasonable fee.

VOLUNTEERS AND PUPPETEERS

Adult volunteers are crucial to the ministry. During practice, when one adult is in front of the stage directing the action, you still need adults behind the stage guiding the children. Tasks for the adults range from training puppeteers, choosing and planning performances, costuming, props, stage setup, and scheduling ministry dates.

Before recruiting puppeteers, determine the age group with which you are comfortable working. Decide how many children you would be able to manage. We divided our puppeteer troupe into three groups: upper elementary, junior high, and senior high. Our youngest group performed only a few times a year. The junior high group performed several times a year and assisted the senior high troupe with stage setup and dismantling, controlling the lights and sound system, and when necessary, helping with props during performances and competitions.

TRAINING AND PRACTICE

Our youngest troupe consists of fifth and sixth graders because it takes practice to be able to maneuver a puppet with skill, but we have welcomed younger volunteers. Remember that you want your puppets to look as believable as possible so your viewers will be engrossed in the message you are sharing. From puppet speech to singing to maneuvering about the stage, and perhaps even playing instruments, these movements require a lot of practice.

To learn the proper techniques of puppetry, a good place to start is with an instructional video from www.creativemin.com. Click on "Puppetry" on the left and then click on "Workshop DVDs and CDs." A video such as "Puppet Workout" will cover the basics of puppet entrances and exits, lip syncing, and rod arm movements. There are a number of instructional sources online that can help with a number of topics, such as choreography, props, and advanced puppetry.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Stage and curtains. If you are blessed with creative people in your congregation, a stage can be made out of PVC pipes. This portable stage is lightweight, so it will be easy to transport and assemble for your outreach ministry. Large cloth bags can be sewn to store and carry the pipes. For directions on making a stage with PVC, check out www.portablestage.wmv; www.jessejoynor.com; and www.childrenministry.org. Another option is to purchase a stage.

Curtains can be sewn out of thick, dark material. Because you are creating the illusion that your puppets are real, you do not want your viewers to see the puppeteers.

Lighting and a sound system. These items enhance the performance. If you have a sound system at your church, you would not have to purchase anything until you decide to expand your ministry to other churches or into the community. Light bars on stands can be used to showcase specific characters or action.

Music and scripts. An endless selection is available online (try www.creativemin.com). Perhaps your troupe leaders and the children can write scripts. Sometimes we pre-recorded scripts to be sure that volume and nervousness did not hinder the quality of a presentation.

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Puppets, puppet costumes, rods, black gloves, and black hoods. If you have church members that can sew, there are instructional videos online about how to create professional, quality puppets. One place to go is www.instructables.com. Type "puppets" on the line next to the words "Let's Make."

Also, puppets are available for sale from many sources. You can find them at online marketplaces and sometimes at Christian bookstores. With regard to puppet costumes, our ministry often purchased children's size 2T clothing at a secondhand store. Simple, Bible-period clothing can often be created out of scraps of fabric without much sewing.

Props and signs with words. We have purchased foam board for signs and foam sheets to cut out letters or objects. These supplies are much sturdier than construction paper and tag-board. I suggest using at least 4-inch letters for easy viewing from the seats or pews. You will need glue guns and glue sticks to assemble your posters. We used dowels that we painted black and attached to the back of the signs. The rods allow the puppeteers to be able to lift props above the stage line.

These props and signs can be used to accent words in a song. For example, if your puppets are going to sing "Jesus Loves Me" (Warner), you could create a large 3-D Bible and a 3-D heart to hold up. Mount the words "Jesus" and "Me" on separate signs. As each word is sung, raise the sign above the stage for the congregation to see.

We chose a team name for our troupe. We had T-shirts made with our church logo and the team name on the front. Before every presentation, we prayed together as a group.

Puppeteers should wear black gloves when maneuvering signs and props. If a puppeteer ever needs to stand with an extra-large puppet, their head should be covered with a black hood. Remember, you are trying to make puppets believable to the viewers. The puppeteer should be as invisible as possible.

FUND-RAISERS

Before-service cinnamon roll sale. On the Saturday night prior to a ministry puppet presentation, we would load trays of frozen dough, ready the coffee pots, and set out supplies. In the morning, we would bake and frost the rolls and place them on paper plates for individual purchase and in larger quantities

for families to take home. The cinnamon roll aroma drifted throughout the church, and it typically was a very successful fund-raiser.

Freewill offerings and fees for public performances. Set reasonable amounts and do not be demanding. Be sure your audiences know you are doing puppet presentations as a ministry.

Adopt a puppet. Mount on poster board pictures of puppets that you would like to purchase for your troupe—puppets that you want to be a part of the "adoption" program. Be sure to choose puppets with a variety of costs. Ask members of the church congregation to choose puppets to purchase for the puppet team. Prepare forms that those adopting a puppet would fill out and submit with a check or cash for the cost of each puppet being adopted.

All donations should be acknowledged with a receipt and a thank-you note signed by the entire troupe. Allow those who donated the funds for a puppet to name the character. Take a picture of the donor(s) with the puppet. Present them with a copy of the picture and an adoption certificate.

In conclusion, as your program grows, you may want to include black lights for some performances. You would need black-light puppets, neon paints for signs, and so on.

You could also expand your ministry to include sign language to music, dramatic play, or dowel rod interpretive movement. An example of dowel rod interpretive movement can be viewed at various sites.

Do not forget about including your troupe in opportunities at Christian puppet festivals and competitions. Even if you are not ready to compete, the festivals are filled with learning opportunities and wonderful experiences for troupe bonding. Again, search online for any festivals and competitions.

Ministering with puppets is a joyful and rewarding opportunity to share the gospel of Christ and to grow in your own knowledge and faith as part of the troupe. A puppet ministry has the opportunity to expand in so many creative ways. The online resources are endless and will aid you in making the most of your ministry.

Armed with God's Word written on your heart and your mission statement on your mind, your troupe can follow Jesus' command in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." ★

Difficulties with Prayer and Knowing God's Will

BY JOE JARVIS

Q. Why is it so hard to pray?

A. We may often feel that it is so hard to pray and that our prayers do not seem to get through to God. I know that sometimes when I pray, I feel so discouraged and have to remind myself that God wants to hear from me no matter what or how I pray. Prayer is a superior and powerful tool that can be used always. When we have tried to do things on our own, our attempts have ended in failure. By praying, we can ask God to take care of our problems and even to heal us when we get sick.

If you are like me, you do not always feel that praying is all that important and necessary because God may be too busy for us, so He may not hear our prayers. Sometimes you might ask why God would want us to pray, even in public at restaurants, before we eat.

So, we just might skip praying because it can make us and others feel uncomfortable. Sometimes we convince ourselves that since God knows how we feel and what we are going through, He will understand if we do not pray, or we may be afraid to pray because of what others might think.

We all have at times struggled to pray and do not take time to talk to our Lord as we should. In Matthew 6:5-13, we learn an example of prayer as Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. He said that praying is not an act to be heard in public in an attempt to appear more important than others. Prayer is to be honest and sincere, with full awareness that God is listening to all of our requests.

The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13) shows our allegiance to God our Creator as we pray for our daily struggles and our needs. This prayer is an example of how we give honor and praise to God. It teaches us to pray for His will to be done and not our own. It is a prayer expressing trust that God will provide for our daily needs.

Use Jesus' lesson on prayer to help you begin persevering in prayer. Do not give up because you are having difficulty knowing how to pray. The

Holy Spirit will help you (Rom. 8:26-27). Pray every day (I Thess. 5:16-18).

Q. How do I know the will of God and His purpose for me?

A. God is not going to hide His will from anyone who truly seeks it. It is true that He might not just come right out and make obvious what His will for your life is; however, you can know His will by seeking Him and allowing Him to use you for His intended purposes.

Some of us are afraid to know God's will, as we feel that He will have us doing things that we do not want to do. So, we pick and choose what we feel God wants us to do and go on doing the things that we want to do.

God has a specific will for every believer. That specific will is about more than dating, marriage, education, and careers. There are probably more questions that we could ask God about all that concerns us. God simply wants us to follow Him, obey Him, and seek Him in all things. When we do that, we show Him that we want to completely know His will.

Take Moses' life as an example of God's will being accomplished in a person's life. In Hebrews 11:24-28, we read that by faith Moses refused power and position. By faith, he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. He evaluated the situation and chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He persevered because he trusted the invisible God and believed. It took a great amount of faith for Moses to give up his place in the royal palace, but Moses chose to leave it behind.

God prepares and then uses us in His timetable just like He did with Moses. Moses learned to react correctly to the choice of living his life to follow God, and even though it may not have been easy for him to give up the wealth, power, and the life of fame to follow God, his actions showed that he would have rather follow God than live like a king.

Knowing God's will involves action

(Continued on page 24)

Towns, Elmer L. and Ben Guterrez, eds. *The Essence of the New Testament: A Survey*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.

This book is an excellent overview of every New Testament book. First, the authors tell us how we got the New Testament and also how we are to interpret the New Testament. There is a chapter on the history between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The major emphasis of each of the books in the New Testament is highlighted, and chapter titles reflect the emphases. For example, Matthew's emphasis is "The Kingdom of Heaven," Mark's is "The Divine Servant," Luke's is the "Son of Man," and John's is "Believe and Live." Visuals are used to illustrate and highlight major events, such as the first, second, and third journeys of the Apostle Paul. The two editors of this book included seven contributors, all highly qualified scholars.

I highly recommend this volume. It ought to be in every church library. Certainly, every pastor ought to have and use this volume as well.

Graham, Billy. *Where I Am: Heaven, Eternity, and Our Life Beyond the Now*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2015.

This book is Billy Graham's reflections on his life, faith, and fruitful ministry. He was, of course, one of the most well-known evangelists in American history. The subtitle describes believers' certainty of "Heaven, Eternity, and our Life Beyond."

Franklin, Billy's son, assisted in helping him put together this beautiful, historical, and easy-to-read story of Billy's ministry. The work is divided into two parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament. Each of these parts deals with the emphasis of each book of the Bible and how it relates to God's message and the believer's response to His plan of salvation.

The Old Testament section deals with the work of God among the Israelites and the Gentiles in anticipation of the New Testament books. Each of the chapters in these two major sections begin with Scripture references that anticipate and summarize the theme and emphasis of each book of the Bible. These summaries whet the reader's appetite for the specific emphases of these books. ★

—Robert P. Lightner.

Gender Difference Confusion

BY JAMES P. ECKMAN

IN early August 2017, a software engineer at a giant company in Silicon Valley was fired by his chief executive for violating the company's code of conduct, specifically his perpetuation of "harmful gender stereotypes" in the workplace. Although 80 percent of the company's tech employees are male, the company prides itself in its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and openness, yet demands ideological conformity within its ranks.

Does the church have an answer for our confused culture when it comes to gender differences? As our teens prepare for college or the workplace, they will be confronted by issues concerning gender differences. How do we prepare them? How does an effective youth ministry clarify the confusion in our culture about gender?

What does social science tell us about gender differences? In a 2008 study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, a group of international researchers compared data on gender and personality across fifty-five nations. They found that "throughout the world, women tend to be more nurturing, risk averse and emotionally expressive, while men are usually more competitive, risk taking and emotionally flat. But the most fascinating finding is this: Personality differences between men and women are the largest and most robust in the more prosperous, egalitarian and educated societies. . . . Higher levels of human development—including long and healthy life, equal access to knowledge and education, and economic wealth—were the main nation-level predictors of sex difference variation across cultures." (Sommers, Christina Hoff. "What 'Lean In' Misunderstands about Gender Differences." www.theatlantic.com).

Sommers, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, further summarized the conclusions of this important study: "The authors of the study hypothesize that prosperity and equality bring greater opportunities for self-actualization. Wealth, freedom, and education empower men and

women to be who they are. . . . What if gender difference turns out to be a phenomenon not of oppression, but rather of social well-being?" Women now earn a majority of doctorates in the humanities, biology, social sciences, and health sciences. As Sommers stated, "Despite 40 years of consciousness-raising and gender-neutral pronouns, most men and women still gravitate to different fields and organize their lives in different ways."

In a related article, Sommers additionally observed that "American boys across the ability spectrum are struggling in the nation's schools, with teachers and administrators failing to engage their specific interests and needs. This neglect has ominous implications not only for the boy's social and intellectual development but for the national economy, as policy analysts are just beginning to calculate" ("How to Make School Better for Boys." www.theatlantic.com).

We live in a knowledge-based economy and school achievement is a cornerstone for success in this economy. Sommers stated that women are adapting; men are not. In the federal government and in much of education, there is little concern about this fact. For example, women now earn 62 percent of all associate's degrees, 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees, 60 percent of all master's degrees, and 52 percent of all doctorates. Sommers observed that "boys of *all* ethnic groups and social classes are far less likely than their sisters to feel connected to school, to earn good grades, or to have high academic aspirations. . . . In the 1980s, nearly the same number of top male and female high school students said they planned to pursue a postgraduate degree (13 percent of boys and 15 percent of girls). By the 2000s, 27 percent of girls expressed that ambition, compared with 16 percent of boys."

God has given humanity clear teaching on the respective differences between a man and a woman. The feminization of culture has produced disastrous results for boys and, therefore, for men. Few would doubt that correc-

tives within culture have been needed to foster greater equality of opportunity for women—but not at the expense of men and boys. In God's eyes, men and women are equal (cf. Gen. 1:26; Gal. 3:28). But He created them differently.

What does Scripture say about this contentious issue of gender differences? Quoting a Creation ordinance of Genesis 1–2, Jesus declared, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female" (Matt.19:4). Jesus made this declaration to a culture with no gender identity issues. Instead, He was affirming a basic proposition of the human race: God made the human race in two grand streams—male and female—and they are totally different. No matter what humans try to do, they can never erase this fundamental characteristic of the human race. That is the basic reason why, in the pursuit of life-fulfilling goals, men and women often make different choices. That is not evil, and perhaps that is the way God intended it to be.

What then should we do? We must affirm the bedrock propositions of genuine, biblical Christianity. God created the human race male and female, and men and women are completely different physically, emotionally, and psychologically. That is why imaginative play among little boys and girls is so radically different. That is why women excel in some fields and men in others.

But American culture is now driven by an ideology that seemingly ignores, and even mocks, gender differences. The result today is that boys and men are suffering the consequences of this ideology. We have the freedom to ignore or even flaunt these propositions, but then we must accept the consequences. Nations such as Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, though to some extent even more secular than America, are waking up to how serious this gender inequity really is and are doing something about it. America is caught in an ideological morass and is hurting because of it. We remain blinded to the obvious, believing a lie and calling it wise! ★

The Orchid Mantis

BY KELLY HAWVER



HAVE you ever seen a flower eat a bug? In 1879, a visitor to Indonesia was surprised to see an orchid eat a fly and a butterfly. What this traveler encountered was not a flower at all. He witnessed an orchid mantis having her lunch.

In the United States, you may know a praying mantis as a plain green or brown bug that looks like a stick. The orchid mantis lives in the rain forests of Southeast Asia. It comes in a variety of cool colors. The male orchid mantis has white wings and a pink-orange body. Most of the females have white wings and shades of bright pink and white on her body. There are some females that are yellow and white or purple and white. The intensity of their colors can change over the span of a few days depending on the amount of light and humidity.

It was once thought that this creature hid among orchids to fool its prey into coming to it. People believed the bright colors attracted insects that pollinate flowers. That is why bees and butterflies are often a meal for the orchid mantis.

But after years of study, it turns out there is more to their pink and

white camouflage. The orchid mantis does not need to be around flowers to attract meals. It can be far away from real flowers and still draw prey to itself. If the orchid mantis wants a quick meal, though, it camps out near real flowers.

It seems that the orchid mantis's unique flower shape does not help it attract its food either. Instead, God gave them this shape to hide from predators, such as birds and lizards. It does not look like any specific flower in its natural habitat. To hide, the orchid mantis will flatten itself against a branch to look even more like a flower. But the orchid mantis cannot hide from God, for the Bible tells us, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

The mantis will eat anything it can catch in the spikes of its large forelegs. Usually, they eat flying insects, but if a small lizard happens to stop by, look out—it could be lunch. With lightning speed, the mantis grabs its prey. Holding the prey with its forearms, the mantis starts its meal by eating its

victim's head, working down until all is consumed.

A mantis starts life in a cluster of 50-100 eggs. Once it emerges, it looks like a red-orange ant that has a black head and legs. As it grows, an orchid mantis sheds its skin. The first time, it is all white with some pink. It will shed a couple more times before it becomes its final color. It sheds, or molts, five to seven times before it is an adult. The male will have a brown spot behind his neck. A female will have a green spot. The male lives about six months. The female lives about eight months.

The female orchid mantis is about 2-1/2 inches long as an adult. The male only grows to about an inch. Like other mantis species, the orchid mantis has a triangular head. At the top of the head, there is a pair of antennae. Its nose is pointed like a beak. Mantis- es have two compound eyes and three simple eyes.

The female's four walking legs have large, flat lobes. These lobes have a slight heart shape that make them look like flower petals. When resting, the two forelegs are tucked in, close to the body. This is how the mantis gets the name "praying" mantis. The abdomen curls and rises behind the base of the neck.

This little creature is an amazing sight to see. Maybe one day, you will see one up close. Just do not try to smell it. ★

Difficulties with Prayer and Knowing God's Will

(Continued from page 22)

on our part to be obedient to Him. When stress comes because of a desire to know His will, we can react in a positive way because of our faith in Him. Despite living in an age when moral standards are steadily lowering, and during times when we may find it is hard to know God's will, we can know that we can trust Him (Prov. 3:5-6). ★

Do you have a question you would like answered? Send it to: Counseling Corner, Union Gospel Press, P.O. Box 6059, Cleveland, Ohio 44101, or e-mail us at theoed@uniongospelpress.com (subject line: Counseling Corner).

WIT AND WISDOM



“Optimists are people who get wealthy by buying out pessimists.”

“An optimist invented the boat; a pessimist invented the life preserver.”

“Too many people remind you of French bread—one long loaf.”

“I thought my group insurance plan was fine until I found out I couldn’t collect unless the whole group is sick.”

“It is difficult to save money when your neighbors keep buying things you can’t afford.”

“A gossip is a person who suffers from acute indiscretion.”

“The stalled car sat dead still at a traffic light as the lights went to red, to green, to yellow, to red, to green, to yellow, to red. Finally, a cop came up and said, ‘Pardon me, sir, but don’t we have any color you like?’”

“Cook: ‘Do you want me to cut this pizza into six or eight pieces?’ Man: ‘You’d better make it six—I don’t think I can eat eight!’”

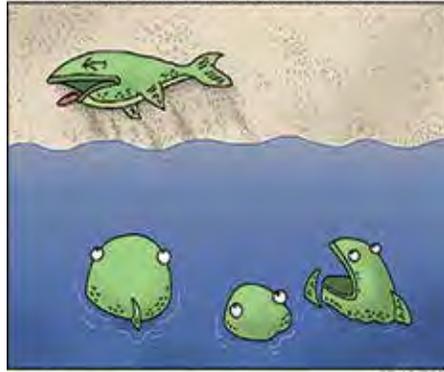
George E. Bergman: “Tact is the art of making guests feel at home when that’s really where you wish they were.” ★

—compiled by Donna Poole.

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CARTOONS

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ARE YOU EVOLVED YET?

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(See Genesis 37:3-36)

JOSEPH!!!

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Thanks to Elked Rice (See Exodus 14)

HELLO MAAM, I'M FROM TROOP 316 AND I'M HERE TO HELP YOU CROSS THE RED SEA

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QUOTE-ABLES

Just Pray

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893): “Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.”

John Bunyan (1628-1688): “In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart.”

Oswald Chambers (1874-1917): “Prayer does not equip us for greater works—prayer is the greater work.”

William Cowper (1731-1800): “And Satan trembles when he sees, the weakest saint upon his knees.”

S. D. Gordon (1859-1936): “You can do more than pray—but only after you have prayed.”

Alan Redpath (1907-1989): “Before we can pray, ‘Lord, Thy Kingdom come,’ we must be willing to pray, ‘My kingdom go.’”

William Temple (1881-1944): “When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don’t, they don’t.”

Frederick Pratt Green (1903-2000): “Of all my prayers, may this be chief: / Till faith is fully grown, / Lord, disbelieve my unbelief, / And claim me as your own.”

James Montgomery (1771-1854): “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, / The Christian’s native air, / His watchword at the gates of death: / He enters heaven with prayer.”

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951): “Prayer is the core of our day. Take prayer out and the day would collapse.”

William Bridge (1600-1670): “Ah, Lord, my prayers are dead, . . . but you are a living God and I bear myself upon you.” ★

—compiled by Donna Poole.

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The Necessity of a Witness

BY LEMUEL KEMP JR.

IN every human age, there has always been a need for witnesses. A witness is one who truthfully testifies regarding their experience. Additionally, a witness can be one who testifies regarding their knowledge of a particular subject. In other words, a witness is one who is ready and able to give an answer for the hope they have (1 Pet. 3:15).

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, witnesses help to convict people of wrongs and convince people of biblical truths. According to Scripture, there are different types of witnesses. However, the purpose of this article is to highlight three aspects of being a witness for Christ.

THE EXPERT WITNESS

An expert witness is a necessity when debating or disputing differences of opinion or interpretations of an event in question. Additionally, expert witnesses highlight issues and concerns that the general public would not easily be able to comprehend. Expert witnesses include doctors, lawyers, and police officers. They have expertise in their occupations. Interesting enough, their testimony is based on their opinion; however, their opinions are highly valued because of their training, education, and experiences.

The Bible establishes a principle in Deuteronomy 19:15 of a testimony from two or three people. The purpose of these witnesses is to protect the truth. In other words, the truth could be stretched, fabricated, and even totally misrepresented. Therefore, the truth needs to be protected. These witnesses are to stand against any malicious and false testimonies. This principle is repeated throughout the Bible (Matt. 18:16; II Cor. 13:1; I Tim. 5:19).

Not all of us can be expert witnesses; nevertheless, God has called some to be a witness in our homes, community, workplaces, and even churches. The witness is always needed because God's truth is always on trial. His truth should always transcend culture. While cultural values and norms

change over time, God's Word does not (cf. Matt. 24:35). Consequently, witnesses are needed to testify of God's truth to the culture.

God's truth may not always be convenient, expedient, or even desired. Nevertheless, as believers of the Lord Jesus, we are called to live our lives in truth. Expert witnesses are called to tell the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

THE EXPERIENCED WITNESS

While one qualification for being a witness is being an expert, another qualification is due to experience. Having experience does not require education and training as prerequisites to being a witness. The experienced witness is someone who testifies to what they have seen and heard. In John's first epistle, he wrote, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1:1). He began his letter by telling the recipients that he was writing from experience. He did not write because he had all of the answers. On the contrary, John wrote because Jesus had appeared to them, the apostles, and had instructed them to be His witnesses. Therefore, as he wrote his letters, he communicated that his message is what he had heard from Christ and simply told the message to them (I John 1:5; 3:11).

In the book of Acts, we also see experienced witnesses. After the Lord Jesus' resurrection, He commissioned the disciples to be His witnesses. They were called to testify to all the things they had experienced in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Sometimes we may feel that such a task of being a witness is impossible. *Why would God ask me to be a witness? I am not an expert. I am not a well-spoken man. I am not clever or witty.* However, God has also made some promises to us. The first promise was that He would give Christians power to speak in His name (Acts

1:8). This power is from the Holy Spirit. He enables us to accomplish the assignment that God intends for us to complete.

Another promise God has given to believers is that He will be with us. Throughout Scripture, there is a constant reminder that God will be with us (Deut. 31:8; Isa. 43:2; Heb. 13:5). We are not witnesses about ourselves, nor are we witnessing by ourselves.

THE MARTYR

Being a martyr can certainly be a type of witness. Being an authentic witness for Christ has resulted in martyrdom. It is the price that so many have often paid for without any recognition. Witnessing is not an easy task. While we are all called to be a witness for Christ, some have paid, and others will pay, the ultimate price.

By definition, being a martyr means dying for something or someone. While we have religious freedom in the United States, some things still may have to "suffer and die" for being a witness of Christ. Christians might suffer the loss of a job or relationships due to their witness for Christ.

THE COST OF A WITNESS

There is an age-old adage that says, "If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?" It appears to suggest that a witness is needed to verify something we all would consider natural. A tree falls, and it makes a sound. In other words, there would be no question at all if a witness was in the forest as the tree was falling.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we fail to be witnesses of His power in our lives, people may begin to misinterpret and misunderstand the message of the gospel. In order to testify to the truth of Jesus Christ, the message of the gospel needs to be spoken by those who are experts and testified by those who have experienced and have been martyred for it.

What if there were no witnesses after the resurrection of Jesus Christ—no one who saw Jesus defeat death, and no one who touched His nailed-pierced hands and feet? Those early believers testified to the truths of what they had seen and experienced, some to the point of martyrdom, not because it was convenient or because it was a "good cause," but because it is truth. And the truth must be told. ★

Fear Not

BY PAULETTE LEBLANC

TRUST in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov. 3:5). Women were designed to be simultaneously soft and strong. This seems like a paradoxical statement, and yet we all have had to be both at various times in our lives.

We know we are to put God first, even before our husbands, children, family, and friends. This seems like something Christian women long to do, but it can be tremendously difficult to feel as though you are putting God first in your life when your child is crying for your attention or your husband needs you to entertain his visiting parents. After all, God is in heaven and not right in front of us, vying for our attention—or is He?

Morning devotions were often the way I would start my day as a young wife and mother. I homeschooled my children, and we always began our school day with a Bible lesson, but I needed my own time with God. So I had quiet time with the Lord over a cup of coffee.

Although I longed to be a good Christian, a good wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, and all those things that God had appointed to me, I found that fear would often creep in. Almost everything I did outside of my home was within five minutes of my house. The grocery store, bank, library, and my church all were no more than a block or two away.

One day, I had to travel a bit farther to a friend’s home across town. I had not realized how long it had been since I drove alone, as my children were nearly always with me. For some reason still unknown to me, my heart began to race, and I was suddenly filled with fear. The feeling that I needed to go home, where it was safe, was overwhelming.

After that day, I began avoiding having to go any farther than the few blocks that I usually traveled. I told no one about what happened, and I began to live in fear in secret. Soon, the thought plagued me that if that panic

could happen on my way across town, it could happen at any time for any reason. I began to panic when I would lie in bed at night to go to sleep. I began to panic if the children were at my parents’ house, and my husband was at work, and I was alone. I felt as though my brain was broken and I would always live that way. It was terrifying.

One night, after trying to lie down to go to sleep and feeling my heart begin to race, I got up and grabbed my Bible and sat alone on the kitchen floor, reading by the kitchen night-light. I looked up anything the Bible had to say about “fear.” Two things occurred to me that night. First, I had not yet confessed my fear and panic to God as sin. Fear is really a lack of trust, and so I did confess it that night. I told the Lord that I wanted to trust Him and that I could not “lose” control. I was never in control to begin with. He was and is.

Second, I saw a verse I had read a million times, and something else about it got my attention: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

It occurred to me that God was telling me not to let my heart be troubled. That meant my heart, if left to its own devices, might run away with me. It also meant that I had some responsibility in the matter. I realized that if I let fear creep in, it would take over my heart, which belongs to God alone.

I read that verse over and over again and then began reciting it even when I was not reading it. That verse became burned into my heart, and I knew that the world cannot promise the kind of peace God gives us. For some people, anxiety becomes a way of life, but for me, it was just a season. I found that the more I trusted God and put myself into anxiety-provoking situations, the less fearful I became. Just as I had learned to let fear in, I could learn to push it out.

Soon after my fearful season, I was asked to lead a weekend retreat for

women. I had known some of the women for years, and some became new friends. All weekend, they kept referring to me as their fearless leader, which I found amazing. They had no idea that on Sunday, just before the close of the weekend, I would give my testimony.

When I did, many of them were crying and confessing the same issue. One girl even told me she had not been able to come on the retreat previously because of the anxiety issues she dealt with when away from home. She said she had prayed a great deal before attending because she felt very strongly that she should be there, though she was terrified to be far way with strangers for a whole weekend. She decided to trust God and come even though she was afraid. She also said she believed it was no coincidence that I was her leader that weekend.

God does not cause anxiety or make horrible things happen to us. We know this because the Bible tells us that He is a loving God who cares for us. However, we do live in a sinful world, and God does allow us to experience difficult and painful things. We need to remember that He promises us that He will work out our difficulties in a way known only to Him. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

After what I went through, it became my passion to help others who were afraid. I have now spoken with so many people who have gone through the same season of fear that I did that I have come to see the most horrific time in my life as useful. I know that God did not cause it to happen because He tells us over and over again not to fear; however, He has utilized my terrible experience to help others.

We sometimes may feel as though we are alone in our pain and misery, but as long as we are children of God, we truly are never alone. ★

Consider Christian School Education

BY JULIE MARIE MAXWELL

SHOULD you consider a Christian school education for your family? Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The education of your children should never be taken lightly. In Psalm 127:3, we read, “Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” This is only one of the many places in the Scriptures where God ascribes value to children.

Maybe you are a new parent looking at schooling options for the first time. Or maybe you already have children enrolled in school but believe that it is time for a change. Either way, there are many things to consider. Depending on where you live, there are several types of school options available today. The choices can become overwhelming and confusing.

One option is government-regulated education. The traditional public school system is based on districts. All children can attend the local public schools in their district. Some districts offer open enrollment to attend schools in neighboring districts (Boland, Maureen. “School Types: The Difference between Public, Private, Magnet, Charter, and More.” September 2016, www.babycenter.org).

Charter schools may receive their funds from both public and private sources. They operate under some of the public school’s guidelines but are not the same as the traditional public school (Boland). Magnet schools are free public schools and operate under the same rules and regulations, but enrollment can be selective and the academics competitive (Boland).

Another schooling option that some parents choose is homeschooling. Children can be educated at home by parents, tutors, or online programs. Homeschool regulations vary from state to state. Parents usually cover

the cost of all curriculum, equipment, supplies, and extracurricular expenses (Boland).

Private schools do not receive government funds. They use tuition payments, charitable contributions, and fund-raisers to meet their financial needs. Private schools either govern and regulate themselves or are governed by a board of directors. They may have regulations to follow, but they are free from the public-school system and are able to choose their own educational curriculum and style (Boland).

Parochial schools are a form of private school. These are church-run schools. They may be financially self-sufficient, or the church may assist in the funding of the school. Christian schools are usually categorized as parochial schools. Christian schools are often considered a ministry of a church.

As a student, I spent some of my education in a public school and then later transferred to a Christian school. I graduated from a Christian college. I did my student teaching at a Christian school. I have since worked in both Christian and secular educational settings.

The purpose of this article is to give counsel to parents who are considering enrolling their children in a Christian school. Christian schools provide many benefits, including Christ-centered classes with teachers who incorporate biblical and moral values into their lessons. Second Timothy 2:15 reminds us, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Many Christian schools include Bible study, prayer, and Bible memorization as part of the daily schedule. Often, they also provide moral instruction that lines up with Scripture. Bible verses are presented to the students for spiritual growth and godly behavior in this world.

We are commanded to teach the Scriptures to our children. Deuteronomy 6:7 says, “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” A Christian school can help with that responsibility.

Christian schools may broaden their teaching beyond simple Sunday school stories to include Bible doctrine and areas of faith. Attending a Christian school can strengthen your children’s foundation of faith. This valuable foundation can shape the choices your child makes in life.

Subjects such as science and history are taught from the perspective of a biblical worldview. The Christian school may teach about the Christian heritage of this nation and teach your children about the great scientists that were Christians. Christian schools may teach about the history of the church and how Christians have influenced the social issues of the day. Your children may learn about the Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening.

Social issues of the day are looked at with the mindset of “What does the Bible say about that?” The definitions of right and wrong will be based on what God calls good and what He calls sin. You can expect the teaching to be based on what the Word of God says.

Many Christian parents want their children taught Christian values. They may want to choose a school that teaches values with which they agree. Colossians 2:8 says, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” Proverbs 16:16 reminds us of the value of wisdom, “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be

chosen than silver.” Protect your children’s minds by providing them an education that agrees with the Bible. Many Christian-school teachers care about the well-being of their students and may encourage, provide biblical counsel, and pray with a student over his or her individual concerns.

Some parents will choose a Christian school for its strong academic program. Some Christian schools provide a stronger academic program than their public-school counterparts, using a curriculum that has the students studying a level or two above that of their public-school peers.

Parents may choose a Christian school because they are disturbed about the increased level of violence that we are seeing in the news. Schools, even elementary schools, are no longer off limits to those who wish to do violence. Occurrences of school violence, especially to the level we witness today, are extremely rare in Christian schools. Many parents feel that their child is safer in a Christian school (capenet.org/facts.html).

On the topic of extracurricular activities, such as music, drama, and sports, a Christian school may provide more opportunities for your child to be involved. Christian schools are often smaller than public schools, making it easier for students to be involved in extracurricular activities. With fewer students trying out for sports teams, the possibility of getting onto a team is increased. Some Christian schools do not have traditional “tryouts” and “cuts,” so everyone gets to play and learn. The same is true in auditioning for a music or drama team. “Average kids” will get more experiences in this smaller setting, and perhaps they will get an opportunity to shine.

Some people have concerns about Christian education. They may find it too expensive. Call the Christian school in which you are interested. Some offer scholarships. Some will offer free or discounted education in exchange for work. The school may allow you to help in a classroom, clean the church, or help in another way to contribute to the expense. Contact the schools in your area and find out what options are available before you say, “It’s too expensive!” and give up.

A couple other questions parents ask are “Will my child get a good education in a Christian school?” and “Are the teachers trained?” These are valid concerns, because some, but not all, Christian schools save money by using untrained teachers and inferior curriculum. Contact local Christian schools and find out if their teachers are trained. Ask whether their teachers have degrees. You could ask where their teachers attended college and what types of degrees their teachers have. Check on whether their teachers have degrees in education or have state licenses. Ask about the average length of time their teachers have been teaching. Inquire about the curriculum they use and whether you may preview it. Choose a school that will provide your child with a quality education. Remember, you are your child’s only advocate.

If you choose to put your child in a Christian school but decide that the school is neglecting certain topics, supplement that subject at home. No school can teach everything, and time is limited. So, if you find that you like the school you have chosen but feel that the education is unbalanced, buy books, go to the library, visit museums, visit historical places, watch educational videos together, and provide educational video games. There are so many ways to supplement your child’s education at home. Teachers cannot teach everything a child needs to learn. Remember, you are your child’s first teacher.

If you have a child or children with special needs, some Christian schools are equipped to help with special needs, and some are not. Discuss with the school the needs your child has to see if they can make accommodations. Your public school district is required to provide you with free assistance (chapter 330-51 Education of Students with Special Needs codes. ohio.gov). A public school might send a teachers’ aid to your child’s private school classroom. Sometimes they will send a therapist to your child’s school, or maybe the therapist will come to your home. Some public schools require special needs students in private school to be dually enrolled in both the public school and the private school. The school may provide transport between the two schools for special classes, or you

may have to arrange transportation yourself.

A quality Christian education is a good option for Christian families. It can be like a breath of fresh air, an oasis from the depravity of this fallen world.

My parents transferred me to Christian school because of the difficulties I was having in our local public school. I was being bullied by the other students during a time when bullying was not taken very seriously. I wanted to make friends, but the other children were not very friendly to me. In my immaturity, I did not know how to make friends, so I started developing behavior problems. I also struggled with math. These things led to teachers thinking of me as a “problem child.” The teachers did not provide me with the help I needed in math and social skills. Instead, they put me in the “dummy reading group” and isolated my work area from the other students.

My parents worked with our school district but were unable to come up with a solution. The teachers there at that time were not prepared for the challenges of children that had different learning styles.

Transferring to the Christian school was a lifesaver for me. I began to flourish. The change in environment and smaller class size helped me to develop my social skills. The teachers had a smaller workload, so they were able to help me with my math struggles. The teachers had time to work with me individually and learn my areas of interest and the subjects in which I could excel.

I was able to participate in sports and school plays, things in which I would not have been able to participate if I had continued in public school. This was because I grew up in a large school district with several hundred students in each high school graduating class.

Later, when I worked in Christian education, I appreciated the freedoms that I had to teach Bible and to pray in class. I value the benefits of my experience in Christian education.

Each Christian family should seriously pray for God’s will concerning the education of their children. If you were to ask me whether you should consider sending your children to a Christian school, I would answer that I absolutely think you should. ★

Humility in the Pastorate

BY ARLIE D. RAUCH

INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, I had the privilege of officiating a funeral for the mother of a law enforcement officer. As we became acquainted, he informed me that he had wanted to enter the pastorate when he was younger, so he had joined the Marines in order to learn how to command people. I had never heard something like that before. Is that what should characterize pastoral ministry?

At a more recent occasion, my wife and I were visiting a church which happened to be celebrating an anniversary of their pastor's tenure. The bishop of their association of churches, speaking on that occasion, stressed that the congregation's assignment was to fulfill whatever vision the pastor had. That was also new to me. Although some pastors may take that view, it seems to me that the pastor and congregation *together* have an obligation to pursue the design God has already revealed for the church.

I have been asked various kinds of questions on occasion about my church. The question may have been innocent, but I have often responded with a disclaimer: "This is not *my* church." I do not own it, and if someone ever leaves, I will probably be the one leaving. If anyone owns this local church, it should be our Lord Jesus Christ.

With those examples in mind, I wish to introduce our topic. Because of three relationships, humility should be a pastor's attitude.

The Greek word for "humility" appears seven times in the New Testament and is translated as either "humility" or "lowliness of mind" in the King James Version. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* gives the following definitions: "the having a humble opinion of oneself; a deep sense of one's (moral) littleness;

modesty, humility, lowliness of mind" (Zondervan). An example of its use is found in Acts 20:19 where Paul was reporting to the Ephesian elders late in his ministry: "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews."

RELATIONSHIP #1: TO THE FLOCK

When considering issues of the pastorate, it is helpful to go to the Pastoral Epistles. Two of them were written to Timothy and one to Titus. Near the end of II Timothy 2, Paul presented a list of instructions to Timothy. He did not encourage the young pastor to demand obedience from the congregation to himself. Instead, in verses 24 and 25 he wrote, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." Notice the words "gentle," "patient," and "meekness." They are traits that are to characterize the pastor as he lives with the flock and delivers God's Word to them.

At the beginning of I Peter 5, Peter addresses elders. They are to teach God's Word faithfully with right motives, but verse 3 says, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." The pastor is not the boss of the congregation, but he certainly should be an example. Here he should follow the model set forth by Ezra 7:10 in studying, practicing, and teaching what the Bible says. One should pay attention to the sequence of activity stated there.

A passage that we as pastors should often visit is I Timothy 3:1-6. Here, the qualifications for a bishop or overseer were given. Notice the terms used to describe what is required: "no striker" and "patient, not a brawler" (vs. 3). He

is to be able to teach and to rule his own household well, yet he models self-control when faced with challenges that may include even direct opposition.

Sometimes humility manifests itself in acts as simple as being last in line at the fellowship meal, shoveling snow to make the church doors more easily accessible, volunteering alongside others, or acquiescing when the choice of hymnals is not the one I recommended.

The humility required for the pastor is not a weakness. It is rather a proper response that agrees with the next two relationships.

RELATIONSHIP #2: TO THE WORD

A pastor friend told me more than once that the only authority a pastor has is that of the Word of God. He was saying essentially that a pastor has no authority of his own by way of position, but when he teaches the Bible accurately, he is speaking within God's authority.

The third Pastoral Epistle is Paul's letter to Titus. He instructed Titus to appoint bishops, or overseers, and then added the qualifications. Titus 1:9 says at the end of a long sentence, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." The entity to which he is to be attached, and which will be useful to exhort and convince, is "the faithful word." It is not his ingenuity or the latest theological trend that is to hold his attention. To clarify, God's Word is not whatever someone says from a pulpit, but it is rather the content of the Bible.

In Romans, that book which unfolds the gospel of Christ and its various ramifications, Paul gave us a lovely sequence of someone being sent, that sent one preaching, others hearing the preaching, and the result of some

believing in Christ. But those preaching do not create their own message. Note Romans 10:15: "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" They are proclaiming an objective message called "the gospel of peace." Someone else prepared this message. The preacher's task is to proclaim it.

And in the second epistle to Timothy, Paul again directed Timothy in view of standing before God someday. In chapter 4 verse 2, we read, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." "The word" is presented as fixed content. The seasons and the responses may change, but the content remains the same. One should note that this verse follows that often-quoted statement about the inspiration of Scripture in II Timothy 3:16-17. It is not what I add to the Scripture that will equip a Christian, but the Scripture itself will.

As a young pastor just beginning, I tried to major in expository Bible teaching. An older pastor once told me that anybody could do that. He suggested that I try to go deeper than simply exposing what the Bible says. Frankly, I thought that if I went "deeper," as he put it, I would have been unfaithful to the charge to preach God's Word. Perhaps I could be creative in how I presented it, but I needed to submit myself to the written Word of God and teach it only. Jude 1:3 has urged us to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." That is a fixed faith, and I suggest that the pastor has enough to do if he simply follows that instruction.

Second Thessalonians 2:10, while revealing that many will be deceived in the future, states the reason for their deception this way: "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." If that is a critical attitude with respect to salvation, then surely a pastor ought to love the truth, which Jesus said is God's Word (John 7:17). We should relate to it humbly, receive it gladly, and seek to understand and teach it accurately.

There must be a humility before

God's Word with the purpose of declaring it clearly and not adulterating it with one's own opinions.

RELATIONSHIP #3: TO THE LORD

In the competition that is often involved in being a pastor, our attention gets misdirected. We may compare ourselves with the success of other pastors and churches. I have often concluded that Pastor A is a much better pastor than I am. On the other hand, if we could have the circumstances of local Church B, we, too, could have significant growth. Or I may wonder why that other local church seems to flourish when I am a better preacher than their pastor is!

If we have that mindset, we are unfortunately looking in the wrong direction, and this becomes clear as we consider certain facts regarding the church. I, personally, have been discouraged when I compared myself with others and yet encouraged when I reviewed what God has provided for me and how He has led me.

The head of the church is not the pastor but rather the Son of God, under whom the pastor serves. In describing the preeminence of the Lord, Colossians 1 calls Him "the head of the body, the church" (vs. 18). Yes, I should serve faithfully, but He determines the final outcome.

Further, if the local church is genuine, then it is not a pastor's church, but it is "the house of God" and "the church of the living God" (I Tim. 3:15). Verse 16 speaks of the "mystery of godliness," and again, it does not focus on the pastor but on God, who was "manifest in the flesh." In His house, and with God's people, the pastor (and others) must learn how to humbly serve.

The Bible gives titles to the pastor and also recognizes his position under Christ. First Timothy 4:6 calls the pastor a "minister of Jesus Christ." The Greek word for "minister" used here is the word for "servant," from which we derive our English word "deacon." Second Timothy 2:3-4 speaks of the pastor as a "soldier of Jesus Christ" who seeks to please the One who chose him.

We might argue whether the Apostle Paul was technically a pastor, but he did preach, and preaching is certainly one of the major tasks of a

pastor. He testified that his preaching ministry was given to him "according to the commandment of God our Saviour" (Titus 1:3). That role is delegated from heaven, and since it is, the pastor is accountable to God Himself.

As we read the Pastoral Epistles, we discover that Paul spoke of the pastoral duties in light of Christ's second coming and final judgment. For example, in I Timothy 6:13-14, he charged Timothy in the sight of God and until "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" to lead a life without blemish. A pastor is responsible to the Lord, not only in preaching but even in everyday living.

With respect to the preaching and teaching ministry, Paul wrote in II Timothy 2:15 that we are to study so as to be "approved unto God." It is easy to be distracted with temporal things because we see our salary and benefits being provided by a group of people, but ultimately, it is the Lord who gives or withholds approval. To accent that concept, I Peter 5:4 announces that it is the Chief Shepherd who rewards the crown of glory to the undershepherd.

The pastor really does serve under Christ. This is not some slavish and brutal work, but regardless of the hardships, it is an honorable work in service to the Son of God, the Head of the Church, the Good Shepherd, our crucified and risen Lord and Saviour.

CONCLUSION

In I Corinthians 4:1, Paul wrote that he and his associates should be viewed as "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." That description does not contain even an ounce of self-promotion or competition. As to personal relationships, it emphasizes Christ and the preacher's role under Him. As to the material of the ministry, it stresses that which God has revealed to us through the prophets and apostles.

Further, in I Corinthians 4:2, Paul wrote to us that the major requirement for stewards is to be found faithful. Faithfulness and humility are close friends. Even faithfulness places the focus elsewhere rather than on ourselves. So, let us continue to serve the Lord of the church according to the instruction He has given us. ★

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