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Because death and corruption were gaining ever firmer hold on them, the human race was in process of destruction. Man, who was created in God’s image and in his possession of reason reflected the very Word Himself, was disappearing, and the work of God was being undone. The law of death, which followed from the Transgression, prevailed upon us, and from it there was no escape. The thing that was happening was in truth both monstrous and unfitting.

It would, of course, have been unthinkable that God should go back upon
His word and that man, having transgressed, should not die; but it was equally monstrous that beings which once had shared the nature of the Word should perish...through corruption. It was unworthy of the goodness of God that creatures made by Him should be brought to nothing through the deceit wrought upon man by the devil; and it was supremely unfitting that the work of God in mankind should disappear, either through their own negligence or through the deceit of evil spirits. As, then, the creatures whom He had created reasonable, like the Word, were in fact perishing, and such noble works were on the road to ruin, what then was God, being good, to do? Was He to let corruption and death have their way with them?

In that case, what was the use of having made them in the beginning? Surely it would have been better never to have been created at all than, having been
created, to be neglected and perish; and, besides that, such indifference to the ruin of His own work before His very eyes would argue not goodness in God but limitation, and that far more than if He had never created men at all. It was impossible, therefore, that God should leave man to be carried off by corruption, because it would be unfitting and unworthy of Himself.

Yet, true though this is, it is not the whole matter. As we have already noted, it was unthinkable that God, the Father of Truth, should go back upon His word regarding death in order to ensure our continued existence. He could not falsify Himself; what, then, was God to do? Was He to demand repentance from men for their transgression? You might say that that was worthy of God, and argue further that, as through the Transgression they became subject to corruption, so through repentance they might return to incorruption again.
But repentance would not guard the Divine consistency, for, if death did not hold dominion over men, God would still remain untrue. Nor does repentance recall men from what is according to their nature; all that it does is to make them cease from sinning. Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun, men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case.

What—or rather Who—was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing? His part it was, and His alone, both to bring again the corruptible to incorruption and to maintain
for the Father His consistency of character with all. For He alone, being Word of the Father and above all, was in consequence both able to recreate all, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be an ambassador for all with the Father.

For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far from it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

He saw the reasonable race, the race of men that, like Himself, expressed the Father’s Mind, wasting out of existence, and death reigning over all in corruption. He saw that corruption held us all the closer, because it was the penalty for the
Transgression; He saw, too, how unthinkable it would be for the law to be repealed before it was fulfilled. He saw how unseemly it was that the very things of which He Himself was the Artificer should be disappearing. He saw how the surpassing wickedness of men was mounting up against them; He saw also their universal liability to death.

All this He saw and, pitying our race, moved with compassion for our limitation, unable to endure that death should have the mastery, rather than that His creatures should perish and the work of His Father for us men come to nought, He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own. Nor did He will merely to become embodied or merely to appear; had that been so, He could have revealed His divine majesty in some other and better way. No, He took our body, and not only so, but He took it directly from a...virgin, without the agency of human
father—a pure body, untainted by intercourse with man. He, the Mighty One, the Artificer of all, Himself prepared this body in the virgin as a temple for Himself, and took it for His very own, as the instrument through which He was known and in which He dwelt. Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father.

This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished because, having fulfilled in His body that for which it was appointed, it was thereafter voided of its power for men. This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to
disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.

The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father’s Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a
substitute for the life of all, He fulfilled in death all that was required.

Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word’s indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honored, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race
would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Savior of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death.

This great work was, indeed, supremely worthy of the goodness of God. A king who has founded a city, so far from neglecting it when through the carelessness of the inhabitants it is attacked by robbers, avenges it and saves it from destruction, having regard rather to his own honor than to the people’s neglect. Much more, then, the Word of the All-good Father was not unmindful of the human race that He had called to be; but rather, by the offering of His own body He abolished the death which they had incurred, and corrected their neglect by His own teaching. Thus by His own power He restored the whole nature of man.

The Savior’s own inspired disciples assure us of this. We read in one place: “For the love of Christ constraineth us, because
we thus judge that, if One died on behalf of all, then all died, and He died for all that we should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died and rose again from the dead, even our Lord Jesus Christ.” And again another says: “But we behold Him Who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He should taste of death on behalf of every man.” The same writer goes on to point out why it was necessary for God the Word and none other to become Man: “For it became Him, for Whom are all things and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” He means that the rescue of mankind from corruption was the proper part only of Him Who made them in the beginning. He points out also that the Word assumed a human body, expressly in order
that He might offer it in sacrifice for other like bodies: “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He also Himself assumed the same, in order that through death He might bring to nought Him that hath the power of death, that is to say, the Devil, and might rescue those who all their lives were enslaved by the fear of death.”

For by the sacrifice of His own body He did two things: He put an end to the law of death which barred our way; and He made a new beginning of life for us, by giving us the hope of resurrection. By man death has gained its power over men; by the Word made Man death has been destroyed and life raised up anew. That is what Paul says, that true servant of Christ: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. Just as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,” and so forth. Now, therefore, when we die we no longer do so as men condemned
to death, but as those who are even now in process of rising we await the general resurrection of all, "which in its own times He shall show," even God Who wrought it and bestowed it on us.

**Athanasius of Alexandria** was a church leader and theologian in the 4th century A.D. He served as Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, and is remembered for his clearly articulated theological writings, his influence on establishing the New Testament canon, and his long opposition to the Arian heresy (which taught that Christ was created by God the Father, not eternally existent with Him). He was frequently involved in church and political controversies, suffering numerous exiles ordered by four different Roman emperors. At one point, opposition to him was so great that he was said to be **Athanasius contra mundum** ("Athanasius against the world"). His best known
theological work, *De Incarnazione Verbi Dei* (*On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, from which this piece is excerpted), was first published ca. 318 A.D., and is regarded as one of the earliest and most complete statements of Trinitarian Christology. Athanasius is considered a saint by the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, and regarded as a church father by Protestants.

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**Faith that Changes Things**
By Donald W. Raub

Many churches, TV ministries, and radio programs are based on the false premise that faith is God’s credit card to get whatever we desire. This teaching has produced a generation of sincere yet disillusioned Christians who feel that they are entitled to the riches of this world. When they fail to receive the things they desire,
they begin to wonder if Christianity is real (tragically, this has become a tremendous problem in parts of the world where poverty is most rampant, hindering the spread of hope through the true Gospel of Christ).

The problem is that the ministries I refer to are doing “reverse preaching”. They urge people to seek for the wrong things. Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). If you read this passage in context, you will notice that the “things” are the daily necessities of life, not a windfall of earthly riches. Of course, God provides blessings to those who put their faith in Him, but He does not guarantee material wealth to all believers.

Biblical faith is not a conduit to obtain material or physical blessings. It is a spiritual condition whereby we place our lives in the hands of the true God of the universe, so
that He can use us in whatever way He chooses. We often forget that the more God gives to us, the more He requires of us. His blessings come to us to equip us to glorify Him. Following are a few thoughts regarding biblical faith.

I. Faith without Substance Is Fantasy

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11:1). The substance required for true faith is a good relationship with God. He, as a good Father, will not give us anything that would be detrimental to that relationship.

II. Faith without Evidence Is Hearsay

Evidence is first-hand knowledge of the will of God. This knowledge brings understanding of the over-all plan of God. “Faith is the evidence of things not seen.” An example of first-hand knowledge is found in Romans 8:16: “The [Holy] Spirit itself
beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.”

III. Faith without Deep Conviction Is Assumption

Simple faith begins when we realize our sinful condition and the need for a Savior. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not profit unless it is “Mixed with faith in them that hear it” (Heb. 4:2). Spiritual prosperity always begins at the cross!

IV. Faith without Purification Is False Faith

God’s will is to purify the hearts of His children. The Apostle Peter declared that the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles as He had to the Jews, “Purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).

V. Faith without Submission Is Empty Faith
“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service” (Rom.12:1). How dare we expect anything from God if we refuse to give Him that which He asks?

Donald W. Raub is pastor of East Rockhill Chapel in Quakertown, Pennsylvania.

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What of Happiness?
By Shea Oakley

What is the place of human happiness in the economy of God? The world tells us that nothing is more important than its pursuit. In fact “the pursuit of happiness” is so important in America’s national identity that it is literally enshrined in our Constitution. But seeking happiness at
any cost is not the counsel of Scripture. Seeking God at any cost is. When good feelings are put at the center of our aspirations, we become hedonists, and this hedonism is a form of idolatry. In fact, the argument could be made that the all-out quest for personal happiness may, in and of itself, constitute a complete false religious system in our times. If seen in that light, it may not be too far from the mark to suggest that this system is the de-facto majority religion of the 21st century Western world. If you ask the average person on the street in Europe or America today what they want most out of life, it is a fair bet that he or she will tell you that they “just want to be happy.” Even the less self-seeking answer usually revolves around happiness. Often the hope is expressed that someone near and dear may achieve it, most often a person’s children.
Of course gladness of heart is not intrinsically evil. It may be presumed from the Bible that it is even a large part of God’s ultimate will in offering redemption to His fallen human creation. Yet the Bible is also quite clear that the chief purpose of man is to glorify God above all other things, all other goals. Whatever true happiness we can hope for is a direct function of worshipping and obeying God, simply because He is our Creator and He is holy. We love God primarily because of who He is intrinsically, not because of what He can do for us.

Such devotion may sound patently impossible to us, who are essentially born with self-fulfillment as our natural “default setting”, but it is not impossible—if the perfect beauty and righteousness of God captures our hearts. This is only able to happen because, in Christ, He loves us with so pure and powerful a love that our hearts
can be awakened to that beauty and righteousness. When that occurs, we end up loving Him above all things, including our own temporal happiness, because He first loved us. The place that kind of love is made manifest is at the cross, and it is only there that we learn to exchange our demand for bliss for the higher goal of blessing Him.

The sweet paradox in all this is that, in seeking first God’s glorification in our lives, we ultimately obtain eternal happiness as well. The degree to which our hearts are truly surrendered to God in this present life will determine how happy we will be in the here and now. The happiest people on earth are those who are in intimate union with Jesus Christ, and, in grace beyond all measure, they are further promised perfect and infinite happiness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So happiness is not a bad thing at all, if it is not elevated above God as an object
of worship. When rightly seen as a byproduct of knowing our Lord as our first priority it is put in its proper place, and then released into our hearts. To put a spin on the Westminster Shorter Catechism’s definition of the chief end of man, we enjoy God as we glorify Him, and glorify Him even in that enjoyment itself. That very prospect is something to be happy about!

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Shea Oakley is a freelance Christian writer from Ridgewood, New Jersey.

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Exegetically Speaking
by Spiros Zodhiates

Poor yet Rich
James 2:5
“Hearken, my beloved brethren, hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5).

When we are about to issue an important pronouncement, we call it to the special attention of our listeners. And so does James in verse 5 of this chapter. He says, “Listen, my brethren beloved.” He has already given an illustration regarding the behavior of some in the house of God. In verse 1, he stated the sin—judging people by their outward appearance—and then in verses 2 to 4 he gave the illustration. Now he wants to tell us why this thing he has spoken of is a sin. We shall surely do well to
listen to his reasoning. He knows that there will be some who will probably be offended and that is why he assures them of his consideration of them as brethren beloved.

This is what he says: “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” James here introduces one of the most difficult and enigmatic of theological subjects, that of God’s sovereign choice or election and man’s free will. Does God arbitrarily choose some to be saved and some to be lost? Is not everybody elect until he elects not to believe? These are problems with which the mind of man can hardly cope.

A minister one day sat in the vestry of his church to meet anyone who might have spiritual difficulties. Only one came. “What is your difficulty?” asked the minister.
The man answered, “My difficulty is the ninth chapter of Romans, where it says, ‘Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.’”

“Yes,” said the minister, “there is great difficulty in that verse, but which part of the verse forms your difficulty?”

“The latter part, of course,” said the man. “I cannot understand why God should hate Esau.”

The minister replied, “The verse has often been a difficulty to me, but my difficulty has always been with the first part of the verse; I never could understand how God could love that wily, deceitful, supplanting scoundrel Jacob.” Indeed, what a miracle God’s love for man is. It would have been more reasonable for God to hate the human race than to love it with all its transgression and revolt against its Creator and Sustainer.

There is one thing which James wants to make clear by this word “chosen”, and that is that God always takes the
initiative when it comes to the salvation of man, and man actually does nothing more than respond to that initiative. Without that initiative of God, man could not possibly exercise the will to be saved. The child could not catch his father’s hand if the hand were not made available, if it were not stretched out. Grace is available to all, but it is only appropriated by some, and these some are certainly God’s elect. The Greek word is *exeléxato*, which belongs entirely to the past. Furthermore, it is in the middle voice. Does this not remind us of Paul’s declaration to the Ephesians, in chapter 1, verse 4? “As he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” This choice, this election which God made, is something that is of the past and something that belongs entirely to God. It is part and parcel of the absolute sovereignty of God. No man can possibly say he is not
included among the elect and does not constitute part of that grand “whosoever” of John 3:16.

A woman hearing a preacher speak on predestination said, “Ah, I have long settled that point; for if God had not chosen me before I was born, I am sure He would have seen nothing to have chosen me for afterwards!” We can all surely say that, can we not? Of one thing we can be certain, and that is this: had God not chosen us, we would never have chosen God; so it is a good thing that He took the initiative. Just for His own use, God hides within His bosom the knowledge of who are the ones who will respond to this great, divine initiative.

Remember that the verb is in the middle voice, which indicates an action done for oneself and in one’s own interest. This demonstrates to us that God in the exercise of His sovereignty and choice interferes in no way with our free will to choose to
respond or to reject the divine initiative. It may sound like a mystery or a paradox, but it is one of the many found in the Scriptures which the finite mind of man cannot understand: that God’s choice of us is in no way dependent on our choice of Him. As Beecher used to say, “The elect are whosoever will, and the non-elect are whosoever won’t.”

Now whom did God choose? The poor, James tells us. He does not refer to all the poor who live on the earth, but rather to the poor within the family of God who have taken advantage of the divine initiative. He is referring to the elect poor. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that by virtue of our being poor, we necessarily have the favor of God upon us. It is not so. James has been speaking in the previous verses of discrimination against the poor and shabbily clad in the house of God. Now he wants to tell us that these poorly clad people God has
chosen to be among the elect; He has chosen them for Himself.

The Greek word for poor here is *ptōchoús*. It is an adjective which is derived from the verb *ptōsō*, which means “to crouch or cower for fear.” Thus the adjectival noun *ptōchós*, or “poor,” refers to the man who is conscious of his abjectness and needs in this world and crouches in the presence of his superiors. He is one for whom the burden of life is so great that he cannot but beg. He is mistreated even in the house of God, as we saw in the illustration which James gave us. A peculiar blessedness that pertains to the poor elect of God is found in their full dependence on God. The rich and prosperous depend on their possessions, but the poor depend on the Possessor and Creator of all things.

A little boy said to his mother one day, “Mother, I think God always hears it when we scrape the bottom of the barrel.”
His mother was poor. They often used their last stick of wood out in the country village and their last bit of bread before they could tell where the next supply was to come from. But they had so often been provided for in unexpected ways, just when they were most in need, that the little boy thought God always heard it when they scraped the bottom of the barrel. Is not this a distinct privilege of the poor, to scrape the bottom of the barrel and at the same time reach the ear of God?

The King James translation phrases it this way: “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?” According to some of the best manuscripts, the expression here is tō kósmō instead of en tō kósmō. In other words, the preposition en meaning “in” or “of” is missing. Thus the literal translation would be, “the poor in the estimation of the world,” or “the poor according to the world.” God has chosen those whom the world
considers poor, to be rich in faith. These are not poor in reality; they do not consider themselves poor; they are only so considered by the world. Christians, James counsels us, do not judge these poor brethren as the world does. Your standards should be different. These people whom you consider poor and against whom you discriminate are actually rich in faith. By virtue of their poverty they have to exercise faith in the providence and provision of God, while the faith of the rich is somewhat wanting.

Two little girls were counting their pennies. One said, “I have five pennies.” The other said, “I have ten.” “No,” said the first little girl, “You have just five cents, the same as I.” “But,” the second child quickly replied, “my father said that when he came home tonight he would give me five cents, and so I have ten cents.” Trustfully, she
counted what her father had promised. That is exactly how a Christian can be poor in the estimation of the world and at the same time be rich. He counts as his whatever his heavenly Father has. And is it not a source of joy to know that we can never be deprived of such riches because they are in secure hands? No one can fully guarantee earthly riches, but riches held in heaven’s bank no one can touch. And the assurance is that the One with whom our riches are deposited sees our needs and He will give us according to our needs; not always according to our wants because what we want would not always contribute to blessedness and happiness.

As Moody said: “Trust in yourself, and you are doomed to disappointment; trust in your friends, and they will die and leave you; trust in money, and you may have it taken from you; trust in reputation, and some slanderous tongue may blast it, but trust in
God, and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity.” Faith in this verse means trust, and the poor Christian has to exercise this faith in the riches of God. We are not only rich in faith but also “heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those loving him.”

The word “heirs” in the original Greek is *klēronómos* and consists of the word *klēros*, meaning “lot,” and the verb *némomai*, meaning “to possess, to get hold of.” It indicates to us that each of us who has been born into the family of God through the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus has acquired the status of sonship; we have become His sons and daughters. We have a rich God and, therefore, there is something to inherit from Him; each one of us will have a lot which we shall take hold of one day. Every one of us will have a different lot, but, praise God, He will have enough for every one of us. We are heirs of the kingdom.
Once we acknowledge God as our King, His kingdom automatically becomes ours. Who, therefore, can dispute our riches in Him? According to the world we may be considered poor, but in Christ we are the richest of all people.

Queen Elizabeth I once sent an ambassador far away on important and difficult business. He objected, saying to the queen, “But what will become of my business and my family?” The queen replied, “You take care of my business, and I will take care of yours.” Is it not wonderful to know that we belong to a King who will take care of all our business as long as we keep loving Him? This inheritance He promises only to those who continue to love Him.

The exact translation of the last phrase of our verse is, “which [inheritance] he has promised to those loving him.” The more we love the Lord, the more real His promises become to us. We should not love
Him, however, because of the promised inheritance, but for what He is, in all His glory and majesty.

A blind girl, whose eyes had been opened by a surgical operation, delighted in the sight of her father, who had a noble appearance and presence. His every look and motion were watched by his daughter with the keenest delight. For the first time his constant tenderness and care seemed real to her. If he caressed her or even looked upon her kindly, it brought tears of gladness to her eyes. “To think,” she said, holding his hand closely in her own, “that I have had this father for these many, many years, and never knew him!” Many of us are poor in this world’s goods, but we are so blind that we fail to see how rich our heavenly Father is, and that His riches are ours when we become His children and love Him with all our hearts.
Spiros Zodhiates (1922-2009) served as president of AMG International for over 40 years, was the founding editor of *Pulpit Helps* Magazine (*Disciple’s* predecessor), and authored dozens of exegetical books.

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**Words to Stand You on Your Feet**

by Joe McKeever

**It’s Not Hard to Preach, but Humanly Impossible to Do It Right**

“*Not that we are adequate for these things. But our adequacy [sufficiency] is of God*” (2 Cor. 3:5).

If you want to be a preacher and are satisfied with what R. G. Lee called “Sermonettes by preacherettes to Christianettes,” then you can do that easily enough. Prepare sweet little devotionals
around interesting Scripture verses you come across. Add some cute stories and raise your voice at least once in the 15-minute message (to convince the more discerning that what they’re hearing is really preaching) and you can stay at that church a long time.

Lord, bless your churches and help your preachers.

If, however, you are a God-called messenger who believes that the sermons should speak to the culture and address issues people sitting before you are actually dealing with, sermons in which you bring the light of God’s eternal Word to shine upon the decisions people make, if you truly want to make disciples of Jesus Christ and not just church members, then you have a problem. You’re not smart enough. You are not holy enough. You are not courageous enough. My friend Rick Lance said, “You don’t have the morality, the mentality, or the maturity to
do this yourself.” You’re going to have to go to the Lord and find out how He wants this done.

“Faithful is He who called you and He will bring it to pass” (1 Thess. 5:24). There’s a good reason for this promise. If you do not go to Him and ask Him and wait before Him for His instructions, but decide that anyone can see what needs to be done and set about planning your preaching ministry the way you “just know” it needs to go, your head will soon explode. The demands are too numerous, the needs too great, the pressures beyond your ability to withstand. You are not adequate for these things.

Think of it this way. A pastor in this second decade of the 21st century needs to be well aware of several things.

He should know the message of the entire Bible (good luck with that!).

He should know the changing culture of this country, as it moves more
and more off the grid before your very eyes. What was acceptable and reasonable a generation ago is now illegal; what is normal today will, within another generation, get you accused of being a right-wing reactionary and probably a terrorist. God help us.

He should know the religious alternatives to the true faith. It’s not enough any longer for a pastor to proclaim only that Jesus “is the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and “No one comes to the Father except through [Him]” (John 14:6). These days, a faithful pastor needs to know what those alternative faiths teach, and why they are forbidden, and be able to do so intelligently. He needs to be an apologist.

What about ISIS? Many in the pews listen for something in the sermons to indicate the pastor is aware of this terrorist organization, their philosophy, their goals, and their methods. He needs to keep up with the daily news, at least at some level.
What about immigration? Half the members of our Hispanic churches in my metropolitan city (New Orleans) are said to be illegal. They are brothers and sisters in Christ. And what about receiving immigrants from the Middle East where terrorist groups slip in crazies to infiltrate the U.S.? He needs to know what Congress is doing and the issues before the U.S. Supreme Court.

What about people in the pews living together as husband and wife, but without marriage? This is not even to mention the changing view of the world toward homosexuality and transgender practice. Again, it is insufficient for him to slam these people as sinners and walk away as though he has solved the problems. He needs to get into their heads to find out why they think as they do, and bring the Gospel’s light to that way of thinking.

What about youth ministry? What does the pastor want from the new guy he’s
hiring to reach the students? Are there guidelines and no-no’s? Are there dangers? This list is, frankly, **endless**.

When the Lord called me to preach as a college senior, only the first (“know the entire Bible”) was on the list. The Middle East was on another planet, sexual deviation was just that, and youth ministry consisted of rallies on Saturday night to sing choruses. The young adult beginning a pastoral ministry today can easily be overwhelmed by the expectations and demands upon him in daily service and particularly in his preaching.

That’s why he has to do these five things as a regular, consistent routine.

1) **Live on your knees, preacher.** Your constant prayer is “Lord, show me what you would have me to do.”

2) **Live in the Word.** Every pastor of a church of any size should have a room with a table where he can leave his Bibles
and sermon study materials and know they will be there waiting for him tomorrow morning when he enters the room. He reads and studies and lives in the Word all week long.

3) Cut yourself some slack. You’re not going to get this right all the time. Do the best you can and expect to come up short from time to time.

4) Attend the best conferences. Ask around. Other pastors will tell you the meetings they found most beneficial. Do not waste your time on the others. Urge your church leadership to set aside money in the budget for this continuing education.

5) Have a team of brethren who are your soul mates. You are all redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, you are all called by God into the ministry, and you are all finding it impossible to do perfectly. So, you pray for each other and encourage one another, and
periodically you get together for talk and prayer and more talk.

God bless you, pastors. Particularly you young ministers who will someday look back on the year 2015 as a simpler time when the issues were blacker and whiter and the expectations were lower. “Lord, bless your servants. We claim the promise that ‘Faithful is He who called you and He will bring it to pass.’ Bring it to pass, O Father. Whatever is Thy will. Amen.”

Joe McKeever is a retired Southern Baptist pastor from New Orleans, Louisiana. He blogs regularly at www.joemckeever.com.
After wrapping up our study in this space of an Old Testament book (Lamentations) and a brief break from writing, it’s time again to go back into a New Testament book. This one may take quite some time to get through, as it is one of Paul’s longer epistles, containing harsh words of correction right alongside many passages that soar to the mysteries of heaven: First Corinthians.

Why Corinthians?

For one thing, Corinth holds a special place in my heart among biblical cities, because I had the great privilege of
spending a day there with a certified archaeological tour guide and an open Bible (you can read about that here). That experience of putting my hands and feet on the stones that were there in Paul’s day and reading inscriptions by and about his ministry associates (like Erastus—see Rom. 16:23) bolstered my understanding of the overwhelming historicity and accuracy of Scripture. When I read and study Paul’s letters to the people of this once-great city, the sights and smells of the very place come to mind, giving vivid life to the firm and beautiful truths the Spirit shared through him.

Perhaps a greater reason, though, is the prescience this letter has for our own age. All of Scripture speaks to all of life in every era. God is unchanging and our stubborn human nature is shared in common with all. Certain revelations of the Spirit, though, are very direct exhortations
and rebukes for people in a specific situation.

Few passages of Scripture so accurately describe life in the modern West like 1 Corinthians. A huge cosmopolitan city at the crossroads of the Roman Empire and the capital of the province of Achaia (containing Athens and the Peloponnese), first-century Corinth ran on money, power, and sex—life was fast, image was everything, and people who couldn’t keep up were used and abused by those at the top. The arrival of the Gospel should have changed the culture, but Paul’s letter shows instead a church that was still very “Corinthian”, with a long way to go to Christian maturity. The church there was called out to be a witness for the Lord in the face of a decadent culture, but was wrestling just as hard with factions, favoritism, lust, lawsuits, and many other cultural sins within the body. In today’s world, we face so many
of the same temptations the Corinthians did, and our churches struggle to submit to God and be free from the toxic influence of sin.

Over and over again, Paul rebuked the Church at Corinth for their failings, calling them back to the cross of Christ to show them “a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). By God’s grace, Paul was not just speaking wisdom, but was “carried along by the Holy Spirit” to speak “from God” (2 Pet. 1:21)—the truth and correction he offered the Corinthians is intended to pierce our hearts as well.

A “Bird’s-Eye” View

The nature of Disciple as a monthly publication means that a truly expositional, verse-by-verse study of this 16-chapter letter is not realistic (unless that’s all you want to read here for the next 15 years). There are many excellent commentaries available which go that route (our own Spiros
Zodhiates published one that spans 17 volumes!), but I will try here simply to open up the Scripture and convey the big picture. It won’t be a “rush job”, but it will move along briskly.

**Setting**

As with many of Paul’s epistles, we have an extended background on his ministry thanks to Luke’s faithful record of their travels together in the book of Acts. The message of the letters to the Corinthians starts in Acts 18.

After the “Macedonian Vision” (Acts 16:9), Paul and his companions (including Timothy and Silas) crossed from Asia Minor into Greece, bringing the Gospel to Europe for the first time. They came first to Philippi, where Lydia and her family were baptized, and the Lord literally brought the house down to free Paul and Silas from prison (Acts 16). From there, they preached at
Thessalonica—until they were arrested and sent nearby to Berea. When the same crowd who had thrown them out of Thessalonica found them there, the new believers encouraged Paul to travel down to Athens for his safety (Acts 17:1-15). At Athens, Paul was moved in the Spirit to boldly proclaim Christ in the public place of worship at the Areopagus, reasoning with the religious people there from his knowledge of the Greek poets, and pointing them to the One “in whom we live and move and have our being.” Some believed there also (Acts 17:16-34), but Paul moved quickly on to Corinth.

At Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he worked and lodged. As was his custom, he went to the synagogue every Sabbath day to reason with the Jews, but “they resisted and blasphemed,” so Paul took the Gospel next door (literally) to the Gentiles. Soon many
others heard and believed and were being baptized (Acts 18:1-8). The Lord then gave Paul encouragement to continue on in Corinth: “And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.’ And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them” (Acts 18:9-11).

Paul’s tenure in the city was not without controversy: After the Lord began working in Corinth, the Jews who had resisted the Gospel brought a charge against Paul before Gallio, the Roman governor of Achaia (who is also known to history as the brother of the great philosopher Seneca). After dragging Paul to the judgment seat, they said, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the Law” (Acts 18:4), but Gallio would have
none of it. He “said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.’ And he drove them away from the judgment seat” (Acts 18:14-16).

Though not much else is said about this event, it would appear to be one of the many times that God used Paul’s Roman citizenship to protect him and others for the sake of the Gospel. Interestingly, the Jews then turned on Sosthenes, who had taken the place of Crispus (who had believed Christ) as the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him publicly for bringing shame on the Jews by having their case against Paul dismissed. All we read after this is that “Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria” (Acts 18:18).
Everything else we learn about the church at Corinth comes from the letters he wrote back to them later.

**Background**

The events of Acts 18 took place around A.D. 51-52 (we know with certainty from records of Gallio’s governorship), and this first letter is usually dated around A.D. 55, assumed to be written from Ephesus during Paul’s 3-year stay there after his departure from Corinth. The letter seems to have been written as a response to questions asked by the church about specific theological and practical questions, with variations on the phrase “Now concerning the things about which you wrote” (1 Cor. 7:1) appearing several times. In addition, Paul’s strongest rebukes and corrections (in chapters 1-6) come in response to a report from “Chloe’s people” (1 Cor. 1:11) about the behavior of the
believers there. With everything he had heard and seen from this church, Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to address the issues at hand both theologically and pastorally, and his letter remains a powerful statement of how the truth of Christ is to be lived out in the work and fellowship of the Body.

**Grace and Peace**

In spite of the struggles and frustrations he addresses later in the book, Paul opens with a warm greeting: “Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:1-3).
These imperfect, often troubled people are written to as “saints” because of their calling and sanctification in Christ. Their sins and failures were certainly of importance, but first and foremost, Paul sees them as his brethren in Christ, along with “all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul’s own testimony of miraculous salvation from his life as a persecutor of the Church was never far from his mind throughout his ministry, and this constant awareness of the overpowering grace of God in Christ motivated his dealings with others who were also great sinners. He never cuts sinful behavior any slack, but rather calls those whom Christ had called to “walk worthy of the calling” (Eph. 4:1). Paul writes with confidence that the same Christ who called them would purify them and mature them according to his riches of mercy.
Note also who is with Paul as he writes: “Sosthenes our brother.” This same man who had led a mob to drag Paul before the authorities in Corinth was now serving alongside him as a fellow-laborer in the kingdom of God. The work that had been done in Sosthenes’ life by the Holy Spirit surely would have been a reminder to the rest of the Corinthians of who they were in sin and a challenge to remember who they were now in Christ. And so Paul starts his teaching, which will be hard at times, with the “grace and peace” that come only by the blood of the Lamb.

Justin Lonas is editor of Disciple Magazine for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Table of Contents
Paul begins the last portion of his epistle to the Ephesians in chapter 6 verse 10 with the word, “finally”. Paul is wrapping up this tremendous letter to the church and in so doing is like a mighty general challenging his troops, reminding them of the battle at hand, the spiritual war that we are in.

Having established a believer’s identity in Christ, as well as the walk that should be the result, Paul acknowledges the Satanic battle that every believer is engaged in. Paul begins this discourse on the believer’s battle by declaring, in effect, that the believer does not have the strength nor
the fortitude to fight the battle. Rather, the believer is to “be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might.”

The words Paul uses for “be strong,” “strength”, and “might” are all different in the Greek. “Be strong” has the idea of ability, what can be accomplished. This accomplishment and ability is not from our own efforts or strength. Rather, believers have ability only through the strength and might of the Lord Himself. “Strength” and “might” both emphasize the Lord’s inherent ability. Paul is emphasizing what the Lord is able to do because of who He is. The Lord is mighty. He is strong. He does not need to “do” anything in order to prove that He can. However, when He chooses to act, He has no equal. Paul is emphasizing spiritual strength over the physical though clearly the physical arena is impacted by this spiritual battle. The Lord is victorious over it all.
In verse 11, Paul continues, commanding believers to “put on the full armor of God.” This is clearly what he is about to describe in the following verses. It is interesting to note that Paul has used the idea of “putting on” prior to this. In chapter 4 verses 20-24 he specifically commands believers to, “lay aside the old self,” and to “put on the new self.” The language used here is of “putting off” a garment and “putting on” a garment. The old garment would be the garment of flesh, whereas the new garment is our new identity in Christ created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

Paul also uses this language in his letter to the Romans. He states, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). Again the idea is to be clothed in Christ. We are to “put on” Christ. With the context of Ephesians, as well as his usage of the phrase in Romans, Paul is continuing
his thought of being clothed in Christ by declaring that the armor is Christ Himself. Christ is able to protect, to defend. Through His strength believers are able. Able to do what?

Paul continues, having commanded believers to put on the full armor of God, to give the reason why, “so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” Through Christ and His power, believers are able to stand against the very schemes of the devil. “Stand firm” is in the aorist tense indicating a stand which is completed per every attack or scheme. Every time Satan and his forces attack the believer is able to stand firm in the strength of Christ. The devil has many schemes, meaning various methods. This word is in the plural so there are many different ways in which Satan attacks believers. Though there are various attacks, or methods, every attack always seeks to undermine the truth
of the Word of God. In the midst of any and every attack, however, the believer is empowered by Christ in order to stand firm. Paul does not say to retreat or attack. Rather we are to stand firm. We are to be strengthened in the Lord’s strength, putting on the armor of God, Christ Himself, through whom we are able to stand.

So, what are the methods of Satan in attacking the believer? In the context of Ephesians there are at least four schemes that Satan uses.

First, Satan tries to confuse the believer as to his true identity in Christ. Paul has spent the first three chapters of Ephesians outlining for believers our salvation, which is by grace through faith and not of works. Paul has encouraged believers that we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Furthermore believers
have been given the Holy Spirit as a “down-payment” or promise of our salvation. Believers are “in Christ” and this cannot be changed. However, clearly Satan will do anything and everything to discourage, cause confusion, and persuade believers to believe something other than the truth of our identity in Christ. If Satan is successful in this, then believers will begin to strive according to the flesh in order to prove through works their acceptance to the Lord, rather than resting in the finished work of Christ, which is by grace. The results are devastating to the believer as well as to the Church.

Secondly, Satan will attack believers regarding the unity they have with Christ and one another. If Satan is able to cause a believer to doubt who he is in Christ Jesus and the unity, the relationship which has been established by grace through faith in the Lord, the result will be the disunity of
believers within the Church. In chapter four, Paul, having established a believer’s identity in Christ, speaks to the walk of the believer. He gives a checklist of action items involving the relationships that believers have with one another. If there is disunity, no love for one another, etc., then there is an identity problem in Christ Himself. If a believer is walking in the identity given by the Lord (by grace through faith), then this will be seen in unity and love for other believers. The testimony of the power of God, the love of Christ, in and through believers, is a powerful light into a very dark world. Disunity and unloving behavior does not glorify the Lord. Satan will seek to do anything and everything to diminish the testimony of the saints so as to continue to blind the eyes of the unbelieving.

Thirdly, Satan will always seek to distract believers by the things of the world. If Satan is able to focus believers on those
ways in which we used to walk, he is able to diminish the testimony of believers in the world. In 4:17 and following, Paul commands believers to walk in light of their new identity in Christ rather than according to the “former manner of life.” Believers are to walk according to the new self rather than the old. We are not to engage in the deeds of the flesh, but rather according to the righteous deeds created by the Lord before the foundations of the earth for us to walk in. Again, this is not according to our power or strength, but according to the Lord’s.

Finally, Satan will attack believers through appealing to believers’ “self ability” rather than “Christ’s ability”. If Satan is able to persuade a believer that he is sufficient in himself, able in and of himself, rather than trusting in the Lord and the strength of His might, then the believer will not be able to stand firm. Believers are to “walk worthy of the calling” in which we have been called.
We are to walk by grace, through faith, not of self-effort, sincerity, or our own strength. Any believer that has been persuaded to try to accomplish the righteous works of Christ in their own strength has fallen prey to one of Satan’s schemes. Only in Christ’s power are believers able to walk worthy and stand firm in the face of the Satanic onslaught that will surely come.

Praise the Lord that we have the opportunity of walking in the power of Christ. Following the Lord by grace through faith begins at the point of salvation and continues on in the life of the believer. Are we following Him? Are we trusting Him and experiencing the Lord’s power in the midst of our walk with Him? In the coming year, I pray that each of us would experience afresh the mighty hand of the Lord in our lives, as He continues to grow us and reveal Himself through us. Have a wonderful Christmas and a very blessed New Year.
Points to Ponder
by David L. Olford

What Time Is It?

Text:  “But, when the fullness of time had come…” (Gal. 4:4a).

Thought: To answer the question in the title, let’s ask this question of our key text, what time is being declared? It was a specific time, the “fullness of time,” when “God sent forth his Son….” (Gal. 4:4). There are three massive truths that are developed by the Apostle Paul in relation to the “fullness of time.”
I. It Was the Time of Incarnation

“God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the Law…” (Gal. 4:4).

At just the right time, according to the plan and promises of God, the Son of God was born. The incarnation is straightforwardly affirmed in this simple phrase—“born of woman.” At the same time, in these words, we are exposed to the majesty and mystery of God’s plan as we think of God’s Son being born of woman! How can it be? Even though we may not be able to fully grasp how the incarnation could take place, we do learn why it needed to take place. God’s Son had to become man in order to redeem mankind. He had to be born “under the Law” not only to fulfill prophecies and to be the Christ, but also to become the “curse” for us, hanging on a tree/cross (Gal. 3:13).
II. It Was the Time of Redemption

“...to redeem those who were under the Law...” (Gal. 4:4).

The incarnation of the Son of God led to the redemption of those “enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” and “those who were under the Law” (Gal. 4:3-4). Mankind, Jew and Gentile alike, were and are in need of redemption and liberation. The teaching of this Epistle makes it clear that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross accomplished this redemption when Jesus, according to the Law, became a curse for us so that we would be freed from the curse of the Law. He took our place; He took our punishment; He took our curse. Therefore, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is our boast, and stands at the center of the Gospel. Furthermore, within Paul’s argument in Galatians he makes it clear that the Gentiles now enter into the “blessing of Abraham” not just through what
Christ did but “in Christ Jesus” Himself (Gal. 3:13-14).

II. It Was the Time of Adoption

“…so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4).

At the time set by our heavenly father, due to Christ’s incarnation and the redemption, those in Christ have been “adopted as sons.” The Old Covenant time of being under a guardian as a child, which Paul compares to slavery, is over. This speaks of the anticipation of God’s people for the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, which has now come to pass in Christ. The full rights of “sonship” are granted to those in Christ. Because of this “sonship,” God’s Spirit has been sent “into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’” And because we are truly sons, we are “heirs.” We are heirs of the promises and blessings of God in Christ.
**Thrust:** Paul’s concern in this Epistle is to clarify the Gospel and to call the Galatians to continue in the faith and in the Gospel, rather than giving in to false legalistic teaching. He agonized over these Galatians, not only initially, that they would have a spiritual birth through the Gospel, but that they now would walk by faith and in the Spirit, and that they would be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. They needed to live as the redeemed in Christ and those who have been adopted as sons. May that be true of us this Christmas and into a new year, if the Lord tarries. During this season, let’s rejoice in the time when the Father sent His Son and all that means to us now.

David L. Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University’s Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee.
Only a New Love Can Give Victory over the World
By Thomas Chalmers


“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

There are two ways in which a practical moralist may attempt to displace from the human heart its love of the world: either by a demonstration of the world’s vanity, or by setting forth another object—God—so much more attractive that the heart
is moved to exchange its old love for a new one.

My purpose is to show that the first method cannot work, and that the latter method will alone suffice for the rescue and recovery of the heart.

Reasoning power alone will never suffice—and this is true even when considering a change in the heart’s affections between various worldly attractions. It is thus, for example that the boy ceases at length to be the slave of his appetite, because a more adult taste, such as a desire for wealth, supplants it. And the love of money may be subordinated by the love of power.

But in all these changes, the heart is never left without an object of desire. Such is the grasping tendency of the human heart that it must have something to lay hold of. The heart abhors a vacuum, and removing one desire without replacing it with another
would leave a void and vacancy as painful to the mind as hunger is to the body.  

The misery of a heart left without a love is strikingly illustrated by those who are so satiated with indulgence that they are fatigued out of all capacity for sensation whatever. Votaries of fashion, for example, may become victims of excess, in whom the multitude of their enjoyments at last extinguishes their power of enjoyment.  

It will now be seen, perhaps, why it is that the heart keeps by its present affections with so much tenacity. The strong man will not be driven out of his dwelling-place unless a stronger than he compel him to give way. The heart would revolt against its own emptiness. Thus, one who tries to persuade the heart to give up worldly ways—even if the preacher is able to convince his hearer of the terrors of vengeance coming upon sinners—will in all probability not succeed.
The world, after all, is all that a natural man knows. He loves nothing above it, and he cares for nothing beyond it; and to bid him to love not the world is to pass a sentence of expulsion on all the inmates of his bosom. Therefore, if loving not the world is indispensable to one’s Christianity, then the crucifixion of the old man is the only adequate description of the transition which must occur, when all old things are done away and all things become new.

The heart cannot be prevailed upon to part with the world by a simple act of resignation. But presenting that heart with a more worthy and more excellent choice may bring about a great moral revolution. This, we trust, will explain the operation of that charm which accompanies the effectual preaching of the Gospel. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old love is by the expulsive power of a new one.
The same revelation of God which dictates so mighty an obedience places within our reach an equally mighty instrument of obedience. It brings to the very door of our heart a love which, once seated upon its throne, will either subordinate every previous inmate or bid it flee. It places before the eye of the mind Him who made the world, so displayed in the Gospel that He stands revealed as an object of confidence to sinners—and where our desire after Him is not chilled into apathy by the barrier of human guilt which intercepts every approach that is not made to Him through the appointed Mediator.

It is the bringing of this better hope whereby we draw nigh unto God. It is God apprehended by the believer as God in Christ, who alone can evict the world from its ascendancy. When we are enabled by faith, which is His own gift, to see His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and to hear His
beseeching voice entreatings the return of all who will to a full pardon and a gracious acceptance—It is then that a love paramount to the love of the world first rises in the regenerating bosom. It is when the spirit of adoption is poured upon us that the heart is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires.

Let us not cease, then, to ply the only instrument able to do away with the love of the world. Let us, if possible, clear away the shroud of unbelief which so hides the face of God. Let us insist on His claims to your affection. And let us never cease to affirm that nothing but faith and understanding are wanting, on your part, to call forth the love of your hearts back again.

**Thomas Chalmers** (1780-1847) was a preacher for several years before he became a Christian—and when that fundamental change occurred, his message
changed simultaneously, and his effectiveness as a minister of the Gospel soared. He was ordained into the (subsidized) Church of Scotland in 1803, but was more interested in mathematics than he was in preaching or shepherding his flock. But after genuinely meeting Christ in 1811, people began to flock to hear his sermons, and many lives were changed. Such success followed his move to a large industrial parish in Glasgow that, at one place where he preached, the crowd was so thick that he had to climb in through a window to reach the pulpit. Often on Sundays he would preach to 3,000 people in each of several services. “His most strenuous spiritual exercise was fighting against the pride and vanity that tempted him because of his popularity,” noted one biographer. Increasingly unhappy with the moral state of the institutional church, Chalmers led a revolt in 1843 to establish
the Free Church of Scotland, becoming moderator of the Free Church and professor and principal of the newly-founded Free Church College in Edinburgh.

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Counselor’s Corner
by James Rudy Gray

Mary, A Picture of Contentment

As the Christmas season closes in on us, we are faced with one of the most unusual times in our country. A History channel program recently stated that Christmas is a “Christian holiday honoring the birth of Jesus which evolved over two millennia into a worldwide religious and secular celebration, incorporating many pre-Christian, pagan traditions into the festivities. Today, Christmas is a time for
family and friends to get together and exchange gifts.”

That may be the way it is—but is that the way it should be? There is no doubt the Christmas season is a mixture of pagan, commercial, and Christian influences. Can Christians still make an impact for Christ and His Gospel during this season? We can, if we have what Mary had—commitment to God.

She has been too highly exalted by the Roman Catholic Church, and, as a consequence, often devalued too much by Protestant and evangelical denominations. She was chosen by God, empowered by God, blessed by God, and obedient to God. She was a virgin, likely only a teenager. Her task was overwhelming, frightening, and awesome: carry and give birth to God’s Son, the Messiah of the world. She is not the mediator between God and people; she gave birth to the mediator: 1 Timothy says,
“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Although she was an ordinary girl, God did the supernatural through her.

The angel Gabriel came to her in Nazareth, a place, by the world’s standards, of little importance and even less positive regard by Jews in the area. Remember Nathanael’s response to discovering that Jesus was from Nazareth, “Can anything good come from Nazareth.” Her greatness in world history is not because of who she was or where she was from, but because of the marvelous grace of God.

Mary never questioned God, as far as we know, but she did ask questions. There is a big difference in the two: the former indicates skepticism or doubt and the latter implies the desire to know.

After Gabriel revealed to her that her relative was pregnant with John the Baptist, even though she was old and referred to as
barren, the angel then delivered some of the greatest words of encouragement and hope to any person desiring to follow Christ in this world. “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). Mary’s response is exemplary in verse 38, “Behold the bondslave of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.” She was committing her life to two things that should characterize every follower of Jesus: 1) I will be what you want me to be (“the bondslave of the Lord”), and 2) I will do what you want me to do (“be it done to me according to your word”). Mary surrendered her life to God and, as a result, found an overwhelming greater life.

There are so many good things about the Christmas season. It is a time for family, friends, travel, food, gifts and more. But, most importantly it is the season in which disciples of Jesus Christ can meditate on the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16) and
commit ourselves, with gratitude, to be who God wants us to be and do what He calls us to do.

We can make an impact for Christ and His Gospel this Christmas season if we follow Mary’s example. Her accomplishment was gloriously historic, but it wasn’t her power but God’s that brought about the supernatural result. What she did will not be repeated. It does not need to be—Jesus has come. But commitment like Mary exhibited can and should be real in our lives today.

This season may we yield ourselves, not just to the babe in Bethlehem’s manger, but to the resurrected and living King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He serves as the
The Story behind the Song
by Lindsay Terry

Capturing Peace during Sorrow
Song: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day”

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, October 2009.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is well pleased” (Luke 2:14).

Seldom did a poet put pen to paper with more skill in verse than Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. His ability to portray life in one of the most beautiful fashions ever
devised—poetry—is illustrated in his masterful “The Song of Hiawatha.”

Longfellow was a legend in his own lifetime. He is known in many circles as “The Children’s Poet.” In his last years, in many schools, his birthday was a holiday and school children were excused from classes.

Tragedy struck in his home on July 9, 1861. His wife, Fanny, was near an open window sealing locks of her daughter’s hair in a packet, using hot sealing wax. It was never discovered whether a spark from a match or the sealing wax was the cause, but suddenly her dress caught fire and she was engulfed in flames. Longfellow, sleeping in the next room, was awakened by her screams and dashed in and was severely burned on this face and hands as he tried desperately to extinguish the flames and save his wife. He was burned so badly he could not attend her funeral.
He seemed to lock the anguish within his soul. Because he continued to work at his craft, only his family knew of his personal suffering. They could see it in his eyes and observe his long periods of silence. His white beard, so identified with him, was one of the results of the tragedy—the burn scars on his face made shaving almost impossible.

Even the literary giant Longfellow needed the peace that only God can give to His children. With the loss of his wife only two and one half years earlier, and the tragedy abounding in his own country, on Christmas day, in 1863, he sat down and tried desperately to reflect on the joys of the season. Although not a hymn writer, the poem that he wrote on that day was later set to music by Englishman John Calkin. The result is one of our most popular Christmas carols.
“I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.”

As he came to the third stanza he was stopped by the thought of the condition of his beloved country. The Civil War was in full swing. The battle of Gettysburg was not more than six months past. Days looked dark, and he probably asked himself the question, “How can the last phrase of those stanzas to be true in this war-torn country, where brother fights against brother and father against son?” But he kept writing:

“And in despair I bowed my head:
‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said,
‘For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men!’”
It seems as if he could have been writing for the present day, also. Then, as every Christian should do, he turned his thoughts to the one who solves all problems:

“Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.’”

Peace and good will shall one day come when the Prince of Peace reigns. Peace in this life, for a Christian, is from within, not in an exemption from suffering. Remember that this season as we celebrate His coming!

© Lindsay Terry. Used by permission.
Lindsay Terry has been a song historian for more than 40 years, and has written widely on the background of great hymns and worship songs including the books *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever* (2008) and *The Sacrifice of Praise* (2002). Table of Contents

**Church Builders**
by Bernard R. DeRemer

**Preeminent Expositor: Donald Grey Barnhouse**


As a child, precocious Donald Grey Barnhouse wanted a book that would tell “everything about anything.” When he discovered the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, he was “a bit disappointed that someone had
beaten him to (writing these volumes).” Nevertheless, he plunged eagerly into them, soaking up facts wholesale which would much later return as sermon illustrations.

He deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest Bible teachers of the twentieth century, gifted with a special ability to make scriptural truth crystal clear. Highlights include: a 33-year pastorate of the Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, from which hundreds of young people were called to the mission field or other service; a 33-year radio ministry on the *Bible Study Hour* (when he bought air time from CBS in 1928, he was said to be the “first fundamentalist to broadcast over a major network”); authorship of some 30 books, as well as innumerable articles; production of films and TV—again, he was an early pioneer in these fields; itinerant ministry which reached every state and many other parts of the world.
A native of California, where he was born in 1895, Barnhouse attended the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University). There he came under the influence of such outstanding leaders as Dr. R. A. Torrey. Then he studied at the University of Chicago and other famous institutions in the U.S. and abroad.

In 1919 he joined the Belgian Gospel Mission, serving as pastor of French Protestant churches. Upon his return to the U.S. in 1927, he began his historic ministry at Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, the base for all his later work and travels.

In 1931 he founded Revelation (later Eternity) Magazine. In the first issue, he listed “20 trends he felt Scripture indicated as signs of the last times before the return of Christ.” Barnhouse built Eternity into a leading periodical of the day. In its pages he discussed the shortcomings of Roman Catholic theology; commented perceptively
on major current events; and of course wrote numerous Bible study articles. The magazine continued in print until 1988.

Ralph Keiper, a long-time colleague, recalled how Dr. Barnhouse on summer trips “visit[ed] mission stations and recharge[d] the missionaries. One of them told me it is so easy for them to get stale on the field and so refreshing to hear that kind of doctrinal teaching. This is one of his greatest works.”

More than 6 feet tall, Barnhouse was described as “cocky, sometimes brusque, full of boyish enthusiasm.” His authoritative preaching of the Word of God was powerfully persuasive and unforgettable. Every broadcast closed with a fervent prayer for the Lord to give the unsaved “restlessness” (until they come to faith), and for grace, mercy, and peace to abide upon “all Thy believing own.”

Somewhat like a modern day circuit rider, for years Dr. Barnhouse traveled to
various cities over the country for meetings, reaching college students, business and professional leaders, and many others. His church granted him six months a year to be on the road.

One outstanding example was the richest man in Grand Rapids, Mich., whom Barnhouse led to the Lord after dealing extensively with him. Later he presented the largest gift to the Evangelical Foundation (Barnhouse’s organization).

Dr. C. Everett Koop, former U.S. surgeon general, who attended Tenth Presbyterian Church for about two decades, testified that he was saved through Barnhouse’s ministry. From him he learned “a deeper understanding of the Word of God.” He went on to serve as a church elder and president of the Evangelical Foundation.

Titles by Dr. Barnhouse available today include *The Invisible War: an exploration of the great spiritual conflict*
between good and evil, Illustrating Great Themes of Scripture, Revelation, and Romans (4 volumes). Many videos and booklets are also available from the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.

After the death of his first wife, Ruth, Barnhouse married Margaret Bell, a widow whose life had been transformed as a result of his ministry in Florida. She became not only his companion but also an invaluable assistant. When he was diagnosed with diabetes, she carefully and strictly regulated his diet, enabling him to travel and minister with a minimum of disruption. But, alas, a massive brain tumor struck this giant, and after a short illness he triumphantly went to be with the Lord in 1960, at only 65.

His life verse was: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Phil. 3:10).
Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing for *Pulpit Helps* Magazine, and continued to serve in this capacity as a volunteer contributor to *Disciple*. He joined those he had written about so faithfully in the Lord’s presence in 2014.

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**Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel**

**Pulpit Helps in India: Still Ministering after 25 Years**
By AMG International Staff

For as long as AMG has been in ministry, we’ve used the written word to advance the knowledge of God and His
Word. Whether through publishing books and Bibles, advertising the Gospel message in newspapers and online, or publishing periodicals, we strive to share Christ’s love with the lost and encourage and equip believers to follow Him.

One of the periodicals AMG uses in ministry around the world is *Pulpit Helps*. Dr. Zodhiates launched this magazine in the U.S. in 1975 to serve busy, bi-vocational pastors with sermon-building tools, Greek language studies, book reviews, and more. As many readers will remember, in 2009, the U.S. version of *Pulpit Helps* transitioned to the online-only *Disciple* Magazine.

In several countries, *Pulpit Helps* took root with “local flavor”—AMG national workers in India, Thailand, and Indonesia (to name a few places) translate pieces from the U.S. magazine, add in some original works in the local language, and print and distribute copies to pastors, church planters,
and other national workers throughout their country.

We recently received a report on *Pulpit Helps* in India, and the ways it is being used by God to serve pastors and churches there, particularly in rural villages in Andhra Pradesh where much of AMG India’s work is located.

“These villagers live on daily wages, and have very limited education. The Gospel workers among them have often only received slightly better learning. They can read the Bible and explain the Gospel, but they may only know the New Testament and lack a comprehensive idea of the Old Testament. They do not have any formal training in Scripture, preaching, or theology. What they have learned is from older pastors through apprenticeship. Only very recently, the Bible Society of India has published a Telugu Study Bible, but even this can be difficult to use for them.”
“They ask for the AMG Pulpit Helps, as we print messages for them in a manner which they can comprehend. We have been in this monthly ministry of Pulpit Helps for about 25 years now. These village Gospel workers do not have the income to pay for a subscription, so we send them this each month free of cost. In most cases, there is not even one computer in a whole village, and few know how to use them, so if we are to help the village evangelist, it must be through printed matter delivered by post.

“Our Pulpit Helps goes to very remote villages in the interior of India. Our Lord Jesus Christ is so compassionate that AMG is able to continue this magazine ministry. Praise be to the Lord God Almighty!”

Your support of AMG through reading, sharing, and (as the Lord leads) giving financially sustains the work of Disciple and the ministries and publications
around the world that use our material. Thank you!

To learn more about AMG’s media ministries around the world and how you can partner with us, please visit www.amginternational.org or call 1-800-251-7206.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International is a non-denominational, international missions agency based in Chattanooga, Tenn. AMG’s distinctive has always been its reliance on national workers to carry the Gospel in their own cultures. Today, they operate ministries in more than 30 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.
Marks of the Master
by the Old Scot

Welcome to Oceanus


Editor’s note: This column will be the last installment of “Marks of the Master”. Ted penned his last column several months before his passing in 2013, and we have now published nearly every one he wrote twice (some in Pulpit Helps and some in Disciple). As all of these are available online in our archives, we will no longer republish these columns in subsequent issues of Disciple. Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The wet cold would mean death, without protection. There would also be no protective blankets of snow for plants, but instead freezing and destructive winter flooding. And if the freeze point were merely a few degrees higher, the snow and ice would never melt in the colder parts of the world, and glaciers would again march south to cover much of our land.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sources:

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Editor’s note: Since this year began with a discussion of fiction in this space, we’ll end on that too.

If there is one name synonymous with adventure, it is Robinson Crusoe. He has become a cliché, invoked every time we have to endure isolation or the lack of modern technology, even seared in the popular imagination through his unfortunate inclusion in the “Gilligan’s Island” theme song. Some 300 years on, the outlines of his story are so well-known, it can be difficult to remember that he never existed, but for the imagination of Daniel Defoe. In fact, when Defoe published this work at the height of the colonial era, when British ships
commanded the high seas throughout the world, it quickly became so popular that even then, people assumed it to be an autobiographical travelogue from the “real” Crusoe.

In fact, *Robinson Crusoe* (originally titled, in the unimaginative publishing style of the time, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver’d by Pyrates*) is considered by many one of the earliest novels, giving rise to that art form that has shaped the modern English language Western man’s self-understanding ever since.
Prior to writing *Crusoe*, Defoe had been a struggling businessman and occasional political dissident. He stirred up society with critical essays and pioneered economic and political journalism during the period of turmoil following the death of King William III, Queen Anne’s persecution of the nonconformists, and the union of England and Scotland. His political writings briefly landed him in prison in 1703. That such a man came to be regarded by many simply as the writer of fantastical adventures (a sort of proto-Robert Louis Stevenson) is one of the great accidents of fame.

Of course, if one is to actually take up and read *Robinson Crusoe* (and not one of the many abridged versions) on its own merits, the story fits together much better. After reading it myself recently, I realized that most of us only think we know the story, and many others who do read it do so only to subject it to harsh postcolonial and
deconstructionist criticism. The actual story reads much less like an adventure (though it certainly is that) or a not-so-subtle statement of the superiority of British civilization to the rest of the world (though it has plenty of elements in that vein also), and more like the complex morality tale Defoe seems to have intended it as. The extended moral of the story could be distilled down to: “*Honor thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*” (Deut. 5:16).

I have seldom read such a Christian novel. Robinson goes to sea against the loving advice of his father, instantly regrets it, and just as quickly forgets his regret. He is tossed about by storms, enslaved by pirates, nearly killed by wild animals, and forced to settle in a foreign land. Still, he refuses to turn from his wandering (and
increasingly wicked) ways, and eventually becomes involved in a business scheme to buy African slaves for his farm. This is the endeavor that results in his most famous shipwreck and marooning on this uninhabited island. There, though, the isolation, mysterious provision of all his needs by God, and the Bible he procured from the ship work to soften his heart so that he cries out in repentance. The theological clarity of Crusoe’s prayer and understanding of salvation is astonishing. Even his later interaction with the cannibals and his “man Friday” are filled with an inner dialogue which mingles fear, trust in God’s sovereignty, and missionary zeal.

Again, most of us are familiar with the broad details of this famous book, so they do not bear repeating beyond this. My encouragement to you is to make time in the new year to engage with this classic. It is a delightful read, but far from simple
entertainment, it may strengthen your faith to walk through this (more) modern prodigal’s journey to redemption.

Justin Lonas

**Target:** All  
**Type:** Novel  
**Take:** Required Reading

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**News Update—December 2015**

**Chinese Christian Says He and His Church Do Not Fear Government Persecution**

Although the Chinese government has been cracking down on churches and Christians in China, one Chinese Christian says Christians in China are not afraid.
According to Christian Today, Zhang Tan who is a member of Huoshi church in Guiyang, Guizhou province, condemned the government’s decision to ban his church. In China, religious freedom is limited and all churches are banned except government-sanctioned ones.

Zhang said that he and other Christians do not want to be a part of a church that is associated with the government. “With genuine faith, and as a Three-Self Church in the truest sense, we do not want to participate in political organizations, particularly a political organization that committed many political mistakes and will not admit it, defiling the sanctity of the Lord’s Church,” he stated.

Zhang added that members of his church are involved in running the “Home of Love,” a place for orphaned children to receive care. “Why was this church, which
provided positive energy to the community, banned by authorities?” Zhang asked.

China is reportedly increasing its crackdown on churches and Christians, but Zhang says, “As a Christian and a member of Huoshi Church, I would say that we do not fear. We accept that God blesses us; we also accept that God allows suffering to happen.”

Christian Headlines

**Discovery of Ancient Marble Slab Proves Existence of Jewish Settlement**

Archaeologists say that the recent discovery of an ancient marble slab found on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee proves the existence of an ancient Jewish settlement in the area.

According to jns.org, the large slab is dated from around 500 A.D. and has an Aramaic inscription in Hebrew script. It was discovered while archaeologists worked on
an excavation site in the spot of the ancient town of Kursi.

The Hebrew script on the slab suggests that there was a Jewish or Jewish-Christian community in the region around 500 A.D. since the Hebrew alphabet was used by Jews and some Christians during this time. Only two words engraved on the slab were able to be read. The first was the word “Amen” and the second was the word “Marmaria,” which is thought to possibly refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Professor Michal Artizi, who supervised the excavation, said that archaeologists thought that Jews had inhabited Kursi, but the slab provides proof. “It is a rarity to discover proof of a Jewish presence on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Up to now, we had nothing proving that Jews settled on the lake’s shores during that era, other than in the town of Migdal,” Artzi said.
Jns.org reports that Kursi is associated with the town of the Garasenes or Gadarenes which is mentioned in the New Testament as the place where Jesus met a man with a legion of demons and commanded the evil spirits to go into a herd of swine (Matthew 8:28-34).

**Christian Headlines**

**Christian Family from Syria Being Held in Detention Camp in U.S.**

A Christian family who left Syria for the U.S. has been in a detention camp for more than a month. According to *Christian Today*, Samer and his family left Syria to come to Texas just days after the Paris attacks. The family was taken to an immigration center near San Antonio. Samer has a wife and two sons, ages 2 and 5.

“My very small children are in prison,” Samer told reporters. “I had no idea that the political climate was so against Syrian
refugees. If I had known that it was so terrible here I wouldn’t have brought my family.”

*Christian Today* reports that the family has undergone a background check but are not security threats. “They have followed every rule, completed every step in the process that results in asylum seekers being released to live with their families and told to report to court, but they are being treated differently…the saddest thing about these cases is that these people fled from a government that singled them out because of who they were—Christians,” said Jonathan Ryan, their attorney. “They came to our country seeking protection only to find that we are doing the same thing because of their national origin.”

The debate over refugee immigration into the U.S. has continued to grow. About half of the governors in the U.S. have said
they oppose settling Syrian refugees in their states.

U.S. evangelical leaders released a statement this week saying that “voices of fear” cannot dictate immigration policy. “Moments like these are when Christians cannot remain silent and still. In light of this crisis, we commit ourselves and our churches to actively care for and minister to global refugees with mercy and compassion, both here and abroad, based on God’s compelling concern for all people in need and especially refugees.”

Christian Headlines

Ugandan Policeman Killed after Converting to Christianity from Islam

A policeman in Uganda who converted to Christianity from Islam has been violently killed by Muslims. According to Christian Today, Ismail Kuloba, 43, was responding to a call to resolve a land dispute
when he was ambushed by 20 men who were lying in wait to kill him.

“They saw that Ismail had become an apostate,” reported a local Christian who remains anonymous for security reasons. This person witnessed the attack on Kuloba and said that the attackers began by throwing stones at Kuloba’s head. One of them then shot him in the head twice while they shouted “Allahu Akbar.” The unnamed witness asked for prayer for Christian converts in the region.

“We need prayers, as the Muslims are out to destroy people who converted to Christ in this area, especially those of us who have sacrificed to share the love of Christ to our fellow Muslims. We shall continue becoming the voice of the persecuted church, and the work of God will eventually emerge victorious against the evil forces of darkness.”
Local Christians reportedly burned down the house of one of Kuloba’s attackers, and locals fear that this will lead to further retaliation and violence.

Christian Headlines

ACLU Sues Christian Hospitals for Their Refusal to Perform Abortions

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) is volunteering to defend Trinity Catholic Hospitals after the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sued the Hospitals in October for their refusal to perform abortions. Trinity Health operates 86 facilities in 21 states.

According to thegatewaypundit.com, “Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys representing several pro-life, pro-women’s organizations asked a federal court Wednesday to allow the groups to intervene in defense of a Catholic hospital system that the American Civil Liberties Union sued in
October. The ACLU lawsuit is asking the court to force Trinity Health and its staff to commit abortions regardless of their religious and pro-life objections.”

The various organizations represented by ADF are Catholic Medical Association, Christian Medical and Dental Association, American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and Concerned Women for America.

“Patients should always have the freedom to choose a health care facility that respects life and to choose doctors who do not commit abortions,” stated ADF Senior Legal Counsel Matt Bowman.

Christian Headlines
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Intro.: Who is this Man? He is the Child of John 1, whose mysterious and obscure birth in Bethlehem marked the fulfillment of God’s plan to be “God with us.” Now we see Him revealed as King of kings astride His white stallion, judging the nations and waging war in heaven. Both scenes speak of the real Christmas, the Child and the King. Why did “the Word [become] flesh and [dwell] among us?”

I. He Became Flesh in Order to:
   A. Give sight to the blind, mobility to the lame, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead, to cleanse the lepers, and
bring the Good News to the poor (Matt. 11:4-5).
B. Pay the ransom for many (Matt. 20:28).
C. Save His own (though they received Him not) (John 1:11).
D. Come in His Father’s name (John 5:43).
E. Give abundant life (John 10:10).
F. Bring light into the darkness (John 12:46).
G. Bear witness to the truth (John 18:37).
K. Seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10).
L. Provide a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).
II. He Did Not Become Flesh to:
   A. Abolish but fulfill Scripture (Matt. 5:17).
   B. Call the righteous, but sinners (Matt. 9:13).
   C. Bring peace but a sword (Matt. 10:34).
   D. Be served but serve (Matt. 20:28).
   E. Destroy lives, but to save them (Luke 9:56).
   F. Do His own will but His Father’s (John 6:38).
   G. Judge the world but save it (John 12:47).

Application: We can see that the child Jesus came to give, not take or get. The most vital components for a proper view of Christmas are: 1) giving, which comes from loving; 2) loving, which comes from the heart which governs our thinking; 3) thinking, which comes from believing (faith); 4) believing, which “comes from hearing, and hearing
comes from the word concerning Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

J. A. Gillmartin

Our Stronghold: a Relationship with God
Psalm 27:1-14
Intro.: Quality of life depends upon the quality of relationships a person develops. David was: faced with enemies (27:2-3), forbidden at the Tabernacle (27:4), and followed by slander (27:12), but waited on the Lord. What are the elements that characterize a genuine relationship with God?
I. Confidence in God (27:1-3)
   A. What does confidence in God do for us?
      1. Confidence in His presence displaces our objections (27:1).
2. Confidence in His preservation disconcerts our opponents (27:2). 
3. Confidence in His peace defeats our odds (27:3). 

II. Communion with God (27:4-6) 
A. Our contemplation focuses on His fairness (27:4). 
B. Our concealment frustrates His foes (27:5). 
C. Our commendation fans His fame (27:6). 

III. Communication with God (27:7-12) 
A. Our prospect provides His means (27:7-8). 
B. Our prayer prompts His mercies (27:9-10). 
C. Our pliability proves His methods (27:11-12). 

IV. Confession for God (27:13-14) 
A. Our willingness precedes our witness (27:13).
B. Our waiting produces our winning (27:14).

Steve D. Eutsler

Illustrations

Mystery of Salvation

A psychiatrist who visited a rescue mission listened intently to the testimonies of many converts. The superintendent asked him if he would like to say a word.

“Tonight I have been given an opportunity to observe something I did not know existed anywhere. It has been my privilege to listen to the testimony of men who were glad to witness to what Christ had done for them. I know nothing about that, but I confess I cannot otherwise explain what has taken place in their lives. A few of these men I recognize. As drunkards, even as dope addicts, some of them have come under my observation at the hospital. But here they are, alive, well-dressed, delivered,
and in their right minds. I do not know how the miracle has been wrought, but of one thing I am confident—nothing in science can account for this change in them. That kind of Gospel is worth preaching to anyone, anywhere.”

Anonymous

The Christmas Gift Is Too Much

In ancient history we are told that Caesar had a friend to whom he once gave a munificent present. But when he offered it, the friend said: “This is too much for me to receive.” To which the emperor replied: “But it is not too much for me to give.”

After all our sinfulness and rebellion, God’s gift of pardon through Christ does seem too much for us to receive; but the riches of divine mercy are so great that it is not too much for Him to give. When God forgives, there is not one sin left unforgiven. Christmas was indeed too great a gift for
man, but it was not so for God. “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” (2 Cor. 9:15).

Anonymous

Bulletin Inserts
Editor’s note: Instead of including regular bulletin inserts this issue, here are a few stanzas from the hymn “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” and a link to a good meditation on these words.

Of the Father’s Love Begotten

Of the Father’s love begotten, 
Ere the worlds began to be, 
He is Alpha and Omega, 
He the source, the ending He, 
Of the things that are, that have been, 
And that future years shall see, 
Evermore and evermore!
O that birth forever blessed,  
When the virgin, full of grace,  
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,  
Bare the Savior of our race;  
And the Babe, the world’s Redeemer,  
First revealed His sacred face,  
evermore and evermore!

Christ, to Thee with God the Father,  
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee,  
Hymn and chant with high thanksgiving,  
And unwearied praises be:  
Honor, glory, and dominion,  
And eternal victory,  
Evermore and evermore!

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"The preacher has heard all about singing Christmas trees, and wonders why we can’t have a ‘preaching Christmas tree!’"
NO MORE NECK-TIES, PLEASE!

PASTOR'S CHRISTMAS WISH LIST
1. UNITY in my church
2. More prayer
3. Love
Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

Hidden Wisdom Bible Acrostic Answers

Jude (21): “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”

A. Proselyte
B. Oasis
C. Unsure
D. Geliloth
E. Hogarth
F. Error
G. Violent
H. Joffre
I. Uncle
J. Dukeofedorn
K. Ejection
L. Folkay

Father Abraham’s Answer Box Answers from p.22

3. Do mine own will, the will of him that sent me (John 6:38).
4. Draw; raise him up (John 6:44).
5. Spirit; flesh; spirit; life (John 6:63).
6. Do his will; God I speak of myself (John 7:17).
7. Appearance; righteous judgment (John 7:24).
8. Bespeak; above; this world; this world (John 8:21).
10. Was; are (John 8:58).
Hidden Wisdom and Father Abraham
By Mark Oshman
Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, March 2000

Father Abraham’s Question Box

By Mark Oshman

The Gospel of John, Part 3
Fill in the missing word(s):

1. "As long as I am in the world, I am ___ of the world" (John 9).
2. "Now we know that God heareth not ___ but if any man be a ___ and ___ him he heareth:" (John 9).
3. "I am ___ by me if any man ___ he shall be saved, and shall ___ and ___" (John 10).
4. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I ___ that I might ___" (John 10).
5. "My sheep ___ and I ___ them, and they ___ me" (John 10).
6. "Jesus said unto her, I am ___ and ___ he that believeth in me, though he were ___ yet shall he ___" (John 11).
7. "Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest ___ thou shouldest see ___" (John 11).
8. "For ___ always ye have with you; but ___ ye have not always" (John 12).
9. "If any man ___ me, let him ___ me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be; if any man ___ me, him will my Father ___" (John 12).
10. "Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me but on ___" (John 12)

Answers on page 25

Hidden Wisdom on next page
Hidden Wisdom: Bible Acrostic
by Mark A. Oshman

Solve the acrostic by using the clues to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, or instruction. Further, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. All quotations are from the King James Version. HAPPY SOLVING:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1C</th>
<th>2T</th>
<th>31</th>
<th>4H</th>
<th>5E</th>
<th>6K</th>
<th>7J</th>
<th>8A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14E</td>
<td>17H</td>
<td>18A</td>
<td>10C</td>
<td>20H</td>
<td>21F</td>
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<td>31G</td>
<td>32F</td>
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<td>37I</td>
<td>38H</td>
<td>39E</td>
<td>40F</td>
<td>41A</td>
<td>42G</td>
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<td>44D</td>
<td>45B</td>
<td>46J</td>
<td>47H</td>
<td>48I</td>
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<tr>
<td>50H</td>
<td>60B</td>
<td>61F</td>
<td>62A</td>
<td>63K</td>
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<td>65G</td>
<td>66E</td>
<td>67D</td>
<td>68K</td>
<td>69A</td>
<td>70C</td>
<td>71D</td>
<td>72G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 73H | 74C | 75B | 76J | 77G | 78K | 79F | 80A | 81J |

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**CLUES**

A. A person who carries a censer in a religious ceremony
18 8 41 60 80 52 33 62

B. "Look unto... the ___ of the pit whence ye are digged"
60 75 26 45

C. A son of Ammihud (1 Chr. 9)
70 19 74 1 57

D. An assemblage of parts which form a unified entity
49 15 71 30 67 44

E. A belief or statement generally accepted as true
39 24 51 5 66 16 58

F. A son of Meshi (1 Chr. 23)
40 61 54 32 36 21 9 79

G. Grotesquely odd
65 22 72 2 14 28 42 77 31 56

H. A location in the Jordan valley (Jud. 7; hyph.)
50 58 73 4 17 20 35 59 47 25 10

I. "Our iniquities ___ against us"
27 55 13 3 48 64 37

J. Extraordinarily large (colloq.)
34 12 81 29 46 7 33 76 23

K. As James wrote, no man can tame it!
68 11 75 43 5 63

Answers on page 25

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