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Worship: Going about It in the Wrong Way
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“Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name” (Ps. 29:2)

It’s Sunday around noon-ish. As the congregation files out of the sanctuary heading toward the parking lot, listen closely and you will hear it. It’s a common refrain voiced near the exit doors of churches all across this land.

“I didn’t get anything out of that today.” “I didn’t get anything out of the sermon.” “I didn’t get anything out of that service.” “I guess her song was all right, but I didn’t get anything out of it.”

Sound familiar? Not only have I heard it countless times over these nearly fifty years in the ministry, I probably have said it a few times myself. This is like dry rot which we seem helpless to stop.

But let’s try. Let’s see if we can make a little difference where you and I live, in the churches where we serve and worship. We might not be able to help all of them, but if we bless one or two, it will have been time well spent.

I. You Are Not Necessarily Supposed to “Get Anything out of the Service”

Worship is not about you and me. It’s not about “getting our needs met.” It’s not about a performance from the pastor and singer and choir and musicians—not in the least.

II. Worship Is about the Lord

That Psalm 29:2 verse at the top of this article is found also in 1 Chronicles 16:29 and Psalm 96:8. It deserves being looked at closely.

1) We are in church to give, not to get. Now, if I am going somewhere to “get,” but find out on arriving, I am expected to “give,” I am one frustrated fellow. And that is what is happening in the typical church service. People walk out the door frustrated because they didn’t “get.” The reason they didn’t is that they were not there to “get,” but to “give.” Someone should have told them.

2) We are giving glory to God, not to man. We know that. At least we say we do. How many times have we recited, “...for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory”? And how often have we sung, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” in a Sunday service?

3) We do so because glory is His right. He is worthy of worship. This is the theme of the final book of the Bible. “Who is worthy?” (Rev. 5:2) “You are worthy...for you were slain, and have redeemed us” (Rev. 5:9). “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Rev. 5:12).

III. Self-Centeredness Destroys All Worship

If my focus is on myself when I enter the church—getting my needs met, learning something, hearing a lesson that blesses me, being lifted by the singing—then Christ has no part in it. He becomes my servant, and the pastor (with all the other so-called performers) is there only for me. It’s all about me.

We have strayed so far from the biblical concept of worship—giving God His due in all the ways He has commanded—it’s a wonder we keep going to church at all. And it’s an even greater wonder that our leaders keep trying to get us to worship. The poor preacher! Trying to cater to the insatiable hungers of his people, even the best and most godly among them, is an impossible task. One week he gets it right and eats up the accolades. Then, about the time he thinks he has it figured out, the congregation walks out grumbling that they got nothing out of the meal he served today.

The typical congregation in the average church today really does think the service is all about them—getting people saved, learning the Word, receiving inspiration to last another week, having their sins forgiven, taking an offering to provision the Lord’s work throughout the world.

Anything wrong with those things? Absolutely not. But if we go to church only to do those things, we can do them, but we will not have worshiped.

IV. Evangelism, Discipleship, Giving, and Praying Grow out of Worship, Not Vice Versa
The disciples were worshiping on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled them and drove them into the streets to bear a witness to the living Christ (Acts 2). Isaiah was in the Temple worshiping when God appeared to him, forgave his sins, and called him as a prophet to the people (Isaiah 6). It was in the act of worship that the two distraught disciples had their eyes opened to recognize Jesus at their table (Luke 24).

V. We Are to Give Him Worship and Glory in the Ways Scripture Commands

“Give to the Lord the glory due His name and bring an offering.” So command 1 Chronicles 16:29 and Psalm 96:8. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart—these, O God, you will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). Singing, praise, rejoicing, praying, offering, humbling, loving—all these are commanded in worship at various places in Scripture.

The Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, “Those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That is, with their inner being, the totality of themselves, their spirit, not just their lips or their bodies going through the motions, and in truth—the revealed truth of how God has prescribed worship to take place. He is not pleased with “just anything” that we claim as worship. We must balance our worship between spirit (the subjective part: body, soul, emotions) and truth (the objective aspect: all that God has revealed in His word).

VI. We Are the Ones Who Decide whether We Worship on Entering the House of the Lord

Don’t blame the preacher. The pastor cannot worship for us. Nor does he decide or dictate whether we will worship by the quality of his leadership or the power of his sermon. Whether I worship in today’s service has absolutely nothing to do with how well he does his job. The Lord has left me in charge of this decision. I decide whether I will worship.

When Mary sat before the Lord Jesus, clearly worshiping, He told a disgruntled Martha that she had “chosen the good part” something that “will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). That something special was time spent in worship. It is eternal. Lest someone point out that Martha could have worshiped in her kitchen by her service for Christ, we do not argue, but simply point out that she was not doing so that day.

VII. Remember: Worship Is a Verb

And it’s an active verb at that. Worship is something we do, not something done to us. In the worst of circumstances, I can still worship my God. Even if the church has no pastor and has to make do with a stuttering layman or some less than adroit fill-in, I can still bow before the Lord, offer Him my praise, and give Him my all.

I cannot leave church complaining that the singers should have done better, that the sermon was poor, and that I was unable to worship because of the noise from the crying baby or the children in the balcony.

Someone has pointed out that we are probably the only culture on earth where church members feel they have to have “worshipful architecture” before they can adequately honor the Lord. Christians across much of the world don’t even have church buildings but seem to do all right without them. Believers in Malawi often meet under mango trees, according to a retired missionary I know. Our insistence on “worshipful” music, “worshipful” settings, and “worshipful” everything are all signs of our disgusting self-centeredness.

It’s disgusting because I see it in myself, and do not like it. No one enjoys a great choir more than I. I love to hear a soloist transport us all into the God’s throne room by his or her vocal offering in the service. A great testimony of God’s grace and power thrills me. And, of course, being a preacher, as you would expect, I delight in hearing a sermon that you feel is direct from the heart of God. But if I require any one or all of those before I can worship, something is vastly wrong with me.

My friends, I’m afraid something is vastly wrong with us today.

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Simple Marks of Faithfulness

By Alan Stewart

During the reign of Queen Victoria, a heartwarming story made its way to the headlines of British news. The story is told of a homeless, mixed breed puppy that wandered the streets and came to the feet of a sentry outside St. James Palace. The dog was covered with snow, and was both hungry and cold. The sentry picked up the dog and fed him, and gave him the name Jack. Jack became so attached to the sentry that he was adopted to be the mascot for the Scots Guards.

During the Crimean War, Jack could be seen stride-for-stride with his master on the battlefield. When his master was mortally wounded during a battle, Jack stood
faithfully by his master’s side until both were removed from the battlefield. Hearing of the courage this noble dog displayed, Queen Victoria was deeply touched. She had a miniature Victoria Cross (Britain’s highest military decoration for gallantry) made, and she placed it on the collar of the dog.

Jack, however, did not live for an award; he lived for his master. For the next twelve years, Jack would make his way through the iron gates of the cemetery and lay down upon the grave of his master. There, Jack would lie every day between meals until he died.

There was a time when a man’s word was his bond. Today, however, we live in a day where a man’s word means so very little. Whether it is a signature on a marriage certificate, a business contract, or a pact between nations, faithful loyalty is becoming an extinct characteristic in our society. Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 4:2, “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

The very idea behind the word “faithful” means someone loyal, consistent, dependable, and trustworthy. When God searches the storehouse of a man’s heart, it is never to seek what that man is able to give, but rather to seek what that man is able to keep. Abraham became the patriarch of faith because God “...found his heart faithful” (Neh. 9:8). Moses was the chosen deliverer because “...he was faithful in all his house” (Heb. 3:5). Daniel was given promotion and power “...forasmuch as he was faithful” (Dan. 6:4).

Seventeenth-century author William Gurnall wrote, “How can there be great faith where is little faithfulness?” Faithfulness can be found at the core of every life that was ever greatly used of God. Staying the course of faithfulness is not always easy, but when faithfulness is most difficult is when it is most essential. Would God say of your life that you are faithful? Consider how God measures a life for faithfulness.

I. God Looks for Lives Faithful in Small Things

In Luke 16:10, Jesus said, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.” In other words, it is how we handle the small things of life that reveals if we are trustworthy to handle the big things of life. We are so prone to be captivated by big things that we both overlook and neglect adequate care of the small things thinking they are beneath our dignity. Perhaps that is why God hides the massive oak in the tiny acorn, and the wealth of a wheat field in a bag of seeds.

Life is not made up of big events, but rather a lot of small moments accumulated over time. Henry Ward Beecher wrote, “Be inspired to nobleness of life in the least things. Set such sacredness upon every part of your life that nothing shall be trivial, nothing unimportant, and nothing dull in the daily life.” It was Gideon’s threshing of wheat that exposed the courage to thrash the enemy. It was David’s method of tending sheep that exposed his trust for leading a kingdom. It was Peter’s tenacity for catching fish that exposed his trust to catch men. How much different our lives would be if we could only see how the small things we hold in our hands are deeply attached to our heart. The prophet asked the question, “For who hath despised the day of small things?” (Zech. 4:10). Certainly not God.

II. God Looks for Lives Faithful in Secret Things

In 1 Samuel 22, Saul is pursuing David to take his life, fearing David as a threat to his throne. However, Ahimelech said to Saul, “And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David?” At a time when David thought no one had noticed, the integrity of his heart had been spotted both publicly and privately. It is said that as Michelangelo was painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, the great artist was asked why he put such detail into something nobody could see. He answered, “I can see it, and God can see it.”

The full depth of a man’s character is measured when no one but he and God are watching. Gideon’s soldiers never knew their courage was being measured by how they drank water. Nathaniel never knew his honesty was being measured as he sat thinking under a fig tree. The unnamed villager never knew his usefulness was being measured by how he had tied his young colt. I like what Frances Ridley Havergal said, “Faithfulness to principle is only proved by faithfulness in detail.” Many of life’s golden opportunities are either gained or forfeited by how we order our private world. God will never overlook a life whose private shadow outdistances his public image.

III. God Looks for Lives Faithful in Sacred Things

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul writes, “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men...” It was Paul’s way of saying to Timothy, “You’ve been entrusted with spiritual treasures (doctrine, theology, wisdom, and grace) that must be guarded by reliable and trustworthy men.” Just how dependable are you with the spiritual treasures of prayer, devotions, service, and meditating on God’s Word?

The value we place on sacred things is often the distinguishing factor in our usefulness and trustworthiness. Hananiah “...was a faithful man, and feared God above many” (Neh. 7:2), and he was given greater authority. Tychicus was “...a faithful minister in the Lord” (Eph. 6:21), and was entrusted to carry letters from Paul. Though their names are not highly recognizable to us, God forever noted their legacy as being faithful in sacred things.

J. Wilbur Chapman once said, “The rule that governs my life is this: anything that dims my vision of Christ, or takes away my taste for Bible study, or cramps my prayer life, or makes Christian work difficult is wrong for me, and I must, as a Christian, turn away from it.” Jesus linked a man’s heart to his treasure because He knew a man will always be loyal to that which he truly loves.
There are times when life truly resembles a battlefield, and each of us possesses enough scars to prove it. However, when our battles are the most intense is when we are most apt to be tempted to desert the things that matter most. Those treasures which hold eternal value are always worth staying with and fighting for. In such moments, may we ever be reminded that it is those whose hearts exhibit the fierce loyalty of a dog that will hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

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D. Min. Programs in the Advancement of the Church
By Martin Crain

Editor’s note: In the interests of full disclosure, the following article was submitted by the director of one of the degree programs described herein. Even so, we feel that such programs may meet the needs of many of our readers for continuing education, so we are including this for your benefit.

There’s always more to learn, even if you are a virtuoso violinist like Itzhak Perlman. He says: “You never reach the point that you say, ‘OK, now I’ve done it.’ There’s no such thing as standing still in the same place. If you stay in the same place, you’re actually going backward.” What’s true of Perlman is true of those in any vocation. To stay in practice, doctors must take classes to keep their licenses, as do lawyers who wish to remain certified.

Pastors, too, facing new challenges in our rapidly changing world, need some form of continuing education. Most congregations seem to realize this by offering financial support and time off for them to attend seminars, conferences and the like; some denominations even providing annual programs.

To keep from standing still, many pastors are enrolling in Doctor of Ministry programs, which provide greater depth and more structure than occasional attendance at conferences. This seminary degree was created to take pastors to a higher level of competence above what they received in a standard Master of Divinity degree program. Prior to the D. Min.’s creation 40 years ago, the M. Div. graduate’s only options to further degree programs were academic ones, a Ph. D. and the like, mostly providing a stepping-stone to a teaching position.

The D. Min. Is Church-Friendly

The D. Min. is a professional (more so than an academic) degree that it is linked closely with the pastor’s present congregational ministry. Thus, most applicants plan to stay where they are rather than move on. It doesn’t require extended absences from his pastorate, such as a Ph. D. program might demand.

Many D. Min. programs offer intensive teaching sessions, usually five days long, taken a couple of times a year, with much of the course work done at home. Courses, though rigorous academically, are practically oriented assignments designed to strengthen the church as well as the pastor. To fulfill a course requirement, for example, a pastor may develop a series of sermons or organize a senior adult seminar. In my own program, we typically hear what one student told us: “Every course that I’ve taken has been very relevant and practical, and the assignments that I’ve done have been directly applicable to ministry.”

A Pastor’s Growth Benefits His Congregation

The D. Min. is built on the adage that a church cannot grow beyond the growth of its pastor. It aims to make churches more effective by making pastors more competent.

The knowledge and competence your pastor will gain will be one way your church will benefit. He will go deeper into subjects studied in his past training as well as delve into new areas. Our students enroll because they want to be “stretched”, and they usually are. One of our students recently said, “My classes were challenging, and pushed me in areas I needed to go.”

Not only does this influx of new ideas, understanding, and practical wisdom enrich the pastor, church board members, staff and other leaders will grow when the pastor passes these on to them. Another of our students said, “My church leadership team and congregation always appreciate the insights gained and directly benefit from the investment in the D. Min.”

The D. Min. also focuses on updating and upgrading the pastor’s skills for pastoral ministry. Churches will likely see their pastor’s preaching and leadership improve. During the D. Min., his skills and relationships will be evaluated in an effort to strengthen any weaknesses.

Besides helping him preach and lead better, a D. Min. can be a wonderful process of personal growth. Most programs hope to improve a participant’s ability to relate to others, to do self-assessment, and to grow spiritually. Much of this takes place by involvement with the professors, but also from their interaction with other pastors in the program, with whom some forge deep and continuing relationships.

The following is typical of comments we hear from our participants. One student said, “My motivation in pursuing the D. Min. program wasn’t necessarily the degree itself, but the opportunity to be around fresh thinking and...
peers in ministry that would help me grow.” Some tell us how a D. Min. helped them get “unstuck” after getting bogged down in routine and stagnated thinking: “I started the D. Min. to stir up an old, tired brain that had been out of seminary and almost all serious academic efforts for 27 years. The program wonderfully fulfilled that and much more.”

Overall, completing a D. Min. can be expensive since it may involve travel and lodging as well as tuition. Many pastors deem it valuable enough to pay their own way. Many churches, however, ease their pastor’s financial burden by providing financial support, some of them through an annual stipend for continuing education. The cost can be reduced considerably by attending a seminary within a short driving distance, with over 130 accredited programs around the United States making this possible for many. In addition, the expenses are eased by spreading the program out for several years.

After twelve years of directing a Doctor of Ministry program, I can say with confidence that most of our graduates would claim for themselves what one of them recently wrote to me: “I am a better pastor and more effective leader because of the D. Min. program. More people have come into the Kingdom through the church I lead through this.”

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**Exegetically Speaking**—by Spiros Zodhiates

**Jesus Answers the Sadducees about Life after Death**

Matthew 22:23-33

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

In the temple, Jesus dealt with the Pharisees, the scribes (from *grammateús* [1122]) who were students and teachers of the Jewish law, and the Herodians (*hērōdianoí* [2265]), a Jewish political sect favoring, as the name implies, the Roman occupation of Israel.

The chief priests were members of the Sanhedrin and mostly from the small sect of the Sadducees. They were wealthy, rationalistic, and more liberal than the Pharisees and Essenes (Matt. 3:7; Acts 4:1; etc.). Unlike the Pharisees, they restricted divine inspiration to the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible; they did not believe that the spirit survives death; and they rejected the ideas of bodily resurrection, final judgment, heaven, and hell. These last denials (cf. Acts 23:8) prompted the discussion that follows.

On Tuesday within the last week of His life, Jesus was in the temple. Many Sadducees no doubt had either heard of Lazarus’ resurrection and/or seen him alive.

[23] On the same day that Jesus stumped the Pharisees and Herodians, the Sadducees came to Him with what they felt was a question He could not answer concerning the resurrection. The verb that Matthew uses implies that they did more than just ask a question; they demanded an answer. This verb is from *eperōtáō* ([1905]), from the intensive prefix *epi* [1909], upon; and the verb *erōtáō* [2065], to ask or inquire). The Sadducees tended to equate heaven with earth, like the Corinthians to whom Paul found it necessary to differentiate (1 Cor. 15:42–49) the earthly, natural (from *psychikós* [5591]) body from the heavenly, spiritual (from *pneumatikós* [4152] body.

[24–28] The story the Sadducees told Jesus may have been exaggerated fiction, but the expression “*with us*” (v. 25) argues for real history.

As it stands, there are seven brothers. The first marries a woman and then dies without offspring. Each successive brother performs his levirate duty (cf. Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5) of marrying the widow to raise up seed to each prior childless brother, until all seven have married and died. Finally, the widow dies (vv. 25–27). The verb translated “shall marry” in verse 24 (from *epigambreúō* [1918]), derives from *epí* and *gambreúō* (n.f.), to marry after), which fits the context of remarriage.

It is not known whether this Mosaic law was kept during Christ’s time, but the Pharisees and Sadducees, like contributing authors to the Talmud and Mishnah, often used exaggerated scenarios to engender controversy.

“Issue” in verse 25 translates the noun *spérmα* ([4690], sperm, seed, or offspring), the phrase meaning that no children had been born to any of the seven brothers.

“Deceased” (KJV) translates a Greek verb from *teleutáō* ([5053], to end or finish [i.e., life in the body]) in verse 25, which is followed by the synonymous verb “*died*” (from *apothnéskō* [599], to expire), referring to the death of the woman who had become the wife of all seven brothers (22:27).

The question posed to Jesus was this: “In the resurrection (from *anástasis* [386], a standing up from a prone position either “aew” or “again”, hence *aná* [303]) whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her” (22:28).

[29] Without hesitation, Jesus answered, “You are deceived (*planásthe*, the present passive of *planúō* [4105], to lead astray, not having known (from *oida* the perfect of
horāō [3708], to perceive) the Scriptures or the power of God” (a.t.). Although Jesus would wisely extract His proof from the Pentateuch itself, it is possible here that by “the Scriptures,” He referred to the prophets whom the Sadducees rejected. Their error then would be not extending inspiration to such prophecies as Isaiah 26:19, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise,” or Daniel 12:2, “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Jesus went beyond this, however, to accuse the Sadducees of a limited application of a basic theistic premise—the omnipotence of God. In the matter of the resurrection, one must take into account what the Scriptures say specifically about the power of God. The Sadducees were not atheists. They did accept the five books of Moses as revelation. Furthermore, they did not deny omnipotence. The Sadducees believed in the power of God to do all sorts of things, but they did not believe He would reclothe a spirit with a new body after death. There was nothing in their definition of omnipotence that required resurrection. An omnipotent God could choose to sustain spirits after death without bodily forms or to annihilate souls altogether.

Because God can do anything He so desires, Jesus needed to show from the Torah that God does use His power to raise the dead, so He pointed them to Exodus 3:6. While the Sadducees allowed for a power in man to “raise up” a full human body and soul out of “seed,” they denied this power to God in the afterlife. Apparently, they did not think of the development of a body and soul from a seed as an impressive miracle. But if God cannot raise the dead, how did He create Adam out of dust in the first place? And the creation story is in the Torah!

[30] Jesus addressed the issue of marriage in the afterlife first by arguing that the resurrection body is spiritual in nature: “For in the resurrection (from anástasis [386], i.e., in the life following the resurrection) they neither (oúte [3777]) marry (from gaméō [1060], to marry, take a wife), nor (oúte) are given in marriage (from ekgamízō [1547]; an alternate of ekgamískō [1548]), to give in marriage as a father gives his daughter; see 1 Cor. 7:38, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

The groom marries (gaméō) the woman whose father gives her in marriage (gamískō [1061]). The purpose of God is that “they [the bride and the groom] twain shall be one flesh” (Matt. 19:5). While we are not taught a great deal about the resurrected body, we are told that it will be different from the one on earth. Paul says it will be a body that is primarily spiritual (from pneumatikós [4152]; see 1 Cor. 15:44) and glorious (from éndoξos [1741], gorgeous, honorable; see Eph. 5:27), manifesting the glory and power of God.

Jesus said we will be “as (hós [5613], like) angels (the definite article is not in the Greek text) of God in heaven.” The small particle “as” (critical to the meaning) and the lack of a definite article (identity) preceding “angels” mean that we will not become angels when we are resurrected; rather, we will be “as” or “like” them—similar but not identical in basic nature. The additional qualification “in heaven” implies a predicate such as glory that would be absent from, say, the “angel of the abyss” (Rev. 9:11) or one of Satan’s angels (Rev. 12:7). Tying this all together, believers will no longer pair off their angel-like bodies in marriage for the purpose of procreating the race. Procreation is obsolescent in immortality.

If we want to gain insight into our metaphysical state, we can study the resurrected body of Jesus Christ. His resurrected body was neither spaceless (omnipresent since it was seen in one place or another, although not in two places simultaneously), nor timeless (an attribute of God, therefore also of Christ’s divine nature) as He performed sequential actions like eating and walking. Yet He had transcendence over space so He could move from place to place quickly and even walk through walls. This latter ability should seem neither strange nor impossible to us, since, according to science, physical entities are mostly empty space, and the boundaries and charges that separate subatomic particles are God’s creations. He is the cohesion that holds atoms together, and, as all nature, they are under His authority.

Jesus’ resurrected body was apparently free from the necessities of food, water, and air. Since our bodies will be “spiritual” like Christ’s (1 Cor. 15:44), they will not be enslaved to material things. However, we will enjoy both spiritual and material things as evidenced by Jesus’ eating of a breakfast of bread and fish with His disciples (John 21:12-13). This was a voluntary meal, enjoyed but not needed.

[31-32] Jesus now confronted the Sadducees with their own Scripture, the Pentateuch (Ex. 3:6): “Have ye not read (anégnōte, the aorist tense of anagnískō [314], to read, the aorist implying, “Didn’t you ever read at any time”) that which was spoken (from erēō [2046], to say precisely) unto you by (hupó [5259], by, which indicates direct cause) God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ God is (from eini [1510]) not the God of the dead (from nekrós [3498]), but of the living (zōнтēn, the present participle of zāō [2198], to live).

The Sadducees did not believe in the existence of human or angelic spirits (Acts 23:8), and they denied any resurrection—physical or spiritual. This did not mean, however, that, when Jesus spoke about the dead here, He agreed with their definition of death as nonexistence. Death is never juxtaposed to bare existence in Scripture, that is, as a state of nonexistence, which is a contradiction anyway (a state of nonexistence is a state of statelessness, which makes no logical sense). The true definition of death as separation (physical or ethical) implies the existence of two separated things.
Furthermore, the present participle, zōntōn, refers to those living now, not those who lived in the past, which would be expressed by the aorist participle. Zōntōn thus stands in opposition to nekrōn, “the dead,” and since there is no definite article before the participle or the adjectival noun, Jesus spoke generically, that is, of comparative states rather than of persons.

Jesus did not reveal here any details of the kind of life human spirits experience behind the veil as He did elsewhere (Luke 16:19–31). In Luke’s narrative, two men were assigned to two distinct locales following their deaths, one to a “place of torment” (Luke 16:28), the other to a place of bliss. The areas were separated by a great gulf (cháisma [5490], chasm, impassable space) so that no one could pass from one place to the other. Their dwellings were fixed, they were both conscious, and they could sense their respective environments. These environments were customized to the way they reacted to God’s offer of salvation.

If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not raised from the dead before God spoke to Moses, how did the statement that “God is...the God of the...living” (note: Luke 20:38 adds, “for all live unto him”) impact Sadducean beliefs? It did so in two ways. First, even if Jesus had conceded to their definition of death as nonexistence, the Sadducees had to admit that God is not the God of nothing. God cannot say, “I am the God of Abraham,” if Abraham does not exist. At best, then He should have said, I was the God of Abraham. If He says, “I am,” then Abraham must exist at the time God spoke to Moses, which means either that he was bodily resurrected at death or that his spirit survived his body. Either way, Jesus overthrew one of the Sadducees’ primary doctrines.

Second, if God is the God of the existing spirits of these men, then there is something to resurrect—something to reclothe with a body. On Sadducean premises, there might be a creation of another (new) person but not a resurrection, since this implies continuity, the restating of something that formerly stood. That continuity, the real person, is the spirit that God attaches to a new body.

Jesus’ point, then, was this: Since Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob exist, they (i.e., their spirits, their persons, not merely their bodies) can be resurrected—stand again inside new bodies. Resurrection is not a creation ex nihilo. By appealing to God’s current sovereignty over these “dead” who “live unto him” (Luke 20:38), Jesus overthrew the primary Sadducean doctrine of annihilation, which in turn opened up the possibility for the resurrection of the body. If Abraham currently exists, then Abraham can be resurrected bodily.

[33] The people who heard this conversation of Jesus with the Sadducees were justifiably “astonished” (from ekplēssō [1605], to astonish; from ek [1537], out of from within or among; and plēssō [4141], to strike; thus to be hit from without by surprise). Not only did Jesus silence the Sadducees on the doctrines of spirit and bodily resurrection, but He did so from within their own narrow set of “acceptable” Scriptures, the Torah—an amazing feat!

Spiros Zodhiates (1922-2009) served as president of AMG International for over 40 years, was the founding editor of Pulpit Helps Magazine (Disciple’s predecessor), and authored dozens of exegetical books.

Living out the Living Word—by Justin Lonas

The Lord Is Highly Exalted
Psalm 47

Last month, in looking at Psalm 46, we saw a theme emerge of God’s sovereignty over every nation of the earth. In Psalm 47, another hymn by the sons of Korah, this shines through even brighter, with the added component that God desires the worship of the nations. He is not content simply with authority; He wants to be recognized, loved, and proclaimed over the whole earth.

Like Psalm 46, God’s rule over the world in Psalm 47 is seen from the perspective of the people of Israel. He is exalted for His protection and preference of Israel over other nations. Likewise, in today’s context, we could interpret this as the people of God (the Church) worshipping Him for His mighty reign and resting in His preservation of us wherever in the world we might end up. Though God’s praise begins with His people, we will see over the course of this psalm that it ends with adoration from the whole earth.

The psalm begins with a commandment to praise: “O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy” (47:1). Clapping is one of the most basic human gestures, as any parent of young children will attest. It expresses joy and adulation unfiltered by language (fitting for praise from a diverse multitude). It is simultaneously auditory, visual, and kinetic, engaging the whole person in rejoicing. Likewise, shouting is universal, requiring nothing but directed emotion. This clapping and shouting is commanded from all people, and unlike the rest of the created order (which is referred to as clapping or shouting in Ps. 98:8, Is. 55:12, and elsewhere), their worship must be voluntary. God wants the willful praise of
all the people He created and gave strength to walk the earth.

Why is God worthy to be praised? The psalmists declare, “For the Lord Most High is to be feared, a great King over all the earth” (47:2). He is worthy to receive the praise of the nations, and within his rights to command it because His dominion is over the whole earth, and no one is outside of His “territory.” The tone of the psalm shifts now to an Israel-centric praise of God for His care for His people: “He subdues peoples under us and nations under our feet. He chooses our inheritance for us, the glory of Jacob whom He loves” (47:3-4).

Again, we have to see this in the larger biblical context of God’s redemption of mankind. After the fall, God called out Abraham, and promised to bless the whole earth through His descendants (Gen. 12:1-3). The law, which showed to all men their sinfulness before God’s holiness, was given through Abraham’s line, and the history of His covenant people serves to provide countless examples of God’s character and man’s failings. His work culminates in the coming of Christ, a Jew, so that anyone who trust in His shed blood for salvation could be grafted into God’s family. Through this, the Apostle Paul writes, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

The inheritance of “Jacob whom He loves” then, is not just the land of promise. It is not an earthly kingdom of any kind, but the promised reign of Christ which believers will share. Again, Paul says, “It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him” (2 Tim. 1:11-12a). This is echoed in Revelation 3:21, 20:6, and elsewhere. God’s praise will, in the end, emanate from the whole earth, because the whole earth will be filled with those He has redeemed and adopted, “a people for God’s own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The psalmists then proclaim praise from every corner: “God has ascended with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a skillful psalm” (47:5-7). The Lord’s ascension is reminiscent of a triumphal procession. He celebrates His own victory and rule, and calls all people to join Him. Many commentators through the centuries have viewed this verse as an allusion to Christ’s ascension into heaven after completing His work, and there is no reason to think that this theme was what God wanted to convey in the inspiration of this passage.

We are then commanded to “sing praises” five times. A “skillful psalm” is added to the earlier modes of clapping and shouting as a type of worship desired by God. He is honored and glorified by every manner of demonstrated praise, and He desires that we use the full range of our created abilities to direct glory to His name. (For an in-depth look at worship, please refer to the seven-part series “O Magnify the Lord with Me: Worship and the Church” by Tim Schoap in Disciple, Vol. 2, Issues 7-13.)

The final segment of the psalm focuses on direct praise to God (rather than exhorting praise from His people), stating the facts of His glory for all to see: “God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne. The princes of the people have assembled themselves as the people of the God of Abraham, for the shields of the earth belong to God; He is highly exalted” (47:8-9). This restates and solidifies the theme of the whole psalm, showing God on His throne with the nations of the world bowed before Him in worship.

This scene prefigures the worship given to the Godhead at the end of days as described by John in Revelation. “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever’” (Rev. 5:13).

As we have already seen, that worship is made possible by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the redemption of the world. As the elders and living creatures proclaimed just before this in John’s vision, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

It is through this grand story arc from creation to new creation that we see the magnitude of God’s mercy and His deep and pursuing love for every person He created. This God who is “patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9b), reigns over the world not to taunt and tease us with His authority but in order to fulfill our every need by His great grace. For this indeed He is highly exalted above all other Gods.

Justin Lonas is editor for Disciple Magazine for AMG International in Chattanooga, Tennessee.
Praying for Unity: Some Important Lessons from Paul’s Prayer

Text: “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 15:5-6).

Thought: This prayer is essentially a prayer for genuine and meaningful unity among the Christians in Rome. These were believers who had many differences between them and there was the potential for divisions and distractions. Unity or “oneness” is a vital subject and one that was especially on the heart of the Apostle Paul.

In the immediate context (Rom.14:1-15:13), Paul is addressing differences that potentially divide Christians and how Christians should deal with these differences. Here we find a call for unity amidst diversity.

I. There Are Principles to Apply that Enable Unity Among Believers

Paul in this passage shares several guidelines that serve to facilitate the unity of the body and the resolution of divisions within it. He lists several negative things to avoid along with several positives that we should aspire to.

Among the things Paul tells us not to do, we find the following: 1) Judging one another instead of allowing God to judge us (14:1, 10, 13). 2) Regarding one another with contempt (14:3, 10). 3) Pressuring others to do things which the Lord has not yet given them a clear conscience about and thereby causing them to stumble into sin (14:13-23).

Likewise, however, there are many things that Paul tells us emphatically to do which correspond to the sins he urges us to avoid. 1) We are to be fully convinced of God’s purposes for us in our own mind (14:5). 2) We are to recognize our own individual accountability to the Lord (14:6-13). 3) We are to accept one another in Christ, just as He accepted us (14:3; 15:7). 4) We are to pursue things that bring peace with one another and edification of the Body (14:19).

II. There Is a Pattern to Follow that Promotes Unity

As believers, we are to follow the pattern that Christ set for building unity among His followers. Paul tells us from the example of Christ that we are to seek to please others, not ourselves (15:2-3). He shows us that we are to edify and help others (15:2), and that we are to accept others in Christ (15:7-9).

III. There Is a Prayer to Offer that Seeks Unity

Now we come to Paul’s prayer for unity. As we view this prayer, let us view it not only as a prayer that can be prayed, but also as a source of truths that we need to understand, believe and obey.

Notice first of all that this prayer is to the God who grants unity (15:5). We direct our prayer to God because He desires unity and because He has demonstrated the qualities necessary to maintain and promote unity. God is the God of patience and endurance, and God is the God of comfort and encouragement. Why these attributes? They are fundamental to God’s relationship with us. They are fundamental to God’s revelation to us (Rom. 15:4). Also, they are fundamental to our relationships with one another. But, God is also the God who gives patience and endurance, and God is the God who gives comfort and encouragement. As we look to God to help us in our relationships, we need to remember how God has dealt with us!

In order to pursue oneness, we need the gift that determines unity (15:5). Here we are going to define the essential elements in true unity. The text reads: “...grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.” Ultimately God has to bring about (to grant or gift) real unity in His church, but let us look at what this gift involves. God has to enable us by His grace to be people of unity. This gift involves a mutual mindset—at the heart of true unity is a way of thinking with a renewed mind (“to be like-minded”). We are to have a Christ-like way of thinking (cf. Phil. 2:1-11).

What does this look like? We are to think humbly, “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” (Rom. 12:16). We are also to think harmoniously, pursuing peace (14:13,19).

This gift involves the Master’s mindset. We must have a spiritual unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus. This means that we specifically following the example of Christ Jesus under His Lordship, doing the things we saw that Paul commands.

Under Christ’s Lordship, we must seek to have His mind and to have the same mind together. But, we need to pray that God will grant us His grace, His patience, His comfort in order for this “mindset” to be a reality. Ultimately, such a mindset that leads to real unity is a provision of God, empowered by His Spirit.

IV. There Is a Goal that Displays Unity (15:6)

The goal of our being unified together in the same mind as Christ is for us to give glory to God. It is not just with one mouth that we glorify God, but with one heart and
mind. Paul’s passion, vision, and mission were to see a united witness to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although not mentioned in this text, thank God for His Spirit that unites us in Christ and helps us to move towards practical and personal unity in experience.

David L. Olford teaches expository preaching at Union University’s Stephen Olford Center in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Story behind the Song—by Lindsay Terry

The Influence of a 16-Year-Old Song: “My Jesus, I Love Thee”

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him’” (John 14:23).

Occasionally, in the search for information concerning the story behind a particular hymn, great barriers are encountered. Such is the case with one of our best-loved hymns, “My Jesus, I Love Thee.” It was not until recent years that the identity of the songwriter, William Ralph Featherstone (1846-1873), became known.

It is reported that he probably grew up in Canada, since it was in Toronto in 1862 that he became a Christian. His conversion must have been very special, because just afterward and in connection with this glorious event, this 16-year-old wrote the hymn that is still meaningful to so many people.

Some historians have said that William mailed the poem to a relative in Los Angeles, who must have sent it to England, because it appeared there in The London Hymnal, published in 1864, just two years following his conversion.

Sometime later, in Boston, Massachusetts, A. J. Gordon was busy pulling together a hymnal for Baptist worshipers. During the process he was going through other hymnals, getting ideas and perhaps some songs for his hymnbook. In The London Hymnal he saw “My Jesus, I Love Thee” but was not at all impressed with the musical selling. He thought he could make great improvements for the beautiful, meaningful lyrics by composing better music for the song. The melody that he wrote has carried Featherstone’s lyrics to every corner of our world.

A. J. Gordon was born in New Hampshire on April 19, 1836. He was educated at Brown University and Newton Theological Seminary. He was ordained at age 27, and he became the pastor of a Baptist church in Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts. He later pastored the Clarendon Street Baptist Church in Boston and died there in 1895, at the height of his wonderful ministry. And yet the height of his ministry might actually have been in 1864, when he gave to the world the musical selling that has carried “My Jesus, I Love Thee” around the world.

The life of every Christian is changed after conversion. The Bible says that the “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). Perhaps this young man had keenly realized his guilt before the Lord Jesus became particularly near and dear to him. He must have sensed a tremendous need for forgiveness. And we know that those who are forgiven more love more.

As you look back on your life and see the things from which you have been forgiven, there should be a strong tendency to draw closer to and increase your love for the Savior. If we will love him, then we must love others. If we pray according to his will, our prayer must be for others.

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Lindsay Terry has been a song historian for more than 40 years, and has written widely on the background of great hymns and worship songs including the books I Could Sing of Your Love Forever (2008), from which this piece is excerpted, and The Sacrifice of Praise (2002).

Church Builders—by Bernard R. DeRemer

Man of Prayer: Joseph Kemp

Joseph Kemp told a committee meeting in Charlotte Baptist Chapel, Edinburgh, “God pity the man who comes here!” Kemp pastored the Baptist Church in Hawick, which was “enjoying remarkable blessing.” Then Charlotte Chapel called Kemp; he “not only restored a great church but also brought salvation and revival to thousands.”
Kemp was born in 1872 at Hull, Yorkshire. Both parents died during his childhood; with only 18 months of schooling he had to go to work. Later he lived with a devout Christian, J.H. Russell, who helped train the lad and witnessed lovingly to him about Christ.

Soon after he was saved Kemp began a Bible study class. He attended Glasgow Bible Training Institute, graduating in 1894. He conducted evangelistic meetings for the Ayrshire Christian Union, and then accepted a call to the Baptist Church in Kelso. There he married the daughter of a key church family.

Next he became pastor of the Baptist Church in Hawick in 1898. He found a divided church but “left it united and growing.” He spent mornings in study and prayer, devoted afternoons to visitation, and evenings to Bible classes and church training sessions. Prayer was one of the main elements in his ministry at Hawick—and throughout his life.

On his first Sunday at Charlotte Chapel, only 35 members came. But he worked diligently, starting two Sunday prayer meetings, at 7 A.M. and 10 A.M. In his meetings he “gave solid Bible teaching with an evangelistic fervor that eventually caught fire in the church” and led to open-air services. Before long, crowds came.

When the great Welsh revival broke out, Kemp sought “some of the blessing for himself and his people.” Attendance increased, souls were saved in unusual numbers and the church felt the power of God. A new building followed to accommodate the large congregation. During its construction, the church met in the 2,000-seat Synod Hall and the blessing of God continued unabated. What a contrast to the earlier handful!

In 1915 he left to become pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, New York City. But his health began to fail and he left there only two years later. In 1920 he accepted a call to the Baptist Tabernacle in Auckland, New Zealand. With health wonderfully improved, he began his new work with great expectations. The New Zealand Bible Training Institute was a by-product of his ministry there.

Kemp last visited Great Britain in 1926. He preached at Keswick and ministered in the U.S. and Canada”, but in 1932, his health began to fail again. The next year he went to be with the Lord.

Like the apostles of old, he gave himself “to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).

Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing for Pulpit Helps Magazine. He continues to serve in this capacity as a volunteer contributor to Disciple. He lives in West Liberty, Ohio.

Reference: Listening to the Giants, by Warren W. Wiersbe; excerpts used by permission.

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Counselor’s Corner—by James Rudy Gray

Preparation Precedes Blessing

Many years ago I read a sentence that has stuck with me, “Preparation precedes blessing.” That is, the heart that is paying attention to what God is up to and seeking after Him is ready for whatever He decides to bring into one’s life next. I have found that to be a truism that is accurate for life.

A young man, separated from his wife because of his immorality, came to me once for counseling. Some progress was being made, but suddenly he seemed to move forward by leaps and bounds. He came into the counseling session eager to talk. He had attended a series of “revival” meetings at his church and had gone to the altar for prayer. People in the church encouraged him and reached out to him. His enthusiasm was evident. He was positive and hopeful.

During this time, he continued to share more and more about his life. He was not irrational but was very optimistic. This man at this moment seemed to be a poster child for faith, but I felt I needed to practice the principle of preparation preceding blessing. I encouraged him, shared some pertinent Scripture passages with him and then told him to be prepared for something that would likely happen in the coming days.

He listened as I related to him how it often happens that when a person experiences an emotional high an accompanying emotional low typically follows. When we know what is coming, we are better equipped to deal with it and work through it. After all, God is the same God whether we are on the mountain or in the valley. He does not change and His grace is sufficient for whatever our need. If the anticipated emotional low does not come, we are still in a more blessed position because we have achieved a Godly realism.

This man appreciated this and wanted to talk about how powerful the devil is. I agreed and assured him that Satan knows how we humans are made and would likely see to it that he had plenty of temptations prepared for him. Our discussion continued as we focused on being prepared for the let down or valley that he was likely to experience emotionally. As he left, I was encouraged that at least I had prepared him for something that could happen. If it does, he will not be devastated by it or surprised by the feelings he may well have.
In this case, and in so many other applications in life, preparation precedes blessing. God is always the same God and He must be our anchor, our hope, and our focus. Circumstances may change. Feelings may fluctuate. But, God is always faithful and true.

James Rudy Gray is certified as a professional counselor by the National Board for Certified Counselors, and is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He serves as the pastor of Utica Baptist Church in Seneca, S.C.

Book Review—5/23/11


Calvinism and a re-emphasis on Reformed theology in general have enjoyed a resurgence in the American Church in recent years. With that renewed interest has come a renewal of confusion and criticism about Calvinist theology and its implications.

In this context, Ken Stewart, a professor of theology at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Ga., has written a book addressing these misconceptions and showing Calvinism to be a vibrant part of the orthodox Christian mainstream. He addresses Ten Myths about Calvinism mainly to Calvinist readers, but it has value for Christians from a variety of traditions.

Stewart gives five reasons for writing his book: 1) Calvinism (like most other strands of Christianity) tends to generate its share of extremists. 2) Calvinism (like most other strands of Christianity) has a tendency to rely heavily on the past (i.e., 16th-century Europe) at the expense of fully engaging the present. 3) Because of reason #2, Calvinism sometimes has difficulty digesting its own potential for today’s world. 4) Calvinists tend to underestimate the movement’s own complexity. 5) Calvinism has often been derided by those who see one or more aspects of its diverse expression as a defective and dangerous form of Christianity.

Stewart organizes his book into two main sections—part one discusses four myths Calvinists should not be circulating (but are); part two examines six myths that non-Calvinists should not be circulating (but are).

For example, the third myth Stewart addresses, “TULIP is the Yardstick of the Truly Reformed,” looks at the development of this acronym (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints) as shorthand for the basic tenets of Calvinism. He shows that the usage of this acronym did not originate with Calvin (or even until the 20th century) and that even its staunchest defenders are quick to clarify and expound the basic points to avoid oversimplification of deep theological truths.

Some of the myths from non-Calvinists that he challenges and undercuts include the notions that Calvinism is an anti-missionary movement and that Calvinism leads to theocracy. Stewart deftly dismantles the anti-missionary charge by showing the zeal for evangelism of the early reformers and pointing out that two of the greatest missionary pioneers in modern history, William Carey and David Brainerd, came from the Calvinist movement and were inspired to carry the Gospel to the unreached by their God-centered theology. He tackles the theocracy accusation by pointing out that even in 16th-century Geneva (the closest thing to a church-led government Calvinism ever produced), the overriding characteristic of that jurisdiction was its commitment to equality of all before the law and the tolerance of other branches of the faith (something that existed almost nowhere else in Europe).

In conclusion, Stewart finds encouragement in the growth the Reformed movement is undergoing, but wants to ensure that readers understand the full history and breadth of Calvinism. He stresses that we need to recover the big picture that was more evident to previous generations than to us; that is, that everything of truly abiding value in Calvinism serves the interests of our common Christianity. Calvinism followed in humility is dedicated to the advance of the Gospel; followed in pride it will lead to distraction and division.

As in all denominations and churches, changes must be made to adapt to the advancement of time and entry into different cultures without compromising the timelessness and inerrancy of Scripture. In my opinion, this is what Ten Myths about Calvinism is all about; this is what makes it appropriate reading across the denominations.

Karen Cannon

Target: All
Type: Church History/Theology
Take: Recommended
News Update—5/23/11

Pakistan Blasphemy Law Used against Kids

_Baptist Press_ reports that Pakistan’s notorious “blasphemy” laws can put even children at risk. Christians say the days when they could teach their offspring pat answers to protect them from accusations of disparaging Islam or its prophet seem to have passed.

One 30-year-old Pakistani woman who grew up in Lahore said her Christian parents taught her formulaic answers to keep from falling prey to accusations under the blasphemy statutes, but says those answers aren’t enough anymore.

“One answer is, ‘As a Christian I have only read the Bible, I can’t read Arabic,’” she said. “These questions used to be easier to answer, we had formulas. But those are not working any more. We just tell children ‘Don’t talk about religion in school.’ This is shaky ground now.” An entire generation, Christians fear, is growing up not knowing their faith for fear that it will lead to potentially disastrous schoolyard talk.

Religion Today Summaries

Thousands of Church Workers Volunteer for Ala. Cleanup

The latest disaster relief statistics released by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions show that more than 8,400 Southern Baptist volunteers from 10 states have been deployed following the tornado aftermath in Alabama.

More significantly, disaster relief personnel reported 38 professions of faith in Christ as a result of their interactions with residents thus far. Southern Baptists have also served more than 200,000 meals and seven mass feeding units have been deployed.

_Baptist Press_ reports that more than 900 chainsaw jobs have been completed, and 365 critical incident stress management chaplains have served 5,292 people, the board of missions said May 11. Twenty-two shower units have been deployed, and nearly 4,000 showers had been logged in addition to nearly 1,200 loads of laundry.

Religion Today Summaries

Rights Experts Warn of Rising Religious Violence in Egypt

A group of experts, advocates, and faith leaders have released a statement highlighting the increasing frequency of attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt and the subsequent “inaccurate” media coverage. At least 12 people were killed over the weekend when about 100 people attacked Coptic demonstrators outside a state TV building, and such deadly interactions are increasingly common.

The letter, signed by members of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and Christian Solidarity Worldwide among others, notes the recent revolution has left a “power vacuum” and opened a “‘Pandora’s Box’ of social problems.”

It continued, “While most of this is a necessary part of the emergence of true democracy in Egypt, the increase in and intensity of attacks on Christians are indicators of imminent civil unrest and the potential for widespread ethnorenligious violence that demands an immediate response.”

Religion Today Summaries

Christian Leaders Refute May 21 Rapture Prediction

Harold Camping’s predictions about rapture on May 21 (which have since then obviously been shown to be completely false) are on the fringe of Christian circles, but plenty of evangelicals have taken time to respond to his views.

“The Christian church has seen this kind of false teaching before,” said Dr. R. Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, on his blog.

He said that Camping’s teachings are “embarrassing” for the church and notes Jesus Christ’s assertion that not even the Son of God knows the day of his return.

W. Robert Godfrey, president and professor of church history at Westminster Seminary California, pointed out on the seminary’s blog, “Valiant for Truth”, a glaring omission from Camping’s prediction. “Camping’s teaching reaches the status of heresy in his recent appeal to the world, ‘Judgment Day,’ an eight page statement online,” Godfrey said.

“The saddest and most distressing element of Camping’s latest theological statement is that it is Christless. He does not write about Christ’s return, but about judgment day.” Hundreds of Camping’s followers have sold their homes in preparation for the event.

Religion Today Summaries

Religious Liberties Amendment Headed to Missouri Ballot

Missouri residents will get to vote on a religious liberties amendment next year, after the Senate passed the legislation, 34-0.

_WORLD_ News Service reports that the measure would amend the state Constitution to clarify the rights of Missourians to pray and acknowledge God in public and private settings. It also would protect public school students’ right to pray and acknowledge God in school, as
well as express their religious beliefs in written and oral assignments.

Joe Ortwerth, executive director of the Missouri Family Policy Council, said: “This legislation establishes the clear outlines of our citizens’ religious liberties (and) would help overcome legal intimidation tactics” from groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union. In March, the House passed the bill for the fourth straight year, with a vote of 126-30.

Religion Today Summaries

Korean Bible Instructor Held Following China Raid

Chinese authorities arrested and held at least 49 Chinese Christians and four South Korean believers overnight on May 17, following a raid on an underground church.

The Associated Press reports that one of the South Korean Bible instructors, Jin Yongzhe, and his wife, Li Sha, are still in custody, and have probably been charged with the minor crime of illegal assembly. Officials searched the meeting place, which was hosting a religious education seminar, and seized thousands of dollars’ worth of property.

South Korean churches maintain close ties with Chinese believers, so much so that South Korean citizens traveling to China have reported having been asked to sign pledges not to engage in missionary or other proscribed religious activity. China Aid President Bob Fu said China’s government has been cracking down on unauthorized religious meetings throughout the country.

Religion Today Summaries

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines
How to Find the True God
2 Chron. 15:3-4

Intro.: The greatest blessing anyone can experience is to find the true God, and the greatest tragedy is to pass through life without ever finding Him. In our key verses we have a brief description of one phase of Israel’s history; but it also describes multitudes of people throughout the world. Notice how this brief portion of Scripture unfolds to give us a sequence of teaching.

I. They Were Without the True God (v. 3)
II. They Were Without a Teaching Priest (v. 3)
III. They Were Without Law (v. 3)
IV. When Trouble Came They Turned to the Lord (v. 4-6)
V. They Found the True God (v. 4)

A. Turn from sin and self (1 Thess. 1:9).
B. Seek the Lord and His pardon (Isa. 55:6-7).
C. Find the true God (2 Chron. 15:2-4,15).

Francis W. Dixon
Words of Life Ministries, wordsoflife.co.uk.

A. To prophecies of God.
B. To promises of God.
C. To the plan of God.

IV. His Frankness:
A. Conversion.
B. Command.

Croft M. Pentz

Illustrations

Duty and Pleasure

I heard some time ago of an optometrist who was very fond of the game of cricket. But he had given it up, much as he enjoyed it, for he found that it affected the delicacy of his touch. For the sake of those whom he sought to relieve he sanctified himself and set himself apart.

That is what we want—that there shall come into our lives a force that prompts us always to be at our best and ready for service, a tree that is always in leaf and in bloom and laden with its fruit, like the orange tree, where the beauty of the blossom meets with its fragrance the mellow glory of the fruit.

Mark Guy Pearse

The Actions and Teachings of Christ
Acts 1:11

I. His Faith
   A. In the divine.
   B. In the disciples.
   C. In the down-trodden.

II. His Forgiveness
   A. Forgiving the low class.
   B. Forgiving the high class.
   C. Forgiving the outcast.

III. His Faithfulness

God’s Unchanging Word

We should be thankful that God kept His promise after the Law came to Moses (see Gal. 3:15:18). Can you imagine what life would be like if our justification came as a result of our ability to keep all of the rules perfectly?

Booker T. Washington describes meeting an ex-slave from Virginia in his book, Up from Slavery: “I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body; and while he was...
paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labor where and for whom he pleased.

“Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some $300. Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater portion of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia and placed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands.

“In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay his debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise.”

The law did not change this man’s commitment to keep his promise. Even more so, the Law did not change God’s plan for man. As Malachi 3:6 says: “I am the Lord, I change not.”

From Practical Illustrations: Galatians-Colossians
Leadership Ministries Worldwide

**Bulletin Inserts**

**On Trust**

All of God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they trusted Him to be with them.

A coincidence is when God performs a miracle and decides to remain anonymous.

When God ordains, He sustains. These three anonymous

Trust in the Lord for every movement, for every movement comes from the Lord.

Christianity promises to make men free; it never promises to make them independent.

William R. Inge
Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever

“SO, THAT’S MY SERMON FOR NEXT SUNDAY—WHADDYA THINK?”

“I’VE DISCOVERED I REALLY ENJOY TAKING NAPS. I WONDER IF THAT IS MY SPIRITUAL GIFT.”

“RETRAITEMENT DISCOVERIES”

Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

**ANSWERS**

1. Revelation (Rev. 1:3).
2. Zelophehad (Num. 27:1; 36:11; Josh. 17:3).
3. Josh. (2 Kgs. 11:2, 3; 2 Chr. 22:11, 12).
4. Titus (Titus 1:12).
5. Peter cut off his right ear with a sword (John 18:10).
6. Ezekiel (Ezek. 4:12). God soon modified this, changing the fuel to cow dung (Ezek. 4:15).
8. Peter (Mat. 17:27); he paid it for Jesus and himself.
10. Dan (Dan. 3:22).

**ACROSTIC #26: ANSWERS**

**LAMENTATIONS 3:22 & 23** “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

A. SHOCOH
B. LERBEREMAIN
C. AFFECTIONS
D. MASTERY
E. EFFETE
F. NOISE
G. TRESPASSED
H. AMORITES
I. TYBALT
J. INHERIT
K. OWENS
L. NICODEMUS
M. SHUNITE
N. WAVE
O. SPROUT

Father Abraham and Hidden Wisdom

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, October 1993

**Father Abraham’s Question Box**

**ODDS AND ENDS, No. 2**

1. Who in the Old Testament was told never to get married?
2. What were James and John doing when Jesus first saw them?
3. Where was Paul attacked by a viper?
4. How old was Adam when he died?
5. Which two books of the Bible mention “Leviathan?”
6. Who protested when Jesus wanted to wash his feet, then changed his mind?
7. How long did the locusts in the book Revelation have the power to hurt men?
8. Who was as strong at 85 years of age as he was at 45 years of age?
9. How many Assyrian soldiers did the angel of the Lord kill in one night?
10. Who was promised that he would not die until he had seen Jesus Christ?

See Answers on page 26

Hidden Wisdom on next page
HIDDEN WISDOM #27
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, instruction, or promise. When read vertically, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. All quotations are from the KJV.

HAPPY SOLVING!!

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CLUES

A. Epithet applied to Samballat
   B. Coverings for moth larvae
   C. Study of quantities and relations through the use of numbers and symbols
   D. Michal's first husband
   E. "He will __________ purge his floor"
   F. A chewy candy made of brown sugar and butter
   G. Paul's Corinthian informants came from here (3 wds.)
   H. What Philip the deacon was
   I. Portable time-piece (2 wds.)
   J. Jonathan and Samson feasted on this
   K. King Arthur's evil kinsman
   L. Peter's one-time stock in trade
   M. A piece of wood to anchor nails
   N. One skilled but showy (colloq.)