THE LETTER KILLS
But the Spirit Gives Life

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Legalism is one of the most insidious, and deadliest, dangers which Christians face. It is insidious because it is a constant temptation which arises from the depths of our old, fleshly nature—hence it is a familiar, even comfortable urge. Yet it is the opposing enemy of the freedom Christ offers us (cf. Gal. 5). And if it is victorious, it will prove deadly—as Paul warns in 2 Corinthians 3:6;

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

The “letter,” of course, is the law. What law? The Law of Moses, certainly; but the application can and should be wider, to encompass any law devised by man or another religion. Basing one’s faith upon adhering to any set of laws or rules will inevitably lead to spiritual death. The letter kills!

The reason why death is the constant companion and ultimate successor of legalism is that following rules so easily gives one the conviction he is “building brownie points” with God. Any system of laws is based on works—and works cannot save us. Faith, and only faith, leads to salvation (cf. Eph. 2:8—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

How clear the Bible is on this point, but how stubbornly our untamed old nature yearns to placate God with rules and good works! Why? It’s a question of control: are we in control of our own destiny, or have we become slaves of God, following the lead of many of our Lord’s apostles?

While Paul fiercely championed the liberty we have in Christ, he himself used this liberty to willingly, lovingly become a doulos of Jesus (Rom. 1:1, Gal. 1:10, etc.). Doulos is translated “servant” in most of our versions, but its true meaning is “bond-servant” or simply “slave.” Paul was joined in this voluntary servitude by Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), John (Rev. 1:1), James (James 1:1), Jude (Jude 1:1), and by the Patriarch Moses (Rev. 15:3). These are the ones we know about with certainty, from the Bible. There were undoubtedly a host of others, from both the Old Testament days (David comes to mind, as well as Enoch) and the Christian era. Recall also that Paul urgently advised all who love the Lord to follow his example and manner of life (1 Cor. 11:1). He recommended becoming a willing doulos of Jesus Christ!

So it is a vital question of whether Jesus is really Lord of our lives, or whether we are negotiating with Him for salvation by offering Him sacrifices of our works, wealth, time, and efforts. For many, no price is too high, if only they are left as the ultimate masters of their little vessels.

“But the spirit giveth life.” This new life is manifested by love. God is love (1 John 4:8), and His Holy Spirit brings and nourishes God’s love in the hearts of His children. Without this love, we cannot be true children of God.

How can we know that this divine love lives within us? It reveals its presence by our attitudes and our actions: “If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12b). It is quite clear that we must love one another, but we simply cannot fulfill this command on our own. If we try, we are bound to fail or fall short. Before this love can be genuine and encompassing, we must love the One who brought us into being, who sustains us moment by moment, and who has destined us to be part of His eternal family.

This love for our Father is the basis of all our other loves, and they bloom and grow in direct relationship to our love for Him. Our Bible tells us that love is the greatest of God’s gifts (1 Cor. 13:13), and when we consider that love becomes the basis of all that we are and do in our new relationships, we see why this is so. Love toward God is the fountainhead of our obedience. If we love Him, we yearn to please Him in all things. Thus, as loving children, we find that in casting off the old law we are nevertheless not without law: we now answer to a new, higher law of love—the “royal law” (James 2:8).

It almost goes without saying that the transition from one basis of our life to another is a matter of growth—and this growth does not occur without struggle. To put it in blunter terms, perhaps more familiar to our experience, our old nature wages a relentless fight to hang onto its old
human beings choose to cooperate with the one who might be called the “Essence of Unfair”, Satan. The fall of our race is what has made the lives we now live on Earth subject to injustice. We have no one to blame but ourselves, both collectively and individually. If we let it stop there, the result could only be despair. We would face the prospect of an ongoing existence as evil beings, with no recourse but to forever wound and be wounded by each other and eventually die in that condition. Our self-earned unfair natures would see to this and all the while our lying egos would assure us that only we have been untreated unfairly. In a sense this is what the idea of “hell on earth” means.

But because of Jesus’ bearing the greatest unfairness of all, His wholly undeserved death and bearing of sin that was not His own, we who believe are on the road to ultimate redemption from the presence and results of our relational wrongs. This is true—there is no unfairness in the perfect unity of the Trinity. While some might interject here that it was unfair for God, the Father, to will His innocent Son to die the horrific death of the cross, the truth is that Jesus went to Calvary willingly. His Father did not bully Him into it. It was an act of love, designed to bring the potential for our forgiveness, and therein lies the rub—love and forgiveness trump unfairness.

The world bears iniquity only because the first human beings cry “unfair!” for a reason. We have an innate understanding that things should be equitable in relationships. This is no accident. Each of us is made in God’s image and so we have, somewhere deep down in our very being, the sense that ultimate reality is void of

repentance for sins that has led to abortive “conversions” and all kinds of evil which confound the living Church of Jesus Christ even now.

Parents who are seeking to train up their children in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4) need to reflect upon the Bible truth that their little darlings are not angels, that they were born tainted by the same potentially fatal sin-germ that has infected every son and daughter of Adam and Eve. That means they, too, must be led to repentance of their sins, if they are to become true children of God.

So, in conclusion, Jews who look to the Law of Moses for salvation, and Gentiles who look to any works-based religion as their hope of heaven, are following deceptive false paths that ultimately lead only to spiritual death.

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### Trumming Unfairness: The Forgiveness of Christ
By Shea Oakley

“Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person’s sin.”

There are doubtless numerous definitions of forgiveness. Because the imperative to forgive is so primary to living an authentic Christian life, believers through the centuries have tried to describe its essence in different ways. There are many facets of forgiveness that must be gleaned to make up an overall definition.

One of those facets is described well by the above quote from Christian author Neil Anderson. In fact, his characterization of granting pardon is one of the more profound in its simplicity. It is also one of the most difficult to accept. I suspect this is because “agreeing to live with the consequences” of someone else’s careless or malevolent wounding of our spirits seems like the height of unfairness. There is no way around the reality of that perceived iniquity, but we need to recognize that the world we live in is no longer fair (or rather, never was). We also have to leave the blame for this reality where it belongs, on our own race’s doorstep.

Human beings cry “unfair!” for a reason. We have an innate understanding that things should be equitable in relationships. This is no accident. Each of us is made in God’s image and so we have, somewhere deep down in our very being, the sense that ultimate reality is void of
inequity. Divine love is more powerful than unfairness and it can set free the human race from the captivity of our fallen unfair natures.

This brings us back to the question of how we may forgive. The reason Christians can forgive others is twofold. First, we come to know that “the consequences of another person’s sin” against us may not be worse than the consequences of our own sin against someone else. In short, we reckon with the fact that we are not always fair ourselves, both to others and to the perfectly fair God we claim to serve. Second, we who have put our faith in Christ know that the destructive consequences of other people’s sins in our lives are not permanent. Even if we do not experience complete healing in this life, God promises to “wipe away every tear” when our redemption is completed and we stand before Him in Glory.

In the meantime, because of this hope, we have access to the grace we need to bear temporary pain and to extend forgiveness to the people who caused that pain. By an act of grace-empowered will we can live with the consequences of their sin and our own, letting love and forgiveness trump unfairness, every time.

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Some Churches Need to Quit “Doing Evangelism”
By Joe McKeever

Evangelism and spiritual harvesting are not for everyone calling themselves followers of Jesus. Fruit-bearing is for the obedient.

Believers aiming to obey the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) should not miss one huge fact: One who is not living as a faithful disciple himself cannot make someone else a disciple of Jesus Christ. Only disciples make disciples. Only the faithful can bear fruit. To put it another way: No one can teach others to “obey all the things I have commanded you” who is not striving to obey those things himself.

The church which is rebellious, wayward, chronically immature, or systemically sick has no business trying to convert outsiders to what they are doing and how they are living. The sick church should get well first and then it will be able to help others.

Here are a few examples of churches I’ve observed (with names changed to protect the guilty) that have no business sending “soul-winning” or visitation teams into their community or hosting evangelistic crusades.

I. Until Sunnyside Church Leaders and Members Stop Fighting and Learn to Love One Another, They Need to Cancel All Outreach

I saw Sunnyside run off a pastor and half its members. They then proceeded to call a new preacher who walked in, saw all those empty pews and announced, “We need an evangelism program around here.” They scheduled a meeting, brought in an evangelist, papered the town with posters, and held their gatherings, all to no avail.

In the meantime, because of this hope, we have access to the grace we need to bear temporary pain and to extend forgiveness to the people who caused that pain. By an act of grace-empowered will we can live with the consequences of their sin and our own, letting love and forgiveness trump unfairness, every time.

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III. Until Bridgetown Church Clears up Its Terrible Reputation in the Community, Their Evangelism Efforts Will Be Fruitless

The members of Bridgetown Church, most of whom joined in the last couple of years, do not understand why the citizens in their town seem completely unmoved by their good works, their impressive growth, and their attempts at recruitment. Let them ask around; they’ll find out soon enough.

Sometime in the past—last year, last decade—that church was a cancer in the community. Its leaders were sick, its ministries self-serving and harsh, and its bills unpaid. When the pastor ventured out into the community, it was only to berate the city commission over its failures or the school board for their wickedness. God got rid of that pastor and some of its worst troublemakers died or moved away, but the reputation lingers. The memory of that ugly little congregation made a lasting impression.

I heard someone ask for prayer for her church one day: “We have found that we are located over a toxic site. Underneath, there are poisons that were buried in the soil a long time ago. We are going to have to deal with it—which we can’t afford—or move.” Bridgetown Church needs to dig down and locate the source of the toxins and deal with them. There are groups and businesses and individuals in the town who need an apology and then evidence of repentance.

Furthermore, they will need time. Bridgetown Church leaders need to humble themselves before their community and find what it means to become servants. In time, if they remain faithful, God will send them a harvest. But it will be in His time. The question remains whether they will be patient and steadfast in their works.

IV. Until North Smithfield Church Opens Its Doors to Everyone, They Do Not Need to Be Inviting Anyone

North Smithfield’s sign is lying. That board out front says “Everyone Welcome.” They aren’t. Certain minority groups are not welcome at North Smithfield Church. The leadership first, and eventually the membership, has shown a prejudice against African-Americans, Latinos, the homeless, illegal aliens, and the chronically poor. Don’t miss this: it’s not just non-whites they reject; they are suspicious of anyone not like themselves.

We may rejoice that the Holy Spirit will not be sending converts to this bunch. The last thing the world needs is more like them.

V. Until Castle Road Church Begins a Foundational Work of Ministry Which Will Legitimize Its Evangelism, They Need to Hold Off

A church has to earn the right to be heard in the community when it speaks of spiritual things. Jesus told Nicodemus, “If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe when I tell you heavenly things?” (John 3:12). What we do and say in the earthly realm lays the groundwork for us to be heard regarding the spiritual.

This week, a woman I know who is highly critical of what she calls “Fundamental” Christians (people I call “Bible-believers”) posted on Facebook a photo of a preacher handing out Bibles to children in Haiti. She lambasted him for not giving them food and clothing. In the comments which followed, some of her “friends” resorted to profanity to condemn such misguided ministries.

I’m usually conflicted as to whether to risk posting a comment into such an atmosphere. What I said was, “No doubt from your comments, you are heavily involved in feeding and clothing Haitians.” I hoped she would get a feel for her own hypocrisy. Not very likely, I know.

But it will be patient and steadfast in its works.

What I wanted to say and didn’t was that no one knows all that evangelist may have done to feed and clothe those children of Haiti. All the article showed was him distributing Bibles. I’ll tell you this: Christian groups have fed and clothed a thousand Haitians for every one helped by skeptics and hostiles.

We feed and clothe for a hundred reasons: it’s the right thing to do, it meets a genuine need, Jesus would have done it, the Spirit lays the groundwork for us to be heard regarding the spiritual things.

Conclusion: My Story

I was in my first church after seminary, Emmanuel Baptist in Greenville, Mississippi. This collection of members had come in from other churches, I had been told, and many were unhappy and disgruntled. Being young, idealistic, and ignorant, I scheduled a revival and invited Don Womack of Memphis to preach a weeklong meeting. The meeting was awful. Our attendance grew weaker and weaker. Wednesday night, one child responded to the invitation and joined the church. Other than that, nothing.

At the same time, there was bickering among members, and rumors were flying about their new young preacher (me!) trying to stir up racial strife in the community, and such as that.

Following the final sermon and the fruitless invitation time, Evangelist Womack handed the service back to me.

I remember what I said like it was last week. “People, I don’t know what to do. Brother Don and I have worked so hard this week. But you have not supported this meeting with your attendance and support. I’m looking
around at quite a few people who have told me you intend to join this church and several of you who need to walk this aisle and give your life to Christ. But you did nothing today.

“...And I just want to say, I don’t blame you. I wouldn’t join this church either. There is a bad spirit in this congregation. And God is not going to send revival until we get our hearts right with each other and then make things right with one another. Folks, the Bible says ‘It is time for judgment to begin at the House of God’ (1 Pet. 4:17).”

And, little by little, day by day, God broke through that log jam and sent a spirit of revival to that church. People who belonged to Emmanuel Baptist Church in 1968-70 still talk about it. This little writing goes forth with the prayer and hope that you find something here that will help your church.

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**Exegetically Speaking**—by Spiros Zodhiates

**The Parable of the Talents—Part 2**

**Matthew 25:24-30**

*From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, 2006, AMG Publishers*

Whereas the first two servants diligently obeyed their master’s wishes, earning a 100 percent return on their charges and receiving the master’s commendation “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord,” the third servant presented a different case.

[24-25] “Then he which received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew (from ginōskō [1097], to know experientially) that you are a hard (sklērōs [4642], callous, harsh, inconsiderate) man, reaping (from therizō [2325], to harvest) where you have not sown (from speírō [4687], to sow) and gathering (from sunágō [4863], to assemble, bring together) where (hóthen [3606], from whence) you have not strewed (from diaskorpizō [1287], to scatter). And I was afraid (from phobēō [5399], to frighten) and went and hid your talent in the earth: lo, there you have what is yours” (a.t.).

What exactly was the complaint, and what was the excuse? The servant complained that the lord was “callous” or inconsiderate (sklērōs) because he reaped where he did not sow; that is, he expected others to do all his work. The servant resented the thought that his master would profit from his work, and he resented the master for it. But he completely ignored the fact that the capital by which he could gain anything came from his master.

He also had a duty as a slave to do what his owner asked him to do. His master simply told him in effect, “I can’t be around to oversee the investment of my money; I want you to invest it for me while I am away.” Once again a person claims to be God’s servant but does not really know Him at all. He thinks he knows God from experience (from ginōskō), but he has no real understanding of God or His character.

In the parable, this servant was prejudged already by the success of the first two servants. Also, he was guilty of blaming his lord, as if a master answers to a servant. But he had no excuse for hiding the money when a bank was available. In the parable of the pounds, one servant amassed a 1,000 percent gain: “Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds” (Luke 19:16). A second servant produced a gain of 500 percent (19:18). Given these results, the third servant had no valid basis for fear or excuse for nonperformance. Obviously, he was strong enough to work since he dug a hole and buried the talent.

[26, 27] The lord’s response was wise and just: “His lord answered and said unto him, Wicked (from ponérōs [4190]) and slothful (from okhnérōs [3636], lazy) servant, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I have not scattered. It was morally necessary (from deî [1163], it must be), therefore (oún [3767]), to place (from bállō [906], to cast or place; the aorist indicates a one-time placement) my money (from argúrion [694], silver coin, talent, money, investment) with the exchangers, and then at my coming I would have received my principle with interest (tókos [5110])” (a.t.).

The master called him a wicked and lazy servant because he did not act properly according to his own words. The master’s words, “You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I have not scattered,” with the following statement could be paraphrased: “If you really believed that I was a harsh master, you should have been afraid to deliberately disobey me.” The master then pointed out that the servant could have invested the money in a bank if he were really afraid of losing it in a business venture.
Burying or hiding the money was inexcusable. Even if he did not want to purchase and work at a business, he could have made a simple deposit in an interest-bearing account that involved no subsequent work. Of course, in human investing, there is always the slim possibility that a bank may go bankrupt and the investment be lost. But Christians who really know their Lord and have faith in Him should never have such a fear: God will never allow any effort we make for Him to go unrewarded.

Notice that the lord calls it “my money,” as does the servant—“your talent” (v. 25). The argurion, silver, was understandably on loan, and it properly belonged in a bank if not exchanged for capital goods that could be increased. This is why the servant’s claim was an utterly indefensible excuse. Who buries money? There is an implicit approval of bank commerce here. In fact, the legal charging of interest on loans was inexcusable. Why? Because it was payment for something already achieved. Who bears interest? The one who has already sown. This is why the lord calls it “my money.”

The master did not bother refuting the accusation that he was a “hard man, reaping where [he] hast not sown.” In fact, he assumed the truth of the premise: “You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest.”

By appealing to the bank sector, the lord refuted the servant with his own premise. There was an institution where the servant could have leveraged his lord’s creative power in his favor without any effort on his part—a bank! The money just sits there and earns interest; no effort is involved following the initial deposit. To not perform this minimal act is sheer laziness.

[28–30] While it was not too late to learn the lesson, it was too late to apply it. Judgment followed: “Take (from airo [142], to pick up and take away), therefore, the talent from him, and give it to him that has ten talents. For to the one who has, all things shall be given (from didomi [1325], to give voluntarily), and he shall be made abundant (from perisseui [4052], to abound, gain): but from him that has not shall also be taken away (from airo even that which he has (here, the original talent)” (a.t.).

This last verse is an explanatory parenthesis between two imperatives. The original Scriptures had no punctuation marks. Verse 30 now reverts to the command of the lord: “And cast ye (from ekballo [1544], to cast out, from ek [1537], out of from within or among; and ballo [906], to cast, put) the unprofitable (from achreio [888] from a [1], without; and chreia [5532], utility, usefulness; thus, useless) servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Notice the analogy with the parable of the profitable and unprofitable servants in Matthew 24:45–51. As the lord in that parable promised the faithful servant he would be ruler over all his goods, so in this parable the master promised the faithful servants that they would rule over many things. And as the lord in that parable commanded that the wicked servant who beat his fellow servants should be cut asunder and placed with the hypocrites where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth, in this parable the wicked and slothful servant also was cast into outer darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The only appropriate place for a wicked, lazy, valueless servant is outer darkness. Some of the frustration expressed in “weeping and gnashing of teeth” may be due to the comparative success of the two other servants and the consequent reallocation of the one talent, the same frustration the isolated rich man experienced in Hades while watching Lazarus and Abraham together across a vast chasm (Luke 16:19–31).

All three occurrences of the expression “outer darkness” are in Matthew (here and 8:12; 22:13), who, more than any other Gospel writer, highlights Jewish apocalyptic and the subsequent allocation of the kingdom to Gentiles: “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness (skotos [4655]): there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11-12). “The kingdom of God (much more than a talent) shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof” (Matt. 21:43).

In Matthew 22:13, we find a similar command concerning the one who attempted to enter the wedding feast without the proper garment: “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness (skotos [4655]): there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Skotos means spiritual darkness and eternal misery (Matt. 4:16; 8:12; Luke 1:79; Acts 26:18; 1 Thess. 5:4; 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 13).

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Following God—by Wayne Barber

Strengthen the Weak: Leading by Example

Hebrews 12:12 says, “Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble.” The author of Hebrews may have Isaiah 35:3 in mind when he wrote this: “Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble.”

The context of Hebrews 12 is a statement that God always loves us. He is not out to get us when we face difficult times because He already has us in His fold if we have received Christ into our hearts. He is not punishing us with hard times. There is such difference between punishment and discipline! God’s discipline is always out of His love, as He is constantly correcting and instructing us in life’s classroom.

Well, because God’s discipline is out of His love and we can be assured of that from His Word, the author of Hebrews says here, “Therefore...” Don’t you love the “therefores” in Scripture? Always look to see what they are “there for”. He says, “Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak...” Watch out for one another. The word “strengthen” comes from the Greek word meaning “to make straight,” which was used in medical writings to refer to setting dislocated parts of the body. It has the idea of reinvigoration—making something (or someone) usable again so that it can fulfill its purpose!

“Strengthen the hands that are weak...” The word translated “hands” originally meant the whole arm, from the shoulder to the end of the fingers. The word for “weak” here implies an arm hanging limp by one’s side. It is a picture of one who is totally defeated and slumping with arms hanging down to the side. To further paint his picture of weakness, he adds “...and the knees that are feeble.” The word “feeble” comes from the Greek word meaning “to loose alongside or to be paralyzed”—we get our word “paralytic” from this same root.

When you combine these two phrases, we have a clear picture of one who is just about to faint; who can’t work and can’t walk. We are to be on the lookout for those who are all around us that are at this desperate place in their spiritual walk. We are to strengthen them not shun them from our fellowship!

But how do we go about this? First of all, we begin by correcting our own walk. The writer continues, “And make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed” (Heb. 12:13). Before we ever reach out to another believer, we need to make certain that our own walk is what it ought to be. This reminds me of what Paul said in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”

In light of the fact that there were those who were weak and about to give up, the author of Hebrews says make straight paths for your feet. This is a quote from Proverbs 4:26: “Watch the path of your feet and all your ways will be established.” The word “paths” in Hebrews 12:12 translates the word for a “wheel track”. In other words, “stay in your own lane;” keep your walk “between the lines” so that others may follow. The word “straight” needs to be taken figuratively, as in to stand spiritually upright as opposed to crooked. The race is on, so run the right way bowed and surrendered to Christ and to His Word! Live in such a way as to make it clear for others to see how to follow.

For instance, in track competitions, the best way to encourage and strengthen others on your team who are running with you is to run in your own lane the way you are supposed to run, and then those running beside and behind you will pick up the pace. Paul said it beautifully in Philippians 3:17, “Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

So our passage tells us to make our paths straight, “so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.” This describes someone who is already falling back and is already weakened. The danger now is that he will be put out of joint, get off the track, and fall out of the race. We must run the race with our eyes on Jesus, trusting Him and Him alone no matter what comes, so that we can strengthen and encourage the one who is weak to be healed spiritually and get back on the right track.

The word “healed” translates a Greek word meaning “to be restored.” We don’t want to end up on the injured list ourselves because we didn’t run straight. Today, when you look around you and see those who are falling by the wayside, are you part of the problem or part of the solution? What is your walk like? You can’t encourage and help others until you yourself are walking the way you should walk.

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Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

The Fruit of the Spirit Is: Humility

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Humility (translated “kindness” in most lists of the fruits) may be the most elusive of all personality traits. If you think you have it, you probably don’t. If you think you don’t, you may well do. Other people are better authorities on whether you possess it, yet they’re not infallible.

The Bible says “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). We’re told to humble ourselves (1 Peter 5:6), but I can’t find anywhere in the Bible where we are encouraged to ask the Lord to humble us. For good reason, I’m thinking.

When God humbles you, He does it with a strong hand. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, potentate of Babylon, once he decided that all the gains God had given him were the result of his own military genius, God decided to send him a healthy dose of humiliation. Next day, Nebuchadnezzar was out in the pasture, munching grass alongside the cows. Eventually, when he came to his senses and gave God the praise, the Lord restored his sanity (Daniel 4).

Lesson number one about humility: “You don’t want God humbling you!” What are the other lessons in humility? Sorry. I don’t know. The last impression I want to leave from this article is that Joe thinks he’s an authority on humility. After all, I am well aware that these articles flood the internet with my name out front and, often, just before my name comes that “Doctor”. I groan (sometimes, not all the time) at that. Doesn’t sound like humility to me.

Humility seems to be a matter of perspective. It’s how you see yourself in relation to the Lord Himself and the people around you. Some people see themselves as humble before God but “something else” before other people. That’s not humility, but self-deception.

It takes both. A humble person sees himself as created by God, as dependent on Him for the very air he breathes, as the Father of the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, and as having been incredibly merciful to him. He sees himself as a lot like the people around him (see Isaiah 6:5), as linked with them, as owing a great deal to them, and their servants for Jesus sake (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Paul wrote to the church at Rome, “I say through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). He continued, “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (12:10). And again, “Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion” (12:16).

Humility is a matter of balance. Neither thinking too highly or too lowly of themselves, believers in the Lord Jesus go forward with their eyes on Him and their hearts set on serving Him by helping the people they see all around. Have you ever noticed that the Scriptures address pride a lot more than inferiority? Why is this?

I think the answer is that we humans have far more trouble from over-rating than from undervaluing ourselves. In that 12th chapter of Romans, I can’t find a word that tells people to think bigger and higher of themselves, but at least three times believers are told to adjust their tendency toward a too-big self-concept in order to keep their balance.

Let’s admit the obvious here: People in the ministry have an ongoing battle with the ego. Maybe it’s because we are, ahem, performing in front of crowds. Perhaps it’s because people come to us for counsel and direction and look to us for insights from the Word of God. In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses this very matter: “I’ve written to you that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:6-7).

Since most of these articles are directed toward men and women in the ministry, I’d like to mention a few specifics that can be encouraging your ego to expand rather than to stay healthy.

1) The plaques on your wall. If your office wall looks like a shrine to yourself and your accomplishments, I suggest you box most of that stuff up. Then a year from now, take it to the trash dump (and save your family the trouble of having to do it when you pass on to glory).

2) The titles by which people call you. One of the first surprises I received on meeting Billy Graham is that he said, “Please call me Billy.” And not Doctor. Not that I did, of course. But I did go so far as to calling him “Brother Billy.” Titles can create barriers between people. I like to tell people, “When your first name is Joe, it suggests a rocking chair on the front porch. There’s nothing formal about it. (My name is not Joseph but Joe Neil.) The name ‘Joe’ invites familiarity. So, come on in, take off your shoes, and get comfortable.”

3) The names of the employees around you. Learn the names of your custodial staff, of every employee,
and learn about their children. Write notes on birthdays. One of the ministry boards on which I have the privilege of serving is run by a president with a zillion things on his agenda. But each year, my wife and I receive birthday notes written personally by him. I know no secretary wrote it because no one else on earth writes this badly! But it’s a humble touch and I appreciate it.

4) Never asking for the ministerial discount. I don’t even know if they have these any more. They used to. I’ve seen pastors get upset because the hospital did not have reserved parking for ministers. Or upset because someone parked in their reserved spot at church. Not good. This is one reason most of the preachers I know do not wear “clergy collars.” Those things seem to set us apart and draw attention to ourselves.

When stopped by the highway patrol, do not—repeat, do not!—work into the conversation that you are a minister on your way to some important function. It won’t help and it could hurt. That officer walks away thinking the clergy see themselves as a privileged class—not good. It’s much better for people to discover accidentally that you are a minister. Let them be pleasantly surprised to learn it, having first come to the conclusion that you are “an all-right guy.”

Why do we want to be humble in the first place?
Answer: So God can use us and eventually exalt us. So people will trust us and we can serve them. Even the Almighty has trouble using an instrument that is resistant because it has its own agenda or thinks of itself as too grand for such a lowly use; He showed us how He deals with those who reject His control in Nebuchadnezzar.

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Jewels from Past Giants

What Do You Think of Christ?
By D. L. Moody


“What think ye of Christ?” (Matt. 22:42). I suppose there is no one here who has not thought more or less about Christ. You have heard about Him, and read about Him, and heard men preach about Him. For eighteen hundred years men have been talking about Him and thinking about Him; and some have their minds made up about who He is, and doubtless some have not. And although all these years have rolled away, this question comes up, addressed to each of us, today, “What think ye of Christ?”

I do not know why it should not be thought a proper question for one man to put to another. If I were to ask you what you think of any of your prominent men, you would already have your mind made up about him. If I were to ask you what you thought of your noble queen, you would speak right out and tell me your opinion in a minute. If I were to ask about your prime minister, you would tell me freely what you had for or against him.

And why should not people make up their minds about the Lord Jesus Christ, and take their stand for or against Him? If you think well of Him, why not speak well of Him and arrange yourselves on His side? And if you think ill of Him, and believe Him to be an impostor, and that He did not die to save the world, why not lift up your voice and say you are against Him? It would be a happy day for Christianity if men would just take sides—if we could know positively who is really for Him and who is against Him.

It is of very little importance what the world thinks of anyone else. The queen and the statesman, the peers and the princes, must soon be gone. Yes; it matters little, comparatively, what we think of them. Their lives can only interest a few; but every living soul on the face of the earth is concerned with this Man. The question for the world is, “What think ye of Christ?”

I do not ask you what you think of the Established Church, or of the Presbyterians, or the Baptists, or the Roman Catholics; I do not ask you what you think of this minister or that, of this doctrine or that; but I want to ask you what you think of the living person of Christ.

I should like to ask, was He really the Son of God—the great God-Man? Did He leave Heaven and come down to this world for a purpose? Was it really to seek and to save? I should like to begin with the manger, and to follow Him up through the thirty-three years He was here upon earth. I should ask you what you think of His coming into this world and being born in a manger when it might have been a palace; why He left the grandeur and the glory of heaven, and the royal retinue of angels; why He passed by palaces and crowns and dominion and came down here alone.
I should like to ask you what you think of Him as a teacher. He spoke as never man spoke. I should like to take Him up as a preacher. I should like to bring you to that mountainside that we might listen to the words as they fall from His gentle lips. Talk about the preachers of the present day! I would rather a thousand times be five minutes at the feet of Christ than listen a lifetime to all the wise men in the world. He used to hang truth upon anything. Yonder is a sower, a fox, a bird, and He just gathers the truth around them, so that you cannot see a fox a sower or a bird, without thinking what Jesus said. Yonder is a lily of the valley; you cannot see it without thinking of His words, “They toil not, neither do they spin.”

He makes the little sparrow chirping in the air preach to us. How fresh those wonderful sermons are, how they live today! How we love to tell them to our children, how the children love to hear! “Tell me a story about Jesus,” how often we hear it; how the little ones love His sermons! No storytaker in the world will ever interest them like the stories that He told. And yet how profound He was; how He puzzled the wise men; how the scribes and the Pharisees would never fathom Him! Oh, do you not think He was a wonderful preacher?

I should like to ask you what you think of Him as a physician. A man would soon have a reputation as a doctor if he could cure as Christ did. No case was ever brought to Him but what He was a match for. He had but to speak the word and disease fled before Him. Here comes a man covered with leprosy.

“Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean,” he cried.

“I will,” says the Great Physician, and in an instant the leprosy is gone. The world has hospitals for incurable diseases; but there were no incurable diseases with Him.

Now, see Him in the little home at Bethany, binding up the wounded hearts of Martha and Mary, and tell me what you think of Him as a comforter. He is a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless. The weary may find a resting place upon that breast, and the friendless may reckon Him their friend. He never varies; He never fails; He never dies. His sympathy is ever fresh; His love is ever free. Oh, widow and orphans; oh, sorrowing and mourning; will you not thank God for Christ the comforter?

But these are not the points I wish to take up. Let us go to those who knew Christ, and ask what they thought of Him. If you want to find out what a man is nowadays, you inquire about him from those who know him best. I do not wish to be partial; we will go to His enemies, and to His friends. We will ask them, “What think ye of Christ?” We will ask His friends and His enemies. If we only went to those who liked Him, you would say:

“Oh, he is so blind; he thinks so much of the man that he can’t see His faults. You can’t get anything out of him unless it be in His favor; it is a one-sided affair altogether.”

So we shall go in the first place to His enemies, to those who hated Him, persecuted Him, cursed and slew Him. I shall put you in the jury-box, and call upon them to tell us what they think of Him.

First, among the witnesses, let us call upon the Pharisees. We know how they hated Him. Let us put a few questions to them. “Come, Pharisees, tell us what you have against the Son of God, What do you think of Christ?”

Hear what they say! “This man receiveth sinners.” What an argument to bring against Him! Why, it is the very thing that makes us love Him. It is the glory of the gospel. He receives sinners. If He had not, what would have become of us? Have you nothing more to bring against Him than this? Why, it is one of the greatest compliments that was ever paid Him.

Once more, when He was hanging on the tree, you had this to say to Him, “He saved others, but He could not save Himself and save us too.” So He laid down His own life for yours and mine. Yes, Pharisees, you have told the truth for once in your lives! He saved others. He died for others. He was a ransom for many; so it is quite true what you think of Him—He saved others; Himself He cannot save.

Now, let us call upon Caiaphas. Let him stand up here in his flowing robes; let us ask him for his evidence. “Caiaphas, you were chief priest when Christ was tried; you were president of the Sanhedrin; you were in the council-chamber when they found Him guilty; you yourself condemned Him. Tell us; what did the witnesses say? On what grounds did you judge Him? What testimony was brought against Him?”

“He hath spoken blasphemy,” says Caiaphas. “He said, ‘Hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.’ When I heard that, I found Him guilty of blasphemy; I rent my mantle and condemned Him to death.” Yes, all that they had against Him was that He was the Son of God; and they slew Him for the promise of His coming for His bride!

Now let us summon Pilate. Let him enter witness-box. “Pilate, this man was brought. before you; you examined Him; you talked with Him face to face; ‘What think you of Christ?’”

“I find no fault in him,” says Pilate. “He said he was the King of the Jews [just as He wrote it over the cross]; but I find no fault in him.” Such is the testimony of the man who examined Him! And, as He stands there the center of a Jewish mob, there comes along a man elbowing his way in haste. He rushes up to Pilate, and, thrusting out his hand, gives him a message. He tears it open; his face turns pale as he reads, “Have thou nothing to do with this just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him.” It is from Pilate’s wife—her
testimony to Christ. You want to know what His enemies thought of Him? You want to know what a heathen thought? Well, here it is, “no fault in him”; and the wife of a heathen, “this just man.”

And now look—in comes Judas. He ought to make a good witness. Let us address him. “Come, tell us, Judas, ‘What think ye of Christ?’ You knew the Master well; you sold Him for thirty pieces of silver; you betrayed Him with a kiss; you saw Him perform those miracles; you were with Him in Jerusalem. In Bethany when He summoned up Lazarus, you were there. What think you of Him?”

I can see him as he comes into the presence of the chief priests; I can hear the money ring as he dashes it upon the table, “I have betrayed innocent blood!” Here is the man who betrayed Him, and this is what he thinks of Him! Yes, those who were guilty of His death put their testimony on record that He was an innocent man.

Let us take the centurion who was present at the execution. He had charge of the Roman soldiers. He told them to make Him carry His cross; he had given orders for the nails to be driven into His feet and hands, for the spear to be thrust in His side. Let the centurion come forward.

“Centurion, you had charge of the executioners; you saw that the order for His death was carried out; you saw Him die; you heard Him speak upon the cross. Tell us, ‘What think you of Christ?’” Hark! Look at him; he is smiting his breast as he cries, “Truly, this was the son of God!”

I might go to the thief upon the cross, and ask what he thought of Him. At first he railed upon Him and reviled Him. But then he thought better of it: “This man hath done nothing amiss,” he says.

I might go further. I might summon the very devils themselves and ask them for their testimony. Have they anything to say of Him? Why, the very devils called Him the Son of God! In Mark we have the unclean spirits crying, “Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God.” Men say, “Oh, I believe Christ to be the Son of God, and because I believe it intellectually I shall be saved.” I tell you the devils did that. And they did more than that; they trembled.

Let us bring in His friends. We want you to bear their evidence. Let us call that prince of preachers. Let us hear the forerunner; no one ever preached like this man—this man who drew all Jerusalem and all Judea into the wilderness to hear him; this man who burst upon the nations like the flash of a meteor. Let John the Baptist come with his leather girdle and his hairy coat, and let him tell us what he thinks of Christ.

His words, though they were echoed in the wilderness of Palestine, are written in the Book forever, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!” This is what John the Baptist thought of him. “I bear record that He is the Son of God.” No wonder he drew all Jerusalem and Judea to him, because he preached Christ.

And whenever men preach Christ, they are sure to have plenty of followers.

Let us bring in Peter, who was with Him on the mount of transfiguration, who was with Him the night He was betrayed. “Come, Peter, tell us what you think of Christ. Stand in this witness-box and testify of Him. You denied Him once. You said with a curse that you did not know Him. Was it true, Peter? Don’t you know Him?”

“Know Him!” I can imagine Peter saying, “It was a lie I told then. I did know Him.” Afterward I can hear him charging home their guilt upon these Jerusalem sinners. He calls Him “both Lord and Christ.” Such was the testimony on the day of Pentecost. “God had made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ.” And tradition tells us that when they came to execute Peter, he felt he was not worthy to die in the way his Master died, and he requested to be crucified with his head downward. So much did Peter think of Him!

Now let us hear from the beloved disciple, John. He knew more about Christ than any other man. He had laid his head on his Savior’s bosom. He had heard the throbbing of that loving heart. Look into His gospel if you wish to know what He thought of Him.

Matthew writes of Him as the royal king come from His throne. Mark writes of Him as the servant, and Luke of the Son of Man. John takes up this pen, and, with one stroke, forever settles the question of Unitarianism. He goes right back before the time of Adam: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Look into Revelation. He calls Him “the bright and the morning star.” So John thought well of Him—because he knew Him well.

We might bring in Thomas, the doubting disciple. “You doubted Him, Thomas? You would not believe He had risen, and you put your fingers into the wound in His side. What do you think of Him?”

“My Lord and my God!” says Thomas.

Then go over to Decapolis and you will find Christ has been there casting out devils. Let us call the men of that country and ask what they think of Him. “He hath done all things well,” they say.

But we have other witnesses to bring in. Take the persecuting Saul, once one of the worst of His enemies. Breathing out threatening he meets Him: “Saul, Saul why persecutest thou me?” says Christ. He might have added, “What have I done to you? Have I injured you in any way? Did I not come to bless you? Why do you treat Me thus, Saul?” And then Saul asks, “Who art thou, Lord?”

“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.” You see, He was not ashamed of His name, although He had been in heaven; “I am Jesus of Nazareth.” What a change did that one interview make to Saul! “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dross that I may win Christ.” Such a testimony to the Savior!
But I shall go still further. I shall go away from earth into the other world. I shall summon the angels and ask what they think of Christ. They saw Him in the bosom of the Father before the world was. Before the dawn of creation, before the morning stars sang together, He was there. They saw Him leave the throne and come down to the manger. What a scene for them to witness!

Ask these heavenly beings what they thought of Him then. For once they are permitted to speak; for once the silence of heaven is broken. Listen to their song on the plains of Bethlehem, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” He leaves the throne to save the world. Is it a wonder the angels thought well of Him?

Then there are the redeemed saints—they that see Him face to face. Here on earth He was never known, no one seemed really to be acquainted with Him; but He was known in that world where He had been from the foundation. What do they think of Him there? If we could hear from heaven, we should hear a shout which would glorify and magnify His name. We are told that when John was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and being caught up, he heard a should around him, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands and thousands of voices, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!” Yes, He is worthy of all this. Heaven cannot speak too well of Him. Oh, that earth would take up the echo and join with heaven in singing thus!

But there is still another witness, a higher one still. Some think that the God of the Old Testament is the Christ of the New. But when Jesus came out to Jordan, baptized by John, there came a voice from heaven. God the Father spoke. It was His testimony to Christ: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Ah, yes! God the Father thinks well of the Son. And if God is well pleased with Him, so ought we to be.

If the sinner and God are well pleased with Christ, then the sinner and God can meet. The moment you say, as the Father said, “I am well pleased with Him,” and accept Him, you are wedded to God. Will you not believe the testimony? Will you not believe this witness; this last of all, the Lord of hosts, the King of kings Himself? Once more He repeats it, so that we may all know it. With Peter and James and John, on the Mount of Transfiguration, He cries again, “This is My beloved Son; hear Him.” And that voice went echoing and reechoing through Palestine, through all the earth from sea to sea; yes, that voice is echoing still: “Hear Him! Hear Him!”

My friend, will you hear Him today? Hark! What is He saying to you? “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Will you not think well of such a Savior?

Will you not believe in Him? Will you not trust in Him with all your heart and mind? Will you not live for Him?

If He laid down His life for us, is it not the least we can do to lay down ours for Him? If He bore the cross and died on it for me, ought I not to be willing to take it up for Him? Oh, have we not reason to think well of Him? Do you think it is right and noble to lift up your voice against such a Savior? Do you think it is just to cry, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Oh, may God help all of us to glorify the Father, by thinking well of His only begotten Son!

Dwight Lyman Moody (1837-1899), the evangelist, was born at Northfield, Massachusetts. As a businessman he brought to his evangelistic work exceptional tact, initiative, and executive ability, but the main source of his power lay in his knowledge of the Bible, his constant companion. In preaching he largely disregarded form, and thought little of the sermon as such. His one overwhelming and undeviating purpose was to lead men to Christ. Henry Drummond characterized him in these words: “If eloquence is measured by its effect upon an audience and not by its balanced sentences and cumulative periods, then this is eloquence of the highest sort. In sheer persuasiveness Mr. Moody has few equals, and rugged as his preaching may seem to some, there is in it a pathos of a quality which few orators have ever reached, and an appealing tenderness which not only wholly redeems it, but raises it almost to sublimity.” (From notes in The World’s Great Sermons.)
What keeps this magnificent hunter from being a mere naked, helpless, and flightless creature? Feathers! In fact, we can hardly imagine a bird without feathers—unless it’s a chicken ready for the cooking pot! So essential are feathers to a bird that it could not long exist without them.

So let’s take a closer look at a feather—perhaps one molted from our hawk. The first thing we notice is how light it is. Just a puff of breath would blow it out of our hand. But at the same time, how sturdy it is! Its spine is composed of material much like horn: tough yet flexible. Its surface is also ridged for greater strength. If we cut into the spine, or central shaft, we would find a sturdy outer shell and plenty of internal bracing material for strength—but mostly we would find empty space: strength and lightness combined. That lightness is very important to a bird, for when it flaps its wings to fly it must lift and keep on lifting every ounce of weight.

Next notice the springy vanes which come out of both sides of the spine. How perfectly aligned they are! What keeps them that way? If you inspect the tips of these vanes, you may be able to see tiny barbs or hooks. These hook together, much like the halves of a zipper, to keep each vane in line. Should some barbs become unhooked, the bird can repair the damage by preening—running its beak down the feather.

Now notice that each vane is fringed on both sides. There is a special reason for that, too: When each vane is in its proper place, the entire wing feather is a very efficient air scoop. If we could see this feather at work while the bird is flying, we would observe that it is constantly flexing and turning this way or that, in response to the changing needs of flight.

Here is another special design feature: The front side of the feather is narrower than the back side. When the wing moves down in a power/lifting stroke, the resistant air exerts more pressure on the broader side of the feather, and this in turn rotates the feather into the position for maximum lift. On the return stroke, just the opposite happens: the feather shifts so the narrow side is most exposed, thus lessening the resistance of the air. (A swimmer does much the same thing when he cups his hands on each power stroke and straightens them on the return.)

How many “special arrangements” have we noticed on just this one feather? There is great strength with very little weight; there is the marvelous arrangement of the fringed vanes to create air scoops; there is the outstanding “zipper repair kit” which is built into each feather; and there is the amazingly simple basic design, which automatically trims the feather for peak performance in flight.

This list does not exhaust the subject, for we could also mention the top-notch insulating qualities of feathers, and the provision to provide new feathers at intervals (usually yearly).

We haven’t spoken yet about how all this happened, but it seems pretty obvious that there can’t be so many evidences of a master design, without there being a Master Designer. It would be like going into an electronics store, and imagining that somehow all the precision appliances designed and manufactured themselves and came together in just the right order on blind impulse. No, we are looking at more “marks of the Master,” who is their Creator, and ours.

“And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God blessed them, saying Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth” (Gen. 1:20-21). And God “saw that every thing that He had made...was very good” (v. 31). Yes, amen, Lord!

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


Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Proclaiming the Good News: Media Evangelism
By Justin Lonas

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

Christians have always been a people driven by communication. Jesus said that “This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to the nations” (Matt. 24:14) before He returns, and this proclamation is the mission of His Church.
From the oral and handwritten proclamation of the Gospel (which in the Greek is Euaggelion—literally “good news” or “good message”) by the apostles to the spread of the Protestant Reformation through the printed word to the mass preaching of Billy Graham and others in the 20th Century, the Church has used whatever media technologies were available to advance the message of Christ.

From our earliest years of ministry, AMG International has taken the initiative to use various media at our disposal to proclaim the Good News as widely as possible.

Newspaper Evangelism

One of the most effective of AMG’s media outreaches through the years has been the publishing of newspapers and magazines. This method has proven tremendously worthwhile, both in terms of cost and in the numbers of people reached. A single ad in a large newspaper or magazine can be read by thousands of people. Each month, thousands around the world have the opportunity to learn about God through these ads.

To anyone who responds to these ads, AMG sends a Bible and Bible correspondence courses. We encourage respondents to begin attending a church and to continue to study the Bible. It is our desire to make contact with people through the gospel ads, to develop a personal relationship through correspondence, then to persuade them to come to Christ through Bible study and one-on-one evangelism.

The Bible correspondence courses start with very basic teaching about God, sin, and salvation and gradually build upon that foundation to include doctrinal studies and practical truths from the Word of God.

Most respondents begin the course as unbelievers. Many are devoted to false religions, but through their curiosity, they learn more about Christianity and eventually receive Christ as their Savior. The enthusiasm for Jesus Christ is contagious and soon the participants are inviting others to enroll.

One of our national workers recently received this note in response to one of AMG’s ads: “I would say that all my life I have been an atheist. Maybe not so convinced and aggressive as others, but still I believed in other ideals, very distant from God. Now this atheistic faith is ruined. That is why I decided to write to you after I read your advertisement in a newspaper. Maybe I write too late…. Still I hope that you will answer my letter, and perhaps with your help I will find my true way in life.”

Publishing

In the United States, AMG Publishers produces a wide variety of books, from the Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible to in-depth study tools to practical books on Christian living to fiction that presents Gospel truth. Many of these books are also produced in other languages for distribution around the world.

In Greece and Eastern Europe, AMG’s O Logos ministry produces books and Christian music recordings, in addition to operating bookstores that provide a place for individuals to encounter the Gospel and have their questions about the faith answered by evangelical believers. AMG also publishes periodicals designed to tell people about Christ, encourage them in their faith, and equip them for ministry. The Voice of the Gospel has been published for nearly 70 years as a ministry to Greek believers and an outreach tool. Disciple Magazine is an online publication for English-speakers around the world designed to encourage and equip those who study and teach scripture.

In India, Indonesia, and Myanmar, archived materials from Disciple and its predecessor, Pulpit Helps, are translated into the local language and adapted to fit the local culture before being redistributed there as local editions bearing the Pulpit Helps name.

Radio

AMG’s international radio ministries boldly proclaim the Gospel. Every country’s broadcast is different and uses a format that is applicable to that country.

AMG partners with radio station Kanali 7 to share the Good News in the island nation of Cyprus. Broadcasts take place in Greek, English, as well as Russian for the many Russian visitors to the island. The Lord continues to bless this outreach with a wonderful listener response.

In Myanmar, many Buddhists, including Monks and Bamas, have accepted Christ as their Savior after listening to broadcasts sponsored by AMG.

In Indonesia, Living Waters is broadcast on four stations. The response is tremendous and keeps the office staff busy doing follow-up to the inquiries the programs generate.

In Uganda, AMG’s national director is heard across the country on regular radio broadcasts in which he preaches the Gospel and teaches from Scripture.

Other Media

In 2010 and 2011, AMG began partnering with Elam Ministries to place ads on several Persian-language websites to reach people in the closed country of Iran with the Gospel of Christ. This operated much like our newspaper evangelism ministries; those who clicked the web ads were given the opportunity to sign up for Bible Correspondence courses to learn more about Jesus. The Iranian government has forced most of these ads to be taken down at present, but we are looking for new ways to reach out across the Middle East through the Internet.

In Peru, AMG’s national workers, assisted by short-term trip participants, trek for miles through the Andes
Mountains with all the necessary equipment to show the Jesus film to Quechua-speakers in remote villages.

In Argentina also, film is being used as a tool for Gospel outreach. AMG’s national worker writes: “We use the strategy through small groups to preach the Gospel by movies. We carried out meetings in houses where the owner of the house invites people in order to see the film. We show videos that allow us to begin a conversation about the Bible and then invite them to accept Jesus.”

The common thread through each of these various outreaches is a passion to give the lost opportunities to hear and respond to clear presentations of the Gospel of Christ. Every book and magazine we publish, every ad we purchase in secular publications and websites, and every radio broadcast we produce is done with this as our foremost goal.

None of these vital projects operates without the faithful gifts and prayers of AMG’s ministry partners. They help ensure that the Gospel continues to be proclaimed and that those who respond to Christ’s call receive discipleship for their newfound life in Him.

To learn more about the AMG’s media evangelism and national worker ministries, and how you can help support this work, 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 over 40 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.

Justin Lonas is editor of Disciple Magazine for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tenn.

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**Book Review—3/12/2012**


Perhaps one of the most pressing questions we as Christians can ask ourselves is whether our faith is genuine. More specifically, we might wonder if we will continue to firmly believe and live out our faith even when doing so places us under threat of social estrangement, imprisonment, or even death.

One of the preeminent examples of perseverant faith in modern history has found in the life of German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). The story of Bonhoeffer’s bold choice to resist Adolf Hitler’s government in Nazi Germany before and during the Second World War and his execution just weeks before the Allied victory is well known. Many of his published works (*The Cost of Discipleship, Life Together*, and others) are long-established fixtures in the evangelical library.

What is less understood is the story of Bonhoeffer the man (rather than the legend), and it is precisely this more intimate portrait that Eric Metaxas sets out to paint in *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr, Spy*. Metaxas digs deep to bring the inner workings of Bonhoeffer’s heart and mind to the fore, giving the “behind-the-scenes” story of the better-known details of his life and theology.

Through this intensive look, we see Bonhoeffer as a prodigy who earned his doctorate in theology at 21. We see him as the passionate and remarkably consistent thinker and leader among Germany’s orthodox believers for nearly two decades. We see him as a man who, in the midst of war and espionage and on the verge of his arrest, chose to take an incarnational leap of faith and pursue marriage with a young Christian woman.

Most importantly for application, we see Bonhoeffer, because of his biblical understanding, recognize the dangers of Nazism before Hitler even came to power and to boldly speak against the regime long before Hitler’s plans to marginalize the church, kill the Jews, and ruin Europe through war were known or enacted. Because he thought deeply and prayed fervently about his choices through these critical years, he made up his mind to hold fast to Christ whatever the cost. When he was ultimately asked to put his faith on the line, even to the point of death, his soul was prepared.

In *Bonhoeffer*, Metaxas’ storytelling ability is on full display. In particular, the chapters on the conspiracy to kill Hitler and Bonhoeffer’s final weeks in prison leave the reader hanging on the edge of his seat, wondering if the story might somehow end differently than we know from history that it did. This holistic picture of Bonhoeffer presents us a man who knew His Lord and was unashamed to do whatever he was called to do for His glory. It provides a rich background that makes Bonhoeffer’s own writings seem at the same time more accessible and more remarkable.

The purpose of this biography is not to glorify a man, but to show how devotion to our sovereign God can change a heart and set its course for radical obedience. Metaxas’ stated goal is not to point out the tragedy of
Bonhoeffer’s imprisonment and execution, but to inspire a new generation to find the courage in Christ to stand up for what is right against all odds. He raises crucial questions about the Christian’s relationship to the state and the Church’s responsibility when biblical faith and action becomes illegal. Bonhoeffer was a man raised up by God for his time, and Metaxas deftly shows us why his example matters in our time.

News Update—3/12/12

Virginia Joins Six States in Requiring Ultrasound before Abortion

Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell on March 7 signed into law a bill requiring women to obtain an ultrasound before having an abortion, making Virginia the seventh state to adopt such a law, the Christian Post reports.

The bill exempts women who were raped or victims of incest, if the incident was reported to police. Pro-abortion advocates called the bill “state-required rape,” but pro-life advocates applauded it as a “gold standard” in medical care.

“Abortion advocates have engaged in a vicious campaign of misinformation against a proposal that would require a life-saving ultrasound test before giving women an abortion-inducing drug or an abortion procedure,” said Dr. Charmaine Yoest, CEO of Americans United for Life. “It [is] particularly egregious that abortion advocates fought to prevent women from having all the medical information they need for informed consent.”

Pro-Life Youth Arrested for Distributing Literature on Public Sidewalk

Two college-age members of the pro-life organization Survivors Campus Life Tour were arrested March 6 outside Murrah High School in Jackson, Miss., while distributing literature to students on a public sidewalk in front of the campus, the Christian Newswire reports.

The group of pro-life youth activists first attempted on March 5 to hold signs and talk to students on the sidewalk, but school police confronted them, moved their signs across the street, sequestered students back inside school grounds and ordered students not to speak to the demonstrators.

The police said the sidewalk belonged to the school—though it was being used at the same time by passersby and joggers—and that they had the right to remove the Campus Life team. After conferring with attorneys from the Life Legal Defense Fund, the activists returned to the sidewalk the next day, and when police ordered them to leave or go to jail, Kristina Garza and Brianna Baxter remained and were immediately arrested.

Laos: Pastor Jailed 13 Years for Christian Activities Set Free

A pastor has been released from prison in Laos after being locked up for nearly 13 years because of his Christian activities, ASSIST News Service reports. Bounchan Kanthavong was set free Feb. 2, having been arrested in June 1999 and sentenced to 12 years in jail for treason and sedition.

According to the ministry Barnabas Fund, Bounchan’s only “crimes” appear to have been receiving Bible training and sharing his faith with customers in his
clothing shop; his actions were perceived as a threat to national security and the traditional Lao religion of spirit worship, and were thus interpreted as treason.

Lao authorities warned him repeatedly to stop practicing and sharing Christianity, and ordered him to cease all worship activities at his shop, but his witness led to around 70 people accepting Christ. Following his arrest, his wife took over the leadership of their Christian community, which has grown to more than 3,000 believers today.

Bounchan refused to renounce Christ to leave prison early, and his health suffered during his time in jail.

Religion Today Summaries

Christians Speak Out Against “After-Birth Abortion”

Christians have rejected a claim by two medical ethicists that killing newborn babies is no different than abortion, Christian Today reports. In an article published in the Journal of Medical Ethics, Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva argued that “after-birth abortion” should be “permissible in all the cases where abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled,” and Christians spoke out against the claims.

“It stems from the way that many secular humanists draw a fundamental distinction between a ‘human being’ and a ‘human person’—they argue that some human beings are not proper people and therefore it is not morally wrong to kill them,” said Nick Pollard, co-founder of The Damaris Trust.

Christian ethicist Dr. Peter May said childbirth did not mark a change in the intrinsic worth of a child: “The same child now exists in a new environment. Secular humanists may want to embrace infanticide. Jesus, however, taught that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

Religion Today Summaries

Kazakhstan Heightens Religious Crackdown

The central Asian country of Kazakhstan has heightened its crackdown on religious freedom, stripping previously recognized religious groups of their registrations, Baptist Press reports.

Kazakh authorities have rescinded the legal registrations of 579 “small religious groups”—groups with fewer than 50 adult members—as part of a new religion law passed last October. “We have a new law,” said Kazakh official Saule Ibrayeva said. “And as it does not allow for the existence of religious associations which have fewer than 50 members, they should either re-register with 50 members or stop their activity as a religious association.”

Small religious groups have until Oct. 25 to re-register with 50 members, but regulations for re-registration have not been put in place. In the meantime, small religious groups will not be allowed to continue their activities. When questioned how Christians belonging to a small group could do things like preach or administer the Lord’s Supper without meeting, Ibrayeva responded, “This is the law and everybody must obey it.”

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—From SermonHall.com

Sermon Outlines
Leaping for Joy: Experiencing the Presence of the Lord!

Intro.: “…as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy” (Luke 1:39-45).

Foundational Inquiry: What do we learn from Elizabeth about John’s experiencing the Lord’s presence?
I. We Learn the Requisite for His Presence
II. We Learn the Response to His Presence
III. We Learn the Result of His Presence
IV. We Must Practice the Presence of The Lord
  A. Be prepared to be in His presence.
  B. Respond appropriately to His presence.
  C. Really experience His presence.

J. A. Gillmartin

The Measure of a Heart
1 Samuel 16:4-7

Intro.: Often we determine who is able to do a work for God—and who is not able—by what we see. We also look at ourselves in the same light. Too often, because of what we are not, (talented, gifted, educated, popular, etc.) we disqualify ourselves for a work for God. Consider two important truths:
I. The Eyes of Mankind See Only the Superficial (vv. 6-7a)
   A. We are limited by our superficial vision (v. 6a).
   B. We are swayed by our superficial vision (v. 7a).
   C. We are misled by our superficial vision (v. 6b).
II. The Eyes of the Lord Penetrate the Heart (v. 7)
   A. The Lord does not consider human presentation (v. 7a).
   B. The Lord does not judge by our criteria (v. 7b).
   C. The Lord is only influenced by the contents of the heart (v. 7c).
Conc.: The measure of a heart is not found by considering the natural talents, outward qualities, and abilities of an individual. It is only found as the Holy Spirit enables us to see the heart that God has created.

Mark Beaird

Illustrations
An Awakened Conscience

The man who commits sin and imagines he can go his own way and be happy if only his sin is not discovered, makes the fatal mistake of leaving his conscience out of the account. No man can tell when conscience will rise up and shake the accusing finger in his face, and make him condemn himself.

This was illustrated when a young thief who had stolen a package of diamonds walked into the West 20th Street Police Station, in New York City, and confessed himself a thief in order to save a girl who was held for the crime. That mysterious thing we call conscience would not let him sleep or enjoy his stolen goods in peace, but took him by the throat and marched him to jail for his misdeeds.

It was like the case of the men who were about to stone the woman to death for adultery, and Jesus said to them: “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). And John, recording the incident, says: “They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one” (8:9).

Anonymous

Take Time

The story is told of a gallant mounted officer was pursued by an overwhelming force, and his followers were urging him to greater speed, when he discovered that his saddle-girth was becoming loose. He coolly dismounted, repaired the girth by tightening the buckle, and then dashed away.

The broken buckle would have left him on the field a prisoner; the wise delay to repair damages sent him on in safety amid the cheers of his comrades. The Christian who is in such haste to get about this business in the morning that he neglects his Bible and his season of prayer rides with a broken buckle.

James Hamilton

Bulletin Inserts
General and Humorous

Give every man your ear, but few your mouth.

Three hints for making a speech: 1) be sincere, 2) be brief, 3) be seated.

One minute of keeping your mouth shut is worth an hour’s explanation.

An egotist is person who is always me-deep in conversation.

He who controls not his youth will not enjoy his old age.

Always telling the truth means you have to remember less of what you have said in the past.

Why should we expect to be given more knowledge if we do not use what we already have?

A tea kettle, although up to its neck in hot water, continues to sing.

Anonymous

Life is about 10 percent of what you make it and 90 percent of how you take it

If at first you don’t succeed, then skydiving definitely is not for you.

These 11 Anonymous

No matter what happens, there’s always someone who knew it would.

The Old Union Reminder
Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ’Toons by Joe McKeever

Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

ACROSTIC #45: ANSWERS

Psalm (139:14) — “I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.”

A. WELLDONE
B. KWASHIKOR
C. YUL
D. PLEETH
E. SWELLING
F. AWFUL
G. LEVIATHAN
H. MYSTERY
I. FAUST
J. MITHIREDAH
K. FEWER
L. ALMODAD
M. FLURRY
N. MONORAIL

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, May 1995

Father Abraham’s Question Box

“To Make a Difference Between The Clean and the Unclean”

Under the Mosaic Law, which of the following were clean (and permissible for Jews to eat) and which were unclean (and forbidden for Jews to eat)?

1. Beetle?
2. Camel?
3. Eagle?
4. Fallow deer?
5. Goat?
6. Grasshopper?
7. Hare?
8. Owl?
9. Ox?
10. Stork?

Hidden Wisdom on next page
**Hidden Wisdom: Bible Acrostic # 46**

By Mark A. Oshman

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

**HAPPY SOLVING!!**

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A. A type of clothing made from revealing material

B. What Christ’s yoke is

C. Conversational

D. “Do ye look on things after the ______ appearance?”

E. Zenas’ profession

F. Crush, as with debris

G. Narrative

H. A member of the church at Philippi

I. He was a Moabite who followed David (1 Chr. 11)

J. Variegated chalcedony

K. “And he hath put a ___ in my mouth (2 wds.)

L. The mountains will drip this when God restores Israel’s captivity (2 wds.)

M. Transport