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Ruined for Anything Else: Doctrine and the Life of the Church

By Tim Challies

My wife and I were once members of a church that, after a few years of existence, began to de-emphasize doctrine. Some of the pastors seemed to reach the conclusion that “doctrine divides” and that the church really just needed to focus on evangelism and on “action.” They seemed to have determined that a sound theological foundation held in common was both unattainable and unrealistic. Doctrine, therefore, should be laid aside and the church should rally around the things we had in common—a desire to reach others with the gospel and a desire to serve other people.

The church soon began to fracture into camps—those with backgrounds in one Christian tradition began doing things in one way while people from a different Christian background began doing them a different way. For a time chaos reigned. In some small groups members of the church would serve the Lord’s Supper, in others they wouldn’t; in some small groups people were baptizing each other and serving the Lord’s Supper to children.

There was no standard and eventually the pastors had to step in and intervene. By then, though, it was too late and many of these small groups “defected.” Having created their own theological identity, and one that was at odds with that of the pastors, some of these groups left en masse. It was an inevitable result, I think, and one that proved to me the critical importance of doctrine being held in common by members of a church.

Recently I was flipping through Collin Hansen’s *Young, Restless, Reformed*. The book discusses some of the resurgence of Reformed theology in our day and does so, in large part, through interviews with some of the pivotal figures in this resurgence. The book contains a quote by Josh Harris that caught my attention: “Once you’re exposed to [doctrine], you see the richness in it for your own soul, and you’re ruined for anything else.”

This is something I’ve experienced in my own life and something I’ve seen in the lives of other Christians. I once went on a weekend men’s retreat that featured teaching from several local pastors. We heard some

interesting messages about serving our wives, about being men of integrity and so on. We had joyful times of worship and lots of time to blow each other away with paintball guns. The thing that has remained in my mind, though, was one of the sermons delivered that weekend.

While we had received a steady diet of topical sermons, one of the pastors stood and delivered what was, in effect, a biblically-grounded expository message. He simply opened up the Bible and explained to us what it meant and how we could apply it to our lives. He gave us real doctrine—true meat instead of mere milk. As we walked from the meeting room to our cabins, I could tell there was a buzz running through the crowd of men. They had enjoyed the sermon and had been electrified by it. But they had no category for it. I heard comments like, “I don’t know what that was, but it was amazing! I wish we could hear more teaching like that!” I sat with a small group of men a few minutes later and introduced to them the concept of expository preaching. Most had never heard of any such thing; neither had they ever enjoyed a sermon like it.

It was a pivotal moment for me. It drove home to me something that the Bible teaches but something I had never really seen before so up-close and personal—that true believers want and eventually need to move from milk to meat. Though they may not have a category to describe what is missing from their lives, they will feel a restlessness. The Spirit works in them to give them a craving for solid food. And when they take a bite of that food, their eyes light up and they know that they are experiencing something that they were meant to enjoy.

I saw this time and time again. That church was so good at bringing people in through the front doors. They would come in and very often would be saved. Many people were drawn in, became believers, and were baptized. But often they would not last at the church for long. Within a few months or a couple of years they would step right out the back door.

Few left the church and left the faith altogether. Rather, they would leave and head for churches where there

was teaching that was more biblical. They would head for churches where the Word was the main thing. They would be drawn to stronger, more biblical teaching, even when they did not know how to express what they needed or what they longed for. Eventually they would find it. Needless to say, my wife and I soon felt the same call. Though we stayed some time for the sake of our friends, eventually we, too, had to leave to find a place where the Word was central. And we could never go back.

This takes me back to what Josh Harris said. Once you've been exposed to doctrine you see the richness in it for your own soul and you truly are ruined for anything else. Just as a young child craves solid food, Christians will and must crave the meat of the Word. And once you've tasted it, there is no going back. And this, I believe (and

hope!) is at the heart of the theological resurgence we've seen in recent years. This is exactly why so many pastors are abandoning the user-friendly, seeker-friendly, market-driven model of church and are instead focusing their attention on the systematic, book-by-book, verse-by-verse exposition of the Word of God. Here is true meat, a hearty meal, meant to satisfy the cravings of a soul drawn to God and motivated to know him as he is.

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Know Your Enemy: If I'm A Soldier, Where's the War?—Part 3

By Gerald Robison

It would appear that one of the best strategies in wartime is to “know your enemy.” It works in football as teams watch video of other teams playing before they face them in a game. It happens in wrestling and martial arts where competitors study the strategy and moves of their opponent so they know what to expect, how to counter and overcome them.

I remember the classic movie *Patton*. In one scene, after defeating Nazi Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's troops in the North African desert during World War II, General George Patton shouted to his enemy, “I read your book!” That is, Patton took the time to study his opponent's wiles and ways, and as a result, knew how to defeat him.

The same holds true in our spiritual warfare: we must know our enemy, opponent and adversary! In the previous articles in this series, I said that one of the four conclusions we could draw from the Scriptures in Ephesians and 1 Peter is that there is an enemy—Satan.

In describing Satan, we must understand that he is not God, nor is he God-like. Satan is not omniscient; he is not omnipresent; he is not omnipotent. Satan is **limited**; he is **finite**. He was given many titles that describe his character or being, but he has only one name. His name is Lucifer, but his titles and descriptions are many: Satan, serpent, devil, dragon, angel of the morning, father of lies, anointed cherub, angel of light, and more.

If these titles were given in order to better describe his character and being, then it would help us to understand some of these titles better. For instance, the two that are most familiar are Satan and Devil, but few know what these titles (not names) really mean. So, let's take a look. Satan

means “adversary, opponent or enemy”, and devil means “accuser”.

In other words, Lucifer is probably best recognized as an “opponent” of God and every person called of God to be a part of Him. He will oppose God's will in creation, which means he will oppose us, since God's purpose in creation is to “*prepare a people for Himself*.”

But Lucifer is also well known as the “devil”, that is, the “accuser”. In his efforts to oppose God's will and purpose, he will attempt to destroy God's work in man by “accusing” us of all our wrongs and sins and thereby making us noticeably and remarkably unfit for the Kingdom of God. This understanding is clearly shown in such Scriptures as: “*And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brothers is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night*” (Rev. 12:10).

“Well,” you might say, “our opponent, Satan, will be before God spending much of his time accusing us of all our sin, but how can he if he is not omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent? How can he know what we have been involved in? How can he tempt and harass me, especially when there are so many other people in the world at the same time? He can't be watching all of us at the same time can he?” These are good questions and can be understood as we learn more about the background of Satan.

Lucifer's Background

We find that Satan has other beings that work with him. Revelation 12:4 describes a time when Satan rebelled against God, and one-third of the angels followed him. The

Scripture indicates that when this rebellion occurred, Lucifer “became” a satan (an adversary or opponent) and the other rebellious angels became known as demons.

Lucifer’s background is better described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. These passages describe him before and during his rebellion. “*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, which weakened the nations! For you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High’*” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

The passage in Ezekiel is often seen as a double reference. That is, while it is given to a man on earth, much of it appears to apply only to Satan, for only an angelic being meets the characteristics described here. “*Thus says the Lord God; ‘You seal up the sum, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering...the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created. You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you.... I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was*

lifted up because of your beauty, you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness’” (Ezekiel: 28:12-17).

Satan rebelled against God because he wanted to be like God. His pride was lifted up because of his beauty and wisdom. I find it interesting that there is no Scripture to say that Satan became ugly and dumb when he rebelled. There is no reason to believe that he is not still beautiful and wise. He was merely pictured this way in ancient and medieval art when the common man received most of his religious teaching from art because the study of the Scriptures themselves was reserved for the priests. The artists depicted Satan and demons as ugly to let the commoners know they were evil.

If you have questions at this point, then, you’re right on schedule. Tune in to the next issue when we discuss where the demons came from and what they do, and how Satan can know so much about us if he isn’t omniscient.

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Exegetically Speaking—by Spiros Zodhiates

Jesus Walks on the Sea

Matthew 14:22–36

From Exegetical Commentary on Matthew, AMG Publishers, 2006

Before we move on to the miraculous event of walking on water, we need to interject a comment found in John 6:15, “*Jesus, therefore, having known (gnóús, the aorist participle of ginōskō [1097], to know by experience) that they would come and take Him by force (harpázein, the present infinitive of harpázō [726], to suddenly and forcefully take away) to make Him a king, departed again into a mountain by Himself*” (a.t.).

This event followed the feeding of the five thousand, but it did not hinder Jesus from continuing to perform miracles, confident as He was that “*His hour*” was “*not yet*” (John 7:30; 8:20). This would occur only at the *parousía* (3952), His return and subsequent personal presence in glory.

Nevertheless, the crowds in Bethsaida were feverish enough now to “*snatch away*” (*harpázein*) Jesus in order to make Him king. The aorist tense of *poiéō* ([4160], to make) underscores their determination to do this once for all. The verb is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe the unrestrained catching away of the church at Jesus’ Second Coming.

[22] The text does not tell us how Jesus “*constrained (ēnágkasen, the aorist tense of anagkázō [315], to compel) His disciples to get into a ship,*” but it apparently was a countermeasure against the crowd’s attempt to snatch Him away. It makes sense that the disciples, of all people, would be sympathetic with the crowd’s attempt to force Christ’s kingdom prematurely.

Both Matthew’s and Mark’s narratives say “*a*” ship, but the Greek text has the definite article (*tó*, the) for no apparent reason. Nothing had been said about a

particular boat. To take all the disciples, however, it must have been fairly large. Jesus planned to have all of them witness His suspension of one of His laws—gravity. In the meantime, His purpose in sending the disciples ahead “*unto the other side*” seemed to be His need to be alone with the Father.

[23] Jesus’ intention “*to pray (proseúxasthai, the aorist middle deponent infinitive of proseúchomai [4336] from prós [4314], toward; and eúchomai [2172], to express a wish) in [His] own private place*” (a.t.) was realized after He ascended the mountain. He was now “*alone*”, and evening “*was come*.” The imperfect verb *ēn* (from *eimí* [1510], to be) implies He had been there for a while. Regretfully, we do not know the content of this prayer, but we do know that Jesus frequently thanked His Father (Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21; John 11:41) and requested certain things from Him.

[24] By the time Jesus had descended the mountain from His private place, we read, “*The ship was (ēn) now (ēdē [2235], also translated “already”) in the midst of the sea, tossed (basanizómenon, the present participle of basanízō [928], to buffet, toss, torment) with waves: for the wind was contrary (enantíos [1727] from en [1722], in, and antíos [n.f.], set against). What follows is a classic test of faith for the disciples. Already having commanded them to the other side, Jesus would surely secure their safe arrival. Yet the disciples’ faith collapsed under the weight of wind and tide.*”

[25] Jesus appeared to the disciples during the fourth “*watch*” (*phulakē* [5438], guard, implying the normal dangers on the waters). The first watch was probably 6 p.m. – 9 p.m.; the second, 9 p.m. – midnight; the third, midnight – 3 a.m.; and the fourth, 3 a.m. – dawn. In addition to surging seas and violent winds, the disciples had to contend with darkness.

While the text does not say, Jesus probably had been praying from late afternoon through the night up to this appearance of “*walking (peripatōn, the present participle of peripatéō [4043], to walk, to come) on the sea.*”

[26] This was an unprecedented sight; no prophet in the history of Israel had ever walked on water. When the disciples saw this, “*they were troubled (etaráchthēsan, the aorist passive tense of tarássō [5015], to disturb, agitate, trouble), saying, It is a spirit (phántasma [5326] from phantázō [5324], to make appear; an apparition, specter, phantom); and they cried out for fear.*” This was their best guess; surely, no man could walk on water. Mark adds (6:49) that they “*supposed*” (*édoxan, the aorist of dokéō* [1380], to assume, conjecture) they were looking at a spiritual essence as opposed to a weighty object.

[27] But Jesus gave them a good reason to be brave—His presence: “*But straightway (euthús [2112], immediately) Jesus spake unto them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer (tharseíte, the present active imperative of tharséō [2293], to take courage, embolden) it is I; be not afraid (phobeísthe, the present middle/passive imperative of phobéomai [5399], to fear).’*” In sovereign grace, the Lord cuts off false thinking “*immediately.*” When we are driven by storms into the abyss of fear, He quickly speaks to our hearts, “*Be not afraid.*”

[28] Peter certainly became emboldened rather quickly. “*Lord, if (ei [1487], the “if” of supposition) it is You, command me to come toward (prós) You on the water*”(a.t.). We cannot infer from this statement the content of Peter’s doubt. If we stop with the clause, “*if it is You,*” then clearly he doubted the presence of the Lord. On the other hand, if we assign the entire supposition/conclusion—“*if . . . then*”—to conjecture, Peter may be doubting the morality of his demand. After all, even if it were the Lord, why should He honor such a request?

[29] Yet the gracious Jesus, under no necessity as God or man, immediately responds, “*Come*” (*elthé, the aorist imperative of érchomai [2064], to come*). The aorist tense foretells the impending crisis. The Lord decreed an event that would fail in contrast with His own “*walking on the sea*” (the present participle) in verse 25. Accordingly, for a moment Peter “*walked on (epí [1909], on the surface of) the water and came toward Jesus*” (NASB).

[30] The moment was short-lived. Though to his credit, Peter got within an arm’s length of Jesus (see v. 31), the “*strength*” (*ischurón [2478]*) of the wind distracted him from the One known as “*the Strength*” (*Ho Ischurós; LXX Neh. 1:5; 9:32*). Peter initially obeyed the Lord’s decree to “*be not afraid,*” but when he was caught up in the midst of danger, he, “*became afraid and, beginning to sink (katapontízeisthai, the present passive infinitive of katapontízomai [2670] from katá [2596], down; and pontízomai [n.f.], to sink, no doubt related to póntos [4195], the sea), he cried, ‘Lord (Kúrie [2962], master, sovereign), save (sōsōn, the aorist imperative of sōzō [4982], to save) me*”(a.t.).

This is what happens when we move our spiritual eyes from the Lord to the storm, from the Creator to the creation. Despite his lapse of faith, Peter still believed enough in the power of the Lord to call upon Him. The verb *sōzō* here is contextually restricted to physical rescue. Jesus physically helped him back into the boat.

The Lord is free to respond or not respond to an imperative, such as the one Peter blurted out when he was afraid. We should never presumptuously assume that the Lord is mechanically moved by meritorious faith or prayer, a notion consistently denied by Scripture: “*Then shall they*

cry unto the LORD, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings” (Mic. 3:4; see Prov. 1:28, 29; Isa. 59:2). If the Lord chooses to save the desperate, He does so out of a pure grace that spites self-centeredness.

[31] We do not know how far Jesus was from the boat, but we can deduce that Peter “walked” to within His reach because the Lord, “*having stretched out His hand, caught (epelábeta, the aorist middle deponent indicative of epilambánō [1949], to take hold of) him, and said to him, O you of little faith (oligópiste, the vocative of the adjective oligóustos [3640] from oligos [3641], little; and pístis [4102], trust), why did you doubt?*” (a.t.). Jesus is not speaking of saving faith in His atonement here but rather faith in His power to rescue from a specific threat, namely drowning. The Lord did not dismiss Peter as wholly *áπιστος* ([571], without faith).

Then Jesus asked, “*Wherefore (eis [1519], unto; tí [5101], what; therefore, ‘unto what end,’ ‘for what purpose,’ ‘why’) didst thou doubt (edístasas, the aorist tense of distázō [1365], to hesitate)?*” As Peter was walking toward Jesus, fear overcame him, and he hesitated to continue on. Since he had no real need to walk on water, his request was unnecessary and foolish. We, too, should carefully consider our requests of God. As the only wise God (Rom. 16:27), the Lord knows what is best. When we ask God to do foolish things, we test Him (James 1:13) and become offensive (Matt. 4:6).

Jesus knew why Peter hesitated; but occasionally, He asked His followers questions, not to get information of which He was ignorant but to make them understand the consequences of unbelief. From Peter’s experience, we learn that it is not enough to trust God’s sovereignty in general. We must trust the Lord’s sovereignty over the details of life, always reminding ourselves that He has numbered our hairs and not a single sparrow falls to the ground without His sovereign will (Matt. 10:29, 30).

[32] “*When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*” This event is also found in the synoptic Gospel of Mark (6:45–52). Yet in an earlier event (Matt. 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41), the Lord rebuked the wind and the waves, prompting the viewers to ask, “*What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*” (Mark 4:41). Here in Matthew 14:32, however, the Lord didn’t even bother with a verbal rebuke; we read, “*When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*” This time, the disciples’ response was not a quizzical, “*What manner of man is this?*” but a confessional: “*Thou art the Son of God.*”

[33] The response to this miracle was worship: “*Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped (prosekúnēsan, the aorist tense of proskunéō [4352], to bow and kiss towards) Him, saying, ‘Of a truth (alēthōs [230],*

the adverb of the adjective *alēthēs* [227], truthful; from *alētheia* [225], truth) *thou art the Son of God.*”

The next section gives us an idea of what common people thought of Jesus after He fed the five thousand and walked on water.

[34] How the disciples and others came across the lake is discussed in John 6:22–25. Once in the land of “*Gennesaret*” and possibly in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus preached His sermon on the Bread of Life (John 6:32–59).

The Sea of Galilee is also called the Lake of Gennesaret, and the small crescent-shaped strip of country on the northwest side of the Sea is called the land or region of Gennesaret (Matt. 14:34; Mark 6:53). It extends along the lake for three or four miles and inland a mile or more where it is shut in by the hills. The plain was formerly rich and fruitful, possibly the scene portrayed in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–8). Three important cities in this region are Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin. The feeding of the five thousand occurred in Bethsaida.

[35, 36] When the men of this region, “*learned (epignóntes, the aorist active participle of epiginōskō [1921], to experientially know) about Jesus, they brought to Him all (pántas, the plural of pás [3756], all) having (échontes, the present participle of échō [2192], to have) it badly (kakōs [2560], bad; the full range of spiritual and bodily weaknesses and diseases)*” (a.t.).

Interestingly, their faith in the Person of Jesus Christ was so complete that it extended to touching His clothing. Our Lord honored this faith. The pure holiness of the Son of God sanctified even “*the hem of His garment,*” for, “*as many as touched (hápsontai, the aorist middle subjunctive of háptomai [680], to touch) were made perfectly whole (diasōthēsan, the aorist passive of diasōzō [1295] from diá [1223], through, thoroughly; and sōzō).*”

In a similar incident, Mark records that when a woman merely touched Jesus’ clothes and was healed, the Lord “*knew in Himself that power had gone out of Him*” (Mark 5:30; a.t.).

The Greek word translated “*as many*” (*hósoi*, the masculine pronoun of *hósos* [3745]) restricts the number who touched Him but not the number healed. Everyone who touched was healed, but the text does not say that everyone touched Him. Those who touched had faith in His power to save, and “*they were saved through and through*” (*diasōthēsan*).

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Following God—by Wayne Barber

Grow in the Word

Children are so cute when they are little, aren't they? I am a grandfather of five grandchildren, and I just want you to know that grandchildren even go a step further in being cute. They just grab your heart! Of course, my wife and I are like a lot of grandparents in that we love to see the headlights coming and the tail lights leaving—after they're gone we have to rest for a couple of days!

Any parent or grandparent does not want their child to stay a child, even if they say that they do—they want them to grow up! It is a tragic situation when a child refuses to grow up into spiritual and emotional maturity. In our Christian lives, it is the same way. It's tragic when a believer will not grow up in his spiritual walk with God!

In 1 Peter we find the context of believers who are being persecuted for their faith. The Roman emperor Nero burned Rome and then blamed the Christians for what he did. This resulted in horrible persecution for believers. They were burned alive at the stake; put on poles, soaked in oil, and used as torches while the Romans had their orgies; they were taken out to be eaten by lions in an arena. It was an awful time, and yet Peter challenged them to grow in their faith.

He writes in 1 Peter 1:22-25, *“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All flesh is like grass, And all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, But the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word which was preached to you.”*

He continues in 1 Peter 2:1, *“Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”* The term *“putting aside”* comes from the Greek word *apotithēmi*, meaning “to take off like a garment.” It is used in Ephesians 4:22 and 25, Colossians 3:8, Hebrews 12:1, James 1:21, and Romans 13:12 and, in each case, means to stop doing something! Before any growth begins to happen in the Christian life there is the necessity of a yielded heart to Christ and His Word.

The way you stop something in your Christian growth is to say yes to Christ. When that happens, you have just said “no” to your flesh. Our flesh could be summed up with one word in the list that Peter uses—*“malice.”* This word holds the key because it describes the wickedness of our flesh. It is a word that refers to the evil intentions of the

mind. Self is sin. It keeps the company of all sorts of other evils in Ephesians 4:31, *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”*

Now, this evil intention (which is basically to get one's own way) has a tactic to it. Peter's next words, *“and all deceit,”* show that malice is intentionally misleading. The word translated *“deceit,”* *dolos*, is the word that evolved to become *“fishbait”* in Modern Greek. Now, we don't interpret New Testament Greek with Modern Greek understanding, but it's interesting to me how *“fishbait”* so describes what deceit really is.

Think about that catfish who has just taken a piece of luscious meat that was just innocently hanging there in the water waiting to be eaten. The catfish swims off and thinks he has just gotten a free meal, not realizing that underneath that piece of meat is a hook. Deceit is when you come across one way to someone, making them feel comfortable with you, but underneath all the sweet talk there is a *“hook”*, because you want something from them that they are unwilling to give.

Next, Peter warns against hypocrisy. This word means to pretend that something is one way when it is exactly the opposite. The Greek term was used of an actor on stage who would wear a mask. The mask would have a smile painted on it, or a frown, but you never could see the actual face behind the mask.

Peter then tackles *“envy”*, which is when you want something that someone else has and will do whatever is in your power to take that away from them; and *“all slander”*, which means to speak against someone behind his back. When we say *“yes”* to Christ, then we have just said *“no”* to all that flesh is. Now, we can begin to grow.

Peter says in verse 2, *“Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”* Just like newborn babies crave milk even in the *“middle of the night”* because their lives depend on it, so believers are born again with a craving for God's Word. Believers long for the milk of God's Word. The phrase *“the pure milk of the Word”* interestingly means *“unadulterated”* or *“without deceit.”* The Word of God will never deceive you like your flesh will. It will never lead you astray. It is the Word of God that enables the believer to grow up in his spiritual walk with Christ, as Peter says, *“So that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”*

My question to you is, “are you growing in your walk with Christ?” Do you hunger for God’s Word? Do you spend time in studying and learning God’s Word? Is your heart in a submissive attitude towards Christ and His Word? If not, then your flesh has deceived you and, sadly, you are deceiving others. If we are going to be His disciples, then we must come to grips with the fact that we are desperate

for His Word in our lives. This discipline of studying His Word cannot be laid aside for any reason. If we do, we are starving our spiritual growth. May you enjoy your journey with Christ as you learn to devour His Word!

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The Twofold Great Commission

By Justin Lonas

The more I read Scripture, the more I realize that there are two primary tasks for the Church, both encapsulated in Christ’s great commission in Matthew 28:19-20.

The first tends to get most of the hype, and we are right to be concerned with it: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the son, and the Holy Spirit.*” Loving and being loved by God our Savior should be something we shout from the housetops, but our faith has to go deeper than that to be effectively proclaimed.

The second task, which tends to be somewhat glossed over, provides that depth and balance. “*Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you,*” doesn’t have the same fascination as missionary work, but is just as crucial to the Church. Without the follow-up work of “*training in righteousness*” (2 Tim. 3:16) through faithful exposition of Scripture, the work of missions and evangelism loses its way and devolves into a social gospel that is no gospel at all. The work of the Church is founded on both of those tasks, and neither can be accomplished when divorced from the other.

As Kevin DeYoung points out in *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, his new book on the Heidelberg Catechism, “The only thing more difficult than finding the truth is not losing it. What starts out as new and precious becomes plain and old. What begins as a thrilling discovery becomes a rote exercise. What provokes one generation to sacrifice and passion

becomes in the next generation a cause for rebellion and apathy.”

The Church has to cling to both responsibilities handed to us by Christ in this passage to truly fulfill the commission. Evangelism without training results in shallow believers who are prone to syncretism and may not hold firm in the face of persecution. When we overemphasize training, we can become so insular that we lose touch with the world we have been called to reach. That’s why Christ called us to *mathēteuō*, “*make disciples,*” unifying the two tasks.

Making disciples is not hit-and-run witnessing that moves on to the next target as soon as someone has a conversion experience; it is a process. Jesus “made disciples” of the Peter, James, John, and the rest of the 12 over the course of three years of constant interaction! The Greek term means “to enroll as a pupil,” and puts the emphasis of the action on teaching and learning—to make disciples of the nations is to continually teach the truth so that it does not become stale and lifeless to those long acquainted with it. God’s Word is never dull, it is our senses that become dull from our failure to open, explore, engage, and obey it.

Expositing this two-fold nature of Christ’s commission and exhorting churches and individuals to wholly embrace both aspects of it is the aim of our content at *Disciple*. You’ll find a lot of material that fits both sides of our call, and we hope that this mission and message is coming through loud and clear in each issue.

Justin Lonas is the editor of *Disciple Magazine*

Words to Stand You on Your Feet—by Joe McKeever

What “Preaching Ourselves” Means

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

The pastor walked to the pulpit, opened his Bible, looked out at the congregation, and said, “After we read today’s text, I want to give you something solid to base the Scripture on.” What he gave them that day was his experiences and his opinions. He preached himself.

When we preach Jesus Christ as Lord, becoming the servant of others is a simple process. When we preach ourselves instead of Jesus, serving the people is the last thing on our minds. It has been observed that unhappy families are all unhappy in their own way, but all happy families have a great deal in common.

Likewise with the business of preaching the Word of God—there must be ten thousand ways of getting it wrong, but one big way of getting it right. The right way is to preach Jesus (Acts 8:35). On the other hand, if one is inclined to get it wrong, he could do no better than to “*preach ourselves.*”

This text, 2 Corinthians 4:5, is so well-known and oft-quoted, one would think all we preachers have this nailed, that living up to its standard would be a simple thing. It’s anything but simple.

Most of the churches I’m familiar with center their worship services around the preaching of the Word. If the service lasts one hour, half of that is consumed by the minister opening the Scriptures and expounding what he finds there. The name on the sign out front is the pastor’s. Even if a dozen others share the leadership burdens, only one name hogs the sign. If the church telecasts its services, his is the face people see, his is the name they call the program, and his is the message they hear.

One pastor said to me, “I can’t afford to miss a Sunday from my pulpit. The people don’t want to hear anyone else. And I’m expected to hit a home run every time I come to bat.” That may be the pattern for most churches (not all, thankfully), but it carries a great danger. When everything revolves around you, it’s not much of a stretch for you to decide you’re something special.

When everyone looks to you as “the man,” it’s reasonable to think your experiences and wisdom and words carry a special authority. When the church rises or falls based on how you do—and particularly when it rises—unless your spouse and staff keep you grounded, you may

be in danger of thinking too highly of yourself. That’s a direct violation of Romans 12:3, incidentally.

When you think too highly of yourself, it’s a small step to decide to proclaim your opinions and preach your convictions from the pulpit. When you think too highly of yourself, it’s a simple thing to bolster every point in the text by your own experiences. When you think too highly of yourself, you should not be surprised to find that before long you are going it alone in the ministry. You gradually quit reading books from others in the ministry, your commentaries gather dust from disuse, and you become a stranger to preaching conferences. You need no one; you’re an island.

Members of our churches frequently cater to this kind of preacher idolatry. Some get a vicarious thrill from being close to the center of the action. They derive a personal affirmation from being on a first-name basis with the minister. Catering to the pastor’s ego works a reciprocal magic on their own self-esteem.

A pastor I know got into trouble and had to leave his prominent church. One of his staff members said to me, “This congregation puts preachers on a pedestal. And [this pastor] sure did enjoy that pedestal.”

Someone has said, “No one can preach ‘I am clever’ and ‘Jesus is Lord’ at the same time.” No one can proclaim himself in the pulpit and step away as the servant of the people.

Here is a list of the top ten ways we pastors preach ourselves instead of Jesus as Lord:

- 1) Our opinions are given equal weight with Scripture.
- 2) Our convictions reign supreme in the congregation.
- 3) Our stories form the heart of our sermons.
- 4) Our prejudices are treated as revelations from the Almighty.
- 5) Our language leaves little doubt as to whose church this is.
- 6) Our experiences form infallible proofs for our messages.
- 7) Our writings make up the study literature of the church.
- 8) Our degrees prove the soundness of our theology.
- 9) Our staff-members are required to be “yes” men or find other employment.

10) Our members' guiding principle gradually becomes "WWPD?" (What would pastor do?)

If even one of these is true of a church, the rest will not be far behind.

"I die daily," the Apostle Paul said (1 Cor. 15:31). That's the only way to keep self in its proper place. Put it on the cross and keep it there. The old joke is exactly right: "The trouble with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar" (see Romans 12:1). Every day of our lives, we must crucify self.

"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

When John the Baptist came preaching in Galilee and Judea, the crowds flocked to him from every direction. In all his preaching, John pointed people to the coming

Messiah. They asked John a question which ought to be posed to everyone who walks into a pulpit to proclaim a gospel message: "What do you say about yourself?"

John answered, *"I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness"* (John 1:23). He said, *"One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals"* (Mark 1:7). He said, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30). No one who reads of John the Baptist can fail to notice that the Lord in Heaven took him literally on that commitment. In a matter of weeks, Herod had beheaded him. Such statements should never be made lightly.

What do you say about yourself, pastor?

Joe McKeever is a retired Southern Baptist Pastor from New Orleans, Louisiana. He blogs regularly at www.joemckeever.com.

Jewels from Past Giants

The Lamb of God in Scripture

By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

From Christ in the Old Testament, a collection of sermons originally published in 1899. Edited slightly for modern spellings and flow.

"Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:35-36).

You all know the old, old story. The world was lost; God must punish sin; He sent His Son to take our sin upon Him that He might honor the law of God and establish God's government by being obedient to the law and yielding Himself up to the death-penalty. He whom Jehovah loves beyond all else came to earth, became a man, and, as a man, was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. It is He who is called in our text *"the Lamb of God,"* the one sacrifice for man's sin.

There is no putting away of sin without sacrifice; there is only one sacrifice that can put away sin, and that is Jesus Christ the righteous. He is divine, yet human; Son of God, yet son of Mary. He yielded up His life, *"the just for the unjust,"* the sinless for the sinful, *"that He might bring us to God,"* and reconcile us to the great Father. That is the story, and whosoever believes in Him shall live. Any man, the world over, who will trust himself to Christ, God's great sacrifice, shall be saved, for this is our continual witness, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

When John saw Jesus Christ on that memorable day, he, first of all, beheld Him himself, and then said to others, *"Behold the Lamb of God."* Brethren, we cannot preach what we have not practiced. If these eyes have never looked to Jesus, how can I bid your eyes look at Him? Beholding Him, I found peace to my soul; I, who was disposed even to despair, rose from the depths of anguish to the heights of joy by looking unto Him; and I therefore dare to say to you, *"Behold the Lamb of God!"* Oh, that each one of you might believe our testimony concerning Jesus and look on Him and live!

What did John mean by saying, *"Behold the Lamb of God?"* Behold, in the Latin, *ecce*, is a note of admiration, of wonderment, of exclamation. There was nothing of greater wonder ever seen than that God Himself should provide the Lamb for the burnt offering, that He should provide His only Son out of His very bosom, that He should give the delight of His heart to die for us. Well may we behold this great wonder. Angels admire and marvel at this mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh; they have never left off wondering and adoring the grace of God that gave Jesus to be the Sacrifice for guilty men. Behold and wonder, never leave off wondering; tell it as a wonder, think of it as a wonder, sing of it as a wonder; even in heaven you will not cease to wonder at this glorious Lamb of God.

I think that John also meant his disciples to consider when he said to them, *"Behold the Lamb of God!"*

So we say to you, “Think of Him, study Him, know all that you can about Him, look Him up and down. He is God; do you understand that He stood in the sinner’s stead? He is man; do you know how near akin He is to you, how sympathetic He is, a brother born for your adversity?” The person of Christ is a great marvel; how God can be in one person, it is impossible for us to tell. We believe what we cannot comprehend, and we rejoice in what we cannot understand. He whom God has provided to be your Savior is both God and man; He can lay His hand upon both parties, He can touch your manhood in its weakness, and touch the Godhead in its all-sufficiency. Study Christ! He is most learned in the university of heaven who knows most of Christ. Behold Him, then, with wonder and with thankfulness.

But when John said those words, he meant more than wondering or considering. “Looking” is used in Scripture for faith: “*Look unto me, and be ye saved.*” Beholding is a steady kind of looking. Take your eyes off everything else, and behold the Lamb of God! “Look and live” is now our message; not “do and live,” but “live and do.” If you ask how you are to live, our answer is to look, trust, believe, confide, rest in Christ, and the moment you do so, you are saved.

But once more, when John exhorted his disciples, it was a hint that they should leave off looking at John, and turn their attention wholly to Jesus and follow Him. Hence we find that John’s two disciples left him and became the disciples of Christ. Beloved, we who preach long to have your attention, but when you give your attention to us, our longing then is to pass it on to Christ our Lord. Look on Him and follow Him, not us. What can we do, poor creatures that we are? Look unto Him, mark His footsteps, and tread in them. Do as He bids you, take Him for your Lord, become His disciples, His servants. Behold the Lamb of God, and always behold Him. Look to Him, look up to Him, and follow where He leads you.

Thus I have put the text before you pretty simply. Now, I want to talk to you a little about beholding this Lamb of God, taking a hasty run through various Scripture references to the Lamb.

The Lamb for One Man

How was the Lamb of God first seen in the world? It was the case of the lamb for one man, brought by one man for himself, and on his own behalf. You all know that I refer to Abel, who was a shepherd, and brought of his flock a lamb for himself, on his own account that he might be accepted of God, and that he might present to God an offering well-pleasing in His sight. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground as an offering to God. I think that there was a difference in the sacrifice, as well as in the man bringing it,

for the Holy Ghost says little about the difference of the man, but He says, “*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain,*” and he was accepted because of it. The one sacrifice was bloodless, the fruit of the ground, the other was typical of Christ, the Lamb of God, and was therefore accepted: “*and the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering.*”

Now, beloved, our first view of Christ is usually here, to know Him for ourselves. I am a sinner, and I want to have communion with my God; how shall I obtain it? I am guilty; I am sinful; how shall I draw near to the holy God? Here is the answer. Take the Lord Jesus Christ to be yours by faith, and bring Him to God; you must be accepted if you bring Christ with you. The Father never repelled the Son, nor one who was clothed with the Son’s righteousness, or who pleaded the Son’s merit. Come, as Abel came, not with fruits of your own growing, but with the sacrifice of blood, with Christ the holy victim, the spotless Lamb of God, and so coming, you shall be acceptable before God by faith.

The Lamb for the Family

Now turn over the pages of this grand old Book, and you will find the Lamb in another connection. Israel was in Egypt, and there they had the lamb for the family. “*In the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house.*” Oh, I wish that you would all go on to behold the Lamb of God for your households! “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*” Why do you stop before you finish the verse? What said the apostle to the trembling jailer? Not merely all that I have quoted, but more: “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*”

Are there not many believers who do not believe for their house? Come, now, and believe in this provision of the Lamb for the house. Pray that the Lamb may be for the house. Grace does not run in the blood, but grace often runs side by side with it, so that Abraham is loved, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Joseph, and Ephraim, and Manasseh. Thus the covenant blessing goes from one to another. Plead with God, tonight, that all in your house may be beneath the sprinkled blood of the Lamb, and be saved from the destroying angel, and that all with you may go out of Egypt to have a possession in the land of the promise.

The Lamb for the People

A little further on, following the Scripture, and asking you still to behold the Lamb, in Exodus 28:38-39, we come across God’s command for the lamb for the people: “*Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually.*”

The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even.” Here is the lamb for all the chosen people, the lamb for Israel. It began with the unity, it went on to the family; and here is the Lord, who *“loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob,”* makes His tabernacle to be the central place where a lamb shall be offered for the whole nation. Think of it with delight, that Christ died for all His chosen people. He hath redeemed them from among men. Though they be as many as the stars for number, or as the sand on the sea-shore innumerable, yet that one sacrifice has redeemed them all. Glory be to God for the blood of the Lamb, by which the whole of Christ’s people are redeemed!

The Lamb for the World

Then let your mind take wing right out of the Old Testament into the New. Come now to John, saying, in the 29th verse of this chapter, *“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* Now you have gone beyond the bounds of Israel, and have come to the Lamb for the world. You have come to the Lamb of God, who dies for Gentiles as well as for Jews, for men in the isles of the sea, for men in the wilds of Africa, for men of every color, and every race, and every time, and every clime.

Oh, glory be to God, wherever there are men, we may go and tell them of Christ! Wherever there are men born of Adam’s race, we may tell them of the second Adam, to whom looking, they who look shall live, and in Him they shall find eternal life. I love to think of the breaking down of the bounds that shut in the flow of grace to one nation. Behold, it flows over all of Asia Minor, at first, and then over all Greece, and then to Rome, and Paul talks of going to Spain, and the Gospel is borne across the sea to England, and from this country, it has gone out unto the utmost ends of the earth.

The Lamb for All Heaven

Well, now take your flight, if you can get beyond that, away to heaven itself, and there you will see the Lamb for all heaven. Look at Revelation 7:14. All the saints in heaven are standing in their glittering ranks, white-robed,

pure as the driven snow. They sing and praise one glorious name; when one of the elders first asked the question, *“What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?”* He Himself gave the answer, *“These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*

The blood of the Lamb has whitened all the saints who are in heaven; they sing of Him who loved them, and saved them from their own sins in His own blood. I have often wondered why that second word was not brought into our translation, for it so beautifully fits the language of the Apostle John: *“Unto Him that loved us, and saved us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* There is no whiteness in heaven but what the Lamb has wrought, no brightness there but what the Lamb has bought; everything there shows the wondrous power and surpassing merit of the Lamb of God.

If it is possible to think of something more glorious than I have already described, I think you will find it in Revelation 5:13: *“And every creature which is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.’”* The day shall come when, from every place that God has made, there shall be heard the voice of praise unto the Lamb; there shall be found everywhere men and women redeemed by blood, angels, and glorious spirits, rejoicing to adore Him who was, and is, and is to come, the Almighty Lamb of God.

I think I have given you something to consider if you turn over the pages of Scripture, and follow the track of the bleeding Lamb.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892), “the Prince of Preachers,” was a renowned pastor and author who served as pastor of London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle for 38 years. His works are still widely read today.

Marks of the Master—by the Old Scot

Those Migrating Monarchs

Birds which migrate vast distances each year have long been a marvel to interested observers—but even more marvelous is the migrating butterfly, *danaus plexippus*, commonly called the Monarch butterfly.

Monarchs travel up to 3,000 miles every fall. Those moving south from the eastern two-thirds of the United States and Canada predominantly head for a small forest in central Mexico, where millions of these beautiful creatures annually congregate in a remote mountain area comprising

less than 15 square miles. Some thirteen million of them annually congregate in just one particular site only three to four acres in extent!

Smaller colonies winter at locations along the Gulf Coast from Florida to south Texas, while Monarchs from the western third of North America mostly winter in small areas along the Pacific coast, between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Smaller numbers over-winter in Arizona. Additionally, “the Monarch has spread from its home in the Americas to Hawaii, Indonesia, Australasia, the Canary Islands, and has recently established colonies in Mediterranean countries.”

But the most amazing thing about this annual migration is that every one of the migrating millions are on a first-time, one-time journey. They have no experienced leaders or scouts, and they start from thousands of locations spread across a large continent; yet year after year the current generation will zero in on one small target area—truly a mass demonstration of remarkable navigation! In their wintering grounds, they will cover the trees in a shimmering restless blanket of orange-and-black beauty, throughout the winter months.

When April signals their time of departure, the Monarchs will wake from their stupor and mating will take place. “It is mostly fertilized females that migrate north. Most will die after laying their eggs; only about one percent of these travel all the way to northern states, laying eggs as they go.” Following these generational leaders will be a growing horde of males and females rapidly matured from the eggs laid earlier. Thus for most Monarchs it will take at least two generations to reach the summer feeding grounds.

Monarchs primarily feed on milkweeds, which are poisonous to other creatures, so they stop to feed where milkweeds are plentiful—and there they lay their eggs. The eggs will hatch into hungry caterpillars, which will feast upon milkweed leaves for several weeks before entering the chrysalis stage. Then, within a week or two, an adult Monarch will struggle out of the chrysalis husk, and after its wings dry and harden, it is ready to feed—and, shortly, to mate again and die.

Normally, one or two additional generations will exist briefly before the final, longer-lived migratory generation arrives to finish the journey. Somehow they will know their route and their destination. Scientists have

determined that Monarchs’ wings do contain slight amounts of magnetite, an iron compound which they speculate may give the butterflies an orientation with the earth’s magnetic field—but as their destinations are spread across thousands of miles from east to west, there would be huge differences in their individual “compass headings.”

Man may wonder about the influence of prevailing winds and ask whether insects can navigate by the stars, but the surest and best answer is that the Creator who made them has given them all that they need to survive as a species. God said in the beginning: “*To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat*” (Gen. 1:30). And again the Bible acknowledges: “*O LORD, thou preservest man and beast*” (Ps. 36:6).

God has given man the intelligence to discover some of the workings of this great world which He fashioned for us, and it is good to learn His ways after Him. But it is far better to learn this truth from the Bible: “*The eyes of all wait upon thee (O God), and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing*” (Ps. 145:15-16).

Truly, the God who implants the necessary knowledge in the Monarch butterflies also cares for us. The Son of God, Christ Jesus, declared: “*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows*” (Matt. 10:29-31).

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

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Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Flex and Obey

By Pat Ragan

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

With the Vancouver Winter Games still fresh on our minds, I am reminded of my most recent experience leading an AMG Mission Adventure Team during the Winter Olympics. This was during the 2006 Winter Games in Torino, Italy, where we had the privilege of leading not just one but three short-term teams who all came alongside AMG missionaries Larry and Mary Lowery.

One of our foundational philosophies for mission teams is for team members to “flex and obey.” Early on in the training process, we teach team members a little song to the tune of “Trust and Obey” that goes like this:

“Flex and obey,
for there's no other way,
to be happy in Jesus,
than to flex and obey.”

We have found that most of us go to the mission field, even short-term, with some expectations. The purpose of teaching this little song is to help our team members begin to rethink why they are going on a mission trip and to leave their expectations at home.

The reason for this is simple. While we make some definite plans for our teams and seek to accomplish specific goals, we have come to understand that God does not always work on our timetable; and if we want Him to accomplish His purposes through us, we need to wake up each morning with an attitude of complete surrender while we are serving on a short-term team.

One good example of this was with our 2006 Winter Olympics Mission Adventures team in Italy. As you would expect during the Winter Games, snow was everywhere and it was bitterly cold. We were staying with the Lowerys, and they live high up in the

mountains in a small village just above Aosta. The road up the mountain is very narrow, steep and curvy. After spending an entire day in Torino, distributing evangelistic booklets, trading pins and seeking to share Christ with all who would listen, we were cold, a little weary and ready to be home “by the fire.”

After traveling nearly two hours back “home” from Turin, the unexpected happened—halfway up the mountain, as we slowly wound our way up the snowy roads, the snow chains broke off of one of the tires on each of our vans! There was no way to keep going except to walk, so we all piled out of the vans and started up the snowy road in the silence of a winter wonderland in the Italian Alps at midnight.

With the moon peeking through the trees and the crunching of snow beneath our feet, a funny thing happened. In the midst of the initial frustration of getting out of warm vans so close to home and beginning to walk, what could have been a disappointing end to a very long day of ministry became the realization that God was giving our team a special treat that none of us would soon forget.

Like weary soldiers coming back from battle, the five mile hike uphill in the snow that night became a time the Lord used to draw us closer together as a team but also closer to Himself. Completely unanticipated, this experience became one of our most fond memories of this trip. Why? Because we had all come to appreciate the need to “flex and obey.”

AMG Mission Adventures short-term team ministry exists for two reasons. The first is to shepherd and disciple team members in their walk with Christ. The second is to come alongside AMG's ministries and co-workers on the field to provide support, resources and encouragement to see the ministry move forward. Over the past 10 years, AMG Mission Adventure team members have accomplished much for the cause of Christ around the world, and our prayer is that each one returned home with a deeper walk with the Lord. Many have returned two, three and four

times...making a long-term impact out of short-term service!

Is God calling you to serve on an AMG Mission Adventure Team? Check out AMG's website at www.amginternational.org and click on "World Missions" to learn more.

Pat Ragan is vice president of development for Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International in Chattanooga, Tenn.

Book Reviews

Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ, Eugene H. Peterson, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 2010, ISBN 9780802829559, 302 pages, \$24.00, hardcover.

The Church takes a lot of beatings in popular Christianity today. Tell-all memoirs from the hottest new writers detailing the quirks and sins of "church people" and the psychological harm they've caused fly off the shelves. It has become fashionable to debate the value of the Church to the cause of Christ, and words like "community" and "gathering" have become the acceptable way to describe the assembly of believers. Too many of the rebuttals written by traditionalists seem more concerned with tradition than with the Church.

In *Practice Resurrection*, Peterson explores the Church as it is, the Body of Christ born of the Holy Spirit, not as it has been or as we would like it to be. He is mindful that the Church is imperfect (by way of its composition of sinners saved by grace), but seeks to build it up rather than deconstructing it. He writes, "Sooner or later, though, if we are serious about growing up in Christ, we have to deal with the church. I say sooner."

Peterson's book (the fifth in a series of works on spiritual theology) is, in essence, an informal commentary on the book of Ephesians. He points out that almost all New Testament letters to churches were written because of something—doctrinal error, rampant sinfulness, pointless squabbles, etc.—but Ephesians appears to be motivated by Christ's love for His people. He applies Paul's encouragement to the Ephesians to the life of today's Church as a model, urging believers to "*walk worthy of the calling with which [we] have been called*" (Eph. 4:1).

The title, *Practice Resurrection*, comes from Paul's grounding of his entire description of the Body in the fact of Christ's resurrection. Peterson describes the Church as something of an outpost for life in a country of death, and pinpoints our growth into spiritual maturity as the outworking of the raised Christ in our lives. As he works his way through Ephesians, he describes the forms and actions of the Church not just theologically, but through the

very concrete realities of human relationships and his decades of pastoral ministry.

Peterson's book is a breath of fresh air to those who love Christ's Church, "warts and all," and desire to see her cleansed "*by the washing of water with the Word*." He doesn't excuse her faults, but lovingly exhorts individuals to live out the reality of the resurrection together as the dynamic Body the Lord ordained.

Justin Lonas

Type: Ecclesiology/Commentary

Target: All

Take: Recommended

Recent Releases

Scripture by Heart: Devotional Practices for Memorizing God's Word, Joshua Choonmin Kang, 2010, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., ISBN 9780830835362, 150 pages, \$15, softcover.

Kang, a pastor and speaker in California, has written over 30 books in his native Korean language, but this is only his second in English. *Scripture by Heart* attempts to reignite the fire for memorization in today's Church. Kang identifies four reasons to practice memorizing Scripture: 1) to know God, 2) to imitate Christ, 3) to worship God, and 4) to fulfill God's mission. The book is laid out as a 30-day devotional designed to draw the reader into reflective meditation on God's Word and incorporating memorized Scripture into prayer and worship.

The Masculine Mandate: God's Calling to Men, Richard D. Phillips, 2010, Reformation Trust Publishing, Lake Mary, Fla., ISBN 9781567691207, 174 pages, \$15.00, hardcover.

Phillips delves into Scripture and exegetes the key texts on God's design and plan for men. He focuses heavily on God's role for men in marriage, child-rearing,

friendship, and Christian service, with the goal of exhorting men to step into their God-given responsibilities and away from passivity.

Sermon Helps—From SermonHall.com

Sermon Outline The Superiority of Christ

Hebrews 1:1-4

I. The Recipients of This Letter Were Tempted to Revert to Judaism.

A. Because of persecution of the local church (Heb. 10:32, 33).

B. Because of imprisonment of certain believers (cf. Heb. 10:34)

C. Because of confiscation of physical goods (cf. Heb. 10:34)

II. Christians Should Believe in Christ Because He Is the Mediator of a Better Covenant (v. 1; cf. Heb. 7:22)

III. Christians Should Believe in Christ Because He is Superior to Angels (1:1-2:18)

IV. Christians Should Believe in Christ Because He is Superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)

V. Christians Should Believe in Christ Because He is Superior to Aaron (4:14-10:18)

A. His priesthood is divinely appointed (4:14-5:10).

B. His priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek (5:11-7:28).

C. His priesthood is within a new covenant (8:1-9:10).

D. His priesthood is centered in a perfect atonement (9:11-10:18).

VI. Christians Should Behave for Christ Because They are Members of a Better Covenant (10:19-13:25)

VII. Christians Should Behave for Christ by Heeding His Warnings (10:19-11:40)

A. Don't drift (2:1-4).

B. Don't disbelieve (3:7-4:13).

C. Don't degenerate (5:11-6:20).

D. Don't despise (10:26-39).

E. Don't depart (12:15-29).

VIII. Christians Should Behave for Christ by Enduring His Discipline (12:1-13)

IX. Christians Should Behave for Christ by Practicing His Ethics (12:14-13:25)

Conc.: As a result of our belief in the superiority of Christ:

A. We should commit our lives to Christ (1:1-10:18).

B. We should conform our lives to Christ (10:19-13:25).

Steve D. Eutsler

Illustrations Of Lice and Men

Romans 12:3

Human beings have a huge capacity for self-delusion. The Scottish poet, Robert Burns, wrote a famous poem about this entitled "To a Louse (On Seeing One On A Lady's Bonnet at Church)." In the poem he pictures a woman strutting to church decked out in frills and finery, convinced that she is cutting a grand figure. But the sophisticated image she aims for is spoiled by a pesky louse crawling through the lace of her bonnet!

The poem closes with some memorable lines (somewhat translated): "O, that some power the gift would give us to see ourselves as others see us!" What could we need more? The Bible urges: "*Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment*" (Rom. 12:3). In order to see ourselves realistically we must "*In humility receive the implanted word...*" (James 1:21). Then we must use that word as a mirror in order to see our true spiritual condition and change what needs changing (James 1:23-25).

True Christianity means to **serve**, even when we are not being served; **love**, even when we may not be loved; **help**, even when we have not been helped; **give**, even when we have not received; and **please**, even if others do not please us.

Right Under Her Nose

By J.A. Gillmartin

One day our daughter seemed to have lost an important homework assignment. After a desperate phone call from school and many searches by many members of the family, we concluded she had truly lost it. Her teacher

was quite upset. That night the assignment was found—right where she put it—in her textbook, which was with her all the time. What did she learn? Looking in obvious places is worth the effort if the thing looked for is really worth looking for.

Most of the lost (as well as prodigals) suffer similarly. That which they are seeking is in an obvious place, right where God put it, in their hearts. Though the lost (like Israel; 2 Cor. 3:14), have a veil over their understanding, our Lord promised “*seek and ye shall find*” if they will persevere.

Bulletin Inserts On Holiness

There is no detour to holiness. Jesus came to the resurrection through the cross, not around it.

Leighton Ford

There is no true holiness without humility.

Thomas Fuller

Real holiness has love for its essence, humility for its clothing, the good of others as its employment and the honor of God as its end.

Nathanael Emmons

We don't change God's message—His message changes us.

Anonymous

God shows no favorites and makes no exceptions.

Anonymous

News Update—3/8/10

Tempers Flare over Abortion Funding in Senate Health Bill

At the same time as President Obama has stepped up the pressure on Congress to “get it done” on health care reform, Rep. Bart Stupak, the author of the amendment banning abortion funding in the House health care bill, has issued a challenge of his own.

“Mr. President, put it in there,” the Michigan Democrat urged, referring to placing his amendment into the Senate bill, in an appearance on FOX Business.

Stupak pointed out that every poll on the topic of public funding for abortion in the U.S. has found the majority in favor of his funding restrictions. Therefore, he said, the president should show the same level of openness to his amendment that he boasted he had shown to some Republican ideas that were included in the bill.

“If we're trying to reflect the will of the American people,” he said, “this certainly is one amendment where you can show your flexibility and actually do what the American people want: no public funding for abortion.”

Stupak also asserted that, “in its present form, the Senate health care bill is going nowhere in the House of Representatives.” On Thursday, Stupak confirmed to NBC's Chris Matthews that about a dozen lawmakers who voted for the House bill would kill the abortion-expanding Senate version if it lacked his amendment.

Shifts in the House demographic since passing the House health bill last year means Democrat leaders need to net about four more votes from members of their own party

who had previously voted against the House bill, to pass the Senate bill—in addition to winning over those dissatisfied with the upper chamber's vastly more liberal version.

LifeSiteNews

Aftershocks, Rain, Hamper Aid Distribution in Chile

Mission News Network reports that continuing aftershocks and rain are making it more difficult for aid groups to reach survivors of Saturday's earthquake in Chile.

Craig Dyer with Bright Hope International says the group is helping local churches gear up to help the country, where an estimated 2 million people were affected. “We're empowering the local churches in these communities to reach out to the other churches so that people's needs can be met. Right now, it's primarily focused on food and safety. We've released the funds to be able to purchase food, and that's being distributed through the local churches.”

Parts of the country are currently subject to curfews and military presence in the face of looting and general unrest. Chilean officials said on March 3 that the death toll has reached 795, a number that will likely rise as rescue and aid workers continue their efforts.

Religion Today Summaries

40,000 Haitians Profess Faith in Christ since Earthquake

Baptist Press reports that 40,127 Haitians have made professions of faith in Jesus Christ since a massive earthquake hit the country Jan. 12, according to Confraternite Missionnaire Baptiste d'Haiti.

"Haiti is ripe for a spiritual movement from God," said Craig Culbreth, director of the Florida Baptist Convention's partnership missions department, which coordinates the work of the CMBH. During a Feb. 16-17 citywide holiday observance in Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second largest city, Culbreth saw "thousands upon thousands filling the streets where people are seeking God and asking Him to spare them from what happened in Port-au-Prince. For me, it was a New Testament expression of what it looks like when the Spirit of God shows up. I have never seen anything like it."

Since the earthquake, the CMBH pastors have distributed 51 tons of rice, which provided 437,750 servings to Haitians in Port-au-Prince and outlying areas where refugees have fled. Additional feedings are expected.

Religion Today Summaries

2 Baptist Volunteers Still in Haiti Jail

Two weeks after their eight team members were released and allowed to return to the United States, two female Baptist volunteers remain in a Haiti jail, optimistic they'll be freed soon but still awaiting the final word from the judge overseeing the case.

Laura Silsby and Charisa Coulter, members of Central Valley Baptist Church in Meridian, Idaho, have been in jail since Jan. 29 when they and their team members were arrested on charges of child kidnapping and criminal association when they tried to take 33 children out of the earthquake-ravaged country and to a makeshift orphanage in the Dominican Republic. They allegedly did not have the proper paperwork.

Silsby, the group leader, told the Associated Press Wednesday that she and Coulter expect to be released soon, and that they'd even come back to Haiti in the future. "Oh yes, both of us would come back to Haiti because there is so much need here, especially for the children," Silsby said. "We would definitely come back to help them once this misunderstanding or whatever you want to call it is sorted out."

Their friends and family members back home have thought for more than a week they would be released any day—mostly because of repeated media reports that proved to be full of false hope.

On Tuesday, Feb. 24, Judge Bernard Saint-Vil told Reuters, "the case will be over this week because we have no criminal grounds to pursue it," and that the two women "could be released this week." But two days later Saint-Vil said the two women would remain in jail because he wanted to obtain more testimony from others.

The other eight team members were released from jail Feb. 18. Saint-Vil kept Silsby and Coulter in jail because he had further questions for them.

Baptist Press

"I Am Not Ashamed" Campaign Hits News Outlets

The Christian Post reports that one Christian ministry is taking to secular media outlets to urge Christians to stand up for their faith. Answers in Genesis's "I Am Not Ashamed" campaign began on Monday, running commercials on Fox News, FoxNews.com and MSNBC.com.

The spots feature a diverse cast of Christians saying they are "not ashamed of the Gospel," the Post reported. The group is also encouraging local churches to take up billboard campaigns with the message. Part of the campaign encourages Christians to visit the iamnotashamed.org website and upload videos of themselves reading or quoting the Bible, thereby producing the world's first online video Bible.

Religion Today Summaries

EU Considers Protecting Rights of Persecuted Christians

Christian Today reports that the European Union has taken the first steps to protecting Christian minorities in member countries and around the world.

"We've set up a working group and are defining what bilateral action can be taken between Europe and the individual countries where Christians' rights are in danger," said Italy's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. "We're studying which international initiatives the EU can adopt to bring this problem more clearly into focus."

Frattini said this is the first time a "common protocol" has been drawn up to "closely monitor" attacks on at-risk minorities, including Christians. The protocol would be issued to member embassies throughout the world, and will rely on data in watchdog Open Doors' Watch List. "You see, Christians have never had a political group offering them strong support through their governments," Frattini said.

Religion Today Summaries

Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue's puzzles:

ANSWERS

1. Pithom and Rameses (Ex. 1:11).
2. Amram and Jochebed (Ex. 6:20).
3. In a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush (Ex. 3:2).
4. To hold a feast unto God and sacrifice unto Him (Ex. 5:1, 3).
5. Aaron cast down his rod and it became a serpent (Ex. 7:9, 10).
6. Seven days (Ex. 7:25).
7. The plague of lice (Ex. 8:18).
8. The plague of murrain on the cattle (Ex. 9:6).
9. An east wind (Ex. 10:15).
10. Beside Pi-hahiroth, by the Red Sea (Ex. 14:9).

ACROSTIC #44: ANSWERS

PHILIPPIANS (4:6) — "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"

- A. KNAVE
- B. PREFERRING
- C. HEWERSOFWOOD
- D. INNER
- E. LOGARITHM
- F. ICHABOD
- G. PYGARG
- H. PATHETIC
- I. INKBLOT
- J. AUGUSTUS
- K. NINETY
- L. SQUINT
- M. DEVOUTLY
- N. BENNY
- O. BUNT

Hidden Wisdom and Father Abraham
 By Mark Oshman
 Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, April 1995

On next page

HIDDEN WISDOM: BIBLE ACROSTIC # 45

BY MARK A. OSHMAN

Solve the acrostic by using the clues listed below 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. Happy hunting!

HAPPY SOLVING!!

1G		2F	3B	4A	5L		6D	7J	8N	9E	10B	11A		12I	13J	14H	15C
		16M	17B	18K		19J		20L	21N		22F	23K	24J	25B	26I	27M	28D
29N	30H		31G	32E	33L		34A	35N	36G	37J	38D	39H	40K	41C	42E	43F	44M
	45L	46B	47A	48D			49H	50L	51M	52G	53J	54E	55A	56B	57F	58I	
59C	60N	61A		62J	63D	64C		65E	66N	67M	68B	69H		70F	71A	72L	
	73H	74B	75I	76G		77J	78H		79E	80L	81I	82C		83B	84N	85A	86K
87E	88J	89G			90B	91N	92E	93J	94D			95B	96K	97M	98G		

- A. Commendation given by the master in the parable of the talents (2 words.) 34 11 4 55 47 85 71 61
- B. Disease caused by a severe protein and vitamin deficiency 83 95 46 10 74 3 56 90 68 17 25
- C. The late Mr. Brynner 64 41 82
- D. His son rebelled against Moses and Aaron 6 38 28 48 94 63
- E. "How wilt thou do in the _____ of Jordan?" 79 65 87 54 42 9 32 92
- F. Extremely bad 70 2 22 57 43
- G. His scales are his pride (Job 41) 98 15 52 1 59 76 89 31 36
- H. Literary genre of Simenon, et al. 49 30 69 73 14 39 78
- I. Mephistopheles' erstwhile protégé 26 75 81 58 12
- J. Treasurer under Cyrus of Persia. 77 19 62 13 7 53 37 24 88 93
- K. Smaller number than 40 96 86 23 18
- L. Joktan's son (Gen. 10) 50 5 45 80 72 20 33
- M. Sudden commotion 16 97 27 51 67 44
- N. One way to get to Epcot Center from Disney World 21 66 84 35 60 8 91 29

Father Abraham's Question Box

"THE TABERNACLE AND ITS CONTENTS"

1. How many curtains covered the inside of the tabernacle?
2. Of what material was the outside covering of the tabernacle made?
3. What kind of wood was used for the boards of the tabernacle?
4. What were the colors of the tabernacle's veil?
5. What was the length of the altar of the tabernacle?
6. What was the length of the court of the tabernacle?
7. What type of oil was to be burned in the tabernacle's lamp?
8. What was used to overlay the altar of incense?
9. What ingredients went into the making of the anointing oil?
10. What ingredients went into the making of the incense placed before the ark of the testimony in the tabernacle?

See answers on page 27.