

Disciple Magazine



Equipping believers for deeper life

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by Shea Oakley

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Human Judgment vs. Divine Grace

By Shea Oakley

Many of us have a tendency to feel certain that we know what the limits of divine grace should be for ourselves and others. Such “certainty” is usually based on human ideas of fairness and justice that we have embraced as normative after observing how things work between men in the world we live in. But when it comes to the grace of God, we nearly always fall short in recognizing the depth of His love for our fallen race, collectively and individually.

Sometimes we may be tempted to rail against the seeming “unfairness” of the unmerited favor He shows towards people who we feel do not deserve it. An example might be the apparently real conversion of a man like David Berkowitz. During the long summer of 1977 Berkowitz serially murdered several people in New York City while sending notes to police signed “the Son of Sam”. He was eventually captured and sentenced to life in prison without parole. Years later this one-time serial killer cried out to God for forgiveness and found it in Jesus Christ. Since that time he has shown the fruits of real repentance and even become the head chaplain of prisoners in the correctional facility that will be his home for the rest of his earthly life.

Some Christians do know “from whence they came” and can identify enough with a man like Berkowitz that they rejoice at his salvation. But others wonder, secretly or otherwise, why a serial killer, a rapist, a terrorist, etc., should ever be the object of saving grace. Some crimes seem so heinous to us that we feel like they should be included under the heading of “unpardonable sins;” doubting the sincerity of such perpetrators’ conversions or, worse, resenting them.

The core of this issue lies in our understanding of the nature of the God we worship. We know that He is “*not mocked*”—the Bible tells us so. Vengeance most definitely is His. The Scripture also says, however, that “*He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked;*” He does take vengeance, but He does not do so in the fashion of sinful human beings. Truth be told, we are often inclined to enjoy seeing “bad people” get “what they deserve.” Scores of Hollywood movies and television series feature the “bad

guys” getting their just deserts in violent scene after violent scene. We like revenge. It makes us feel better about ourselves. It makes us feel superior to the “really wicked” people of the world.

But God has no such spurious need to feel morally superior to others because He is the only One who truly is morally superior. Paradoxically, the one Being in the universe who has the right to condemn the wicked (which, according to the Bible and our own deepest consciences, includes every one of us) would prefer not to. He would rather shed His loving grace on us first, in the hope that we might repent and return to Him.

And sometimes the depth of that loving grace astounds and discomforts us. We are like the older brother in the prodigal son story. **We** are good and do not feel that we are getting the reward for that studied goodness which we deserve. Meanwhile, God is letting the likes of “the Son of Sam” into the Kingdom. It seems patently **unfair**.

Well, love, divine love anyway, is unfair and unapologetically so. If God’s generosity compels Him to pay all the day laborers the same amount no matter when they started working, then so be it. If His perfect love leads him to embrace a person we think deserves nothing but death and lead him or her towards repentance, what is that to us? We might do well to remember the grace we ourselves were shown when we were hell-bound worshippers of anything and everything but the one true God; grace that He continues to lavish on us every day of our lives.

Rather than trying to set some kind of personal limit on the grace of God, it is far better for us to look up to Heaven and thank that God for the unbelievably “unfair” generosity of His love displayed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who “*takes away the sins of the world.*”

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The Seven Churches of Revelation—Part 8

Laodicea: The Lukewarm Church

By Ray P. Burriss

Laodicea was a city of comfort, known for its collections of classical Greek art and refined way of life. The city had a large Jewish population descended from those deported to the area by Antiochus the Great two centuries before Christ. It was a very wealthy city, perhaps the wealthiest city in the region, partly because of fact it was a financial, medical, and banking hub for the area. Even the Jews there were particularly wealthy: the Roman proconsul Flaccus reports Jewish merchants of Laodicea sending impressive amounts of gold back to Jerusalem for use in the Temple.

While a large portion of the Laodiceans' wealth came from financial sources, it also came from clothing manufacturing, a medical school that produced, among other things, a compound for the ears and a salve for the eyes. They also had sheep that grew rare black wool and people from various parts of the world would come to Laodicea to purchase it. Like most of the other cities in that area of Asia Minor, they had a very good road system because they were part of the Roman Empire. Laodicea was so wealthy that when the earthquake of 60 A.D. destroyed the city, they refused financial help from Rome and rebuilt the city from their own funds.

They did not have their own water supply, though. Because of this, all an invading army had to do was destroy the water supply line, and that crippled the city's ability to defend themselves. The water that was used by the city of Laodicea was carried in from the city of Denizli (which still exists today) by a five-mile aqueduct. By the time this water got to Laodicea, it was lukewarm. Since this water had such high calcium content, there were special vents along the pipeline so the calcium deposits could be removed.

The founding of the church in Laodicea may have been the result of Jewish believers who had traveled to Laodicea after being in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Two other possibilities given for the founding of this church involve "clues" in Paul's letters to Christians in the nearby town of Colossae, Epaphrus (see Col. 4:12) and Philemon. Others think Peter may have had some influence in its founding, given his familiar letters to Christians in that region.

Laodicea appears to have had everything (except good water), so what was the problem? They had grown self satisfied and blind to their situation, and this influenced the church in a negative way.

With this background concerning the city of Laodicea, Christ instructs John to write the following: "*To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this: "I know your deeds, that you are neither*

cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'" (Rev. 3:14-22).

Christ presents Himself as one who has complete authority when He calls Himself "*The Amen*" (in effect, "I have the final word"). He is telling the church that they need to get away from feeling like they are spiritually successful because of their wealth and other areas of successful ventures in the non-Christian arena.

Christ commendation for the church at Laodicea was not present. He had nothing good to say about this church, even though it had been a true church, founded by true Christians.

Christ's condemnation was simple; they were lukewarm. The Christians there knew exactly how serious this was, because Christ was comparing them to the lukewarm water that they had to drink. They knew how distasteful this water was to them, signifying how distasteful they were to Him. Like most of the citizens of Laodicea, the church was self-satisfied with what they had accomplished, but failed to realize how they were poor in spirit.

Christ's correction is to stop this false feeling of security. The Christians in Laodicea needed to repent and commit themselves to things that would benefit them spiritually. Something else the Christians had done was leave Christ out of their fellowship. He states, "*Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me.*" Christ was at the door and wanted to have dinner them, but they had to open door. This phrase about Him knocking at the door is often used for evangelistic purposes, but in context He is trying to re-establish fellowship with the church at Laodicea. The final

meal of the day was dinner, which in the Koine Greek was *deipnon*. It is dinner or supper that Christ is referring to in this letter. This meal was eaten at home and done in a lingering manner after a day's work. It is at this meal friends are invited to join a family for supper. Christ wanted the Christians to invite Him in for supper, but first they had to open the door and invite Him in.

Did they repent? We have few records of the church there, but it seems to have continued in some form

or fashion until the city was sacked by the Turks and the Mongols in the 13th century. It was not rebuilt. The ruins are well preserved today, just down the road from Denizli, Turkey.

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The Talking Walk and the Unseen Partner

By Tim LaFleur

In making disciples of Jesus Christ, your walk is your witness. It's a high calling, one that we are not able to accomplish on our own, but God has given us a Helper.

I. Your Walk Talks

Several years ago, I heard an evangelist say in a sermon, "Your talk talks and your walk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks."

The humanitarian Albert Schweitzer said; "Example is not the **best** teacher, it is the **only** teacher." One thing is certain; there is no better teaching tool than a good example. This is key when it comes to making disciples! There is no greater tool on the disciple-maker's tool belt than a godly example.

Consider the Master disciple maker, the Lord Jesus Christ. According to the writer of Hebrews, He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and the friend of sinners. In fact, His life was so perfect that men had to be hired to bear false witness against Him, and even those who put Him to death had to say, "*I find no fault in Him.*"

Notice what Paul tells the Philippian believers: "*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel*" (Phil. 1:27). He admonishes these believers to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Why? Because when we live lives that are consistent with the Gospel we profess to believe, the Gospel becomes more believable!

When I was coming to grips with the claims of Christ, I became convinced that Jesus was real because I saw Him through the lives of young people who were genuine and living godly lives. I saw Christ in them, working through them to minister to me. They didn't just talk the talk, they walked the walk! When I saw Jesus in them, I wanted that kind of relationship with Him! Since then, I have asked God to help me "walk the talk" so that others might see Christ in me!

II. The Unseen Partner

If you are going to "*make disciples,*" you must first be a disciple—learning, loving, obeying, and following after the Lord Jesus. It doesn't take long until you realize that following after Christ is an impossible task if you try to do it in your own strength and power.

Consider the demands: "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matt. 5:44). "*Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48). "*Be holy for I am holy*" (1 Peter 1:16). "*Be anxious for nothing*" (Phil. 4:6).

J. Oswald Sanders helps us understand this: "Is God so unreasonable as to make impossible demands on us and then hold us responsible for our failures? Our conscious spiritual inadequacy underlines our need for a partner who has adequate spiritual resources from which we can draw."

God has provided this unseen partner in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Godhead indwells the disciple and empowers him in his walk and witness!

1) Walk. The disciple's walk is his whole manner of life—his thoughts, motives, attitudes, and actions! The disciple learns he must surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Consider what Paul says in Ephesians: "*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit*" (Eph. 5:18). To be "*filled with the Spirit*" is to be controlled and empowered by the Spirit. When we surrender to the Spirit's control over our lives, He empowers us to follow Christ and bring glory to God! He provides the adequate resources necessary to do what we cannot do on our own—live the Christ life!

2) Witness. Jesus told believers in Acts: "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

Only in the power of the Spirit can we really be empowered to be dynamic witnesses for Christ. The word

“power” in the language of the New Testament is the same root from which we get the word “dynamite.”

Consider the disciple Peter—in his own strength, he was a miserable failure who denied Christ. But when empowered by the Spirit, he fearlessly stood before the Jewish leaders and would not deny his Lord!

Following Christ is impossible in our own strength, but when we allow the Holy Spirit to control and empower us, we can follow Jesus wherever He leads!

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Exegetically Speaking

by Spiros Zodhiates

Pure and undefiled Religion

James 1:27a

From Faith, Love & Hope: An Exposition of the Epistle of James, AMG Publishers, 1997.

“*Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this...*” (James 1:27a).

We now come to the last verse of James 1. Very few verses admittedly are as controversial as this, and I believe mainly because the true meaning of it is not fully understood. That is what we shall endeavor to discover by the grace of God.

The first word with which our verse starts in the Greek is *thrēskeia*, translated “*religion*,” which, as we said in our previous study, means the ceremonial service of religion, those external things which one performs mostly from a motive of fear and dread of God. Actually James is not speaking of religion as commonly understood today, that is, the totality of one’s relationship with God.

Here the relationship is presupposed; the reconciliation between man and God has already been established; and so “*religion*,” or rather the original Greek word used by James, has absolutely nothing to do with salvation, with regeneration, with the new birth, which is by *faith* alone. Let us say from the very outset that James under no circumstances declares that all God requires of man to get to heaven is for him to visit the orphans and widows and to live a good, clean life. He speaks of the service, the external service, which the child of God is to render after his salvation, after the reestablishment of the lost relationship between him and God as his heavenly Father. Religion, therefore, in its original word *thrēskeia*, refers to the outcome of the already existing inner relationship between man and his God. It means religious service.

It would appear, however, that there are two kinds of such service: religious service which is vain, such as James spoke of in the previous verse, and religious service which is pure and undefiled. As we have already seen in our last study, God’s aim in demanding our service to Him and to our fellow beings is our own happiness and His glory. There is blessedness, happiness, in the doing of the Word of God. But James makes it also very clear that we can perform great religious services, and be great

philanthropists and great benefactors and still be unhappy and not please and glorify God. If there is a pure and undefiled religion, there must be the opposite also. We speak of white in contrast to black. There is much impure and defiled religious service nowadays among men, in which God is not in the least interested. We may do a great deal of good, but that does not mean that we are good in the sight of God. We may even lead others to the road to heaven and yet not be on it ourselves.

I have personally known people who have built orphanages and hospitals in the hope of winning heaven. But they never will arrive there merely because of these deeds. These same men were known to have made their money in crooked and unethical ways. We must understand once and for all that no man can ever buy off God. The grace of God and forgiveness for human sin are not for sale; they are the free gift of God to those who believe that He can transform their inner being. Then, and only then, will our religious service be acceptable before God, as an outcome of our gratitude to God for what He has done for us. First He must do for us, and then what we do for Him is well pleasing in His sight.

This service of religion, the Apostle James says, must be pure and undefiled. Is this mere verbosity? Do these two terms mean one and the same thing, one stating the case positively and the other negatively? Not exactly. Each one has a special significance. The word “*pure*,” *kathará*, in its moral sense refers in this context to something that was once impure and polluted and has been cleansed. We may have been performing good works before our salvation, but they are nothing in the sight of God; that is impure religion. The purity of our religion depends on the motivation of our good works. If we do good for the purpose of gaining acceptance before God, our religion is impure, but if our good works are the outcome of our acceptance before God, then our religion is pure. Thus we have here the purification of our service of religion. Again, James stresses the importance, not of what we actually do,

but of why we do it. The why of our actions determines the purity or impurity of our Christian service, or “*religion*,” as the English translation of our verse has it.

The next word which the Apostle uses to characterize our Christian service is “*undefiled*,” or *amíantos* in the original Greek. This adjective comes from the verb *miainō*, which means “to stain as with color.” It does not mean “to besmear,” which is indicated by another Greek word, *molunō*. What is the message conveyed by this word? It is not enough for our Christian service to be purified as to its motive, but it is necessary for us to be very careful lest our purity become stained on the surface, spotted with selfishness in doing good to others and serving the Lord.

One of the greatest efforts of Satan is to stain our Christian service. What is the real reason that a person seeks to become a deacon, for instance, or an elder in the church, or perhaps a Sunday school teacher? Is it because he is anxious to lead souls to Christ and edify the saints, or because of a desire for recognition and the puffing up of self? The president of a men’s Bible class ceases his service in a lesser capacity simply because he has not been re-elected president for a second year. That is staining one’s service, one’s religion. Surely, in the main such a person is pure, but there are eruptions of his Adamic nature which stain his Christian character. It is so easy to fall into the condition, when one is doing something for others, of consciously or unconsciously doing it for some personal benefit. For instance, I have heard of a Christian businessman who tried to sell some product to a missionary or religious organization and promised that all the commission or profit, or part of it, would surely come to the treasury of the mission as a contribution. The business deal was concluded, but the contribution is still to come from that particular businessman. That is what James calls staining of one’s Christian service. It is the little inconsistencies that creep into our lives.

Who is the judge as to whether this religious service is pure and undefiled? Not our neighbors, not the preacher, not our relatives, but God Himself. One time Ian MacLaren, that great preacher of the Word of God, went to a certain house and saw an old Scotch woman standing in her kitchen, weeping. She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and when the minister asked her what was the matter, she confessed, “I have done so little.” She further said, “I am so miserable and unhappy.”

“Why?”

“Because I have done so little for Jesus. When I was just a wee girl, the Lord spoke to my heart, and I did so much want to live for Him.”

“Well, haven’t you?” asked the minister.

“Yes, I have lived for Him, but I have done so little. I want to be of some use in His service.”

“What have you done?”

“I will tell you. I have washed dishes, cooked three meals a day, taken care of the children, mopped the floor, and mended the clothes. That is all I have done all my life, and I wanted to do something for Jesus.”

The preacher, sitting back in the armchair, looked at her and smiled. “Where are your boys?” he inquired. She had four sons and had named them after Bible characters.

“Oh, my boys? You know where Mark is. You ordained him yourself before he went to China. Why are you asking? There he is preaching for the Lord.”

“Where is Luke?” questioned the minister.

“Luke? He went out from your own church. Didn’t you send him out? I had a letter from him the other day.” And then she became happy and excited as she continued, “A revival has broken out on the mission station, and he said they were having a wonderful time in the service of the Lord!”

“Where is Matthew?”

“He is with his brother in China. And isn’t it fine that the two boys can be working together? I am so happy about that. And John came to me the other night—he is my baby and is only nineteen, but he is a great boy. He said, “Mother, I have been praying and, tonight in my room, the Lord spoke to my heart and what do you suppose He told me? I have to go to my brother in Africa! But don’t you cry, Mother. The Lord told me I was to stay here and look after you until you go home to glory.”

The minister looked at her: “And you say your life has been wasted in mopping floors, darning socks, washing dishes, and doing the trivial tasks. I’d like to have your mansion when we are called home! It will be very near the throne.” This dear, faithful mother thought that her service was small and unworthy, but in the sight of God it was pure and undefiled; for what the Lord gave her to do she was perfectly willing to do well.

Yes, God is the Judge, and we should not mind in the least what others think and say about our religion, our service. God’s eye is what counts. Our verse says, however, that our service is “*before our God and Father*.” There is a reason why James characterizes God as a Father in this instance. He knows that our service is to be pure and undefiled, but he knows that as long as we are within this frail, weak, human body of unlimited limitations our service cannot be perfect and therefore God has to judge it as a kind and longsuffering Father. There are far too many who will not do anything for God for fear that their religion, their service, will not be acceptable because of its imperfections.

It is good to remember that we are just children and that God judges as a Father, loving, kind, forgiving, and tolerant. But as a Father He has the full right to correct and chasten us sometimes.

Spiros Zodhiates (1922-2009) served as president of AMG International for over 40 years, was the founding editor

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authored dozens of exegetical books.

Words to Stand You on Your Feet

by Joe McKeever

Praying in Faith: Giving the Lord His Options

Faith is our trust in God as revealed in His Word. It is not about bending Him to our will by the strength of our belief, but about our being conformed to His will by the strength of His grace.

“And they prayed and said, ‘Thou Lord, who knowest the hearts of all men, show which one of these two Thou hast chosen’” (Acts 1:24).

If you know the name Warren Wiersbe, you might be surprised to learn he and I had a little disagreement one time. I said to him, “I’m convinced the apostles made a mistake in Acts 1 where they decided to fill the vacancy left by Judas and selected the next apostle.” I gave him three reasons: One, the Lord who selected the original twelve was certainly capable of choosing the next one. Two, it seems obvious from the rest of the New Testament that Paul was to be the “thirteenth apostle.” And three, we almost never hear of this guy Matthias again.

Dr. Wiersbe, as I recall, pointed out that “I do not want to sit in judgment on the apostles there. This was what they felt God wanted done. And besides, Matthias is not the only apostle of whom we hear nothing afterward.” True enough.

But the matter remains unsettled in my mind. It feels to me like the apostles who had been instructed to remain in Jerusalem and “*wait for the promise of the*

Father” (1:4), and who were devoting themselves to prayer (1:14), a very good thing, came to the conclusion that, “As long as we’re not doing anything, while waiting on the Holy Spirit, let’s take care of some office work.” Acts 1:15-26 tells what they did. As though they could handle some matters in the flesh, without the aid of the Spirit.

Sound familiar? You and I have been known to do that. “Lord, which of these two jobs shall I take? Which of these two people should I marry? Which of these two candidates should receive my vote?” Meanwhile, perhaps the Lord in Heaven is thinking, “What if I don’t like either one? What if I have something else in mind?”

God’s perspective is so broader than ours. We see have such a limited field of vision. That’s why “*Thy will be done*” is the best prayer we can ever pray. We see this in the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:10, in Gethsemane in Matthew 26:39, and in Paul’s prayer in Acts 22:10.

Let’s ask the Father for His will, for the best He has. After all, as the writer of Hebrews said, “He has planned something better for us” (Heb. 11:40). Let’s ask Him for that!

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Living out the Living Word

by Justin Lonas

Prayer through the Pain

Lamentations 3:43-66

In Lamentations 3, Jeremiah has recalled the Lord’s lovingkindness and unfailing compassions to find hope, even among the ruins of Jerusalem (cf. 3:21-23). The middle section of this chapter, as we have seen, is the focal point of the book, setting in verse incredible truths about God’s sovereignty and mercy.

In the background, however, is always the horrible reality of sin. The poet (speaking for the nation as a whole) does not lay any blame at God’s feet for what He allowed to happen to the people. He writes, “*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth? Why should*

any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins...? We have transgressed and rebelled, You have not pardoned” (3:38-39, 42). God has not pardoned them, but allowed the promised curse for their unfaithfulness to fall on them, and so Jeremiah turns again to recount God’s chastisement poured out on His people.

He declares, “*You have covered Yourself with anger and pursued us; You have slain and have not spared. You have covered Yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. You have made us mere offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples. All our enemies have*

opened their mouths against us. Panic and pitfall have befallen us, devastation and destruction; my eyes run down with streams of water because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. My eyes pour down unceasingly, without stopping, until the Lord looks down and sees from heaven. My eyes bring pain to my soul because of all the daughters of my city” (3:43-51).

He understood that God’s judgment against Israel was total and just, and we are meant to weep for our sins and their consequences in the course of being conformed to His likeness. These descriptions drip with pain and the shame of being cast down before their nations surrounding them. His tears flow, he says, from looking at the fate of Jerusalem, and will continue until God answers his prayer for restoration.

He describes his situation as being “*hunted*” by his enemies like a bird, and “*silenced*” in a pit with a stone placed over it—Israel has been stripped of her humanity, in a sense, captured and carried off like a wild animal snared by a hunter (3:52-53). At the depth of this situation, when escape seemed impossible, he cried out to God: “*Waters flowed over my head; I said, ‘I am cut off!’ I called on Your name, O Lord, out of the lowest pit. You have heard my voice, ‘Do not hide Your ear from my prayer for relief, from my cry for help’” (3:54-56).*

His confidence in this prayer is evident, and God does not ignore his cries: “*You drew near when I called on You; You said, ‘Do not fear!’” (3:57).* What a precious answer to prayer this must have been, consolation and comfort from the Most High. At the same time, The Lord’s reply seems frustrating to us. We crave His power, His deliverance, His healing, but He offers us instead the consolation of His presence. We want God to act, to intervene on our terms, with shock and awe. He responds instead, as He responded to Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).*

When we fail to be comforted fully by that promise, it is because we (unlike Jeremiah) are ignorant of the fact that God is at work as much in our trials as in our deliverance. We deny that God may be using hardship to

purge our sins and present us as purified living sacrifices for His glory.

Jeremiah, though, hears God’s reply as the blessing it is and obeys. He steps back from despair, and continues his prayer, crying out to God to release Israel from shame. Even in the midst of the darkness, he leans fully on the Lord, knowing his help will come from no other quarter.

In crying out to God, it is as though he says, “*Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10).* He wants to see God glorified by protecting His people from ridicule before their pagan neighbors, and looks forward to the day when the full measure of His justice will be poured out on all the earth for all to see: “*O Lord, You have pleaded my soul’s cause; You have redeemed my life. O Lord, You have seen my oppression; judge my case. You have seen all their vengeance, all their schemes against me. You have heard their reproach, O Lord, all their schemes against me. The lips of my assailants and their whispering are against me all day long. Look on their sitting and their rising; I am their mocking song. You will recompense them, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. You will give them hardness of heart, Your curse will be on them. You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord!” (3:58-66).*

The household of God had been chastised severely for their sins, and Jeremiah asks the Lord to redeem His repentant people and complete the work of His war against sin. His confidence in the Lord’s ultimate justice looks “*through a glass, darkly*” to see Christ, the redeemer who pays our ransom and the Savior who brings all those who confess their sin back to God. When trials and hardship come into our lives, we ought to take pains to repent and pray rather than complain or despair. For if we are His children, whatever comes serves to conform us ever more to His likeness. The discipline of a Father for His children is a severe mercy that spares us from His holy wrath against those who refuse to know Him.

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Following God

by Erik Christensen

The Mystery of Love

Ephesians 5:32-33

Paul summarizes the picture of marriage in the last two verses of Ephesians 5. The first point Paul makes is that marriage, as an earthly picture, reveals a great mystery, Christ’s relationship to the Church. Secondly, Paul makes very clear that a husband is to love his wife and the wife is

to respect her husband. Let’s look further at these two points.

First the idea of a “great mystery,” that of Christ and the church. We find many mysteries within the New Testament. The word “*mystery*” itself (*mysterion*, meaning

what is hidden or not fully disclosed) is used 27 different times in the New Testament. Paul himself uses the word 20 times in his epistles.

In Matthew 13:11 the Lord in speaking to the disciples states that they will “*know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*” In Romans 11:25, Paul calls the partial hardening of Israel a mystery. In 1 Corinthians, where the believers were greatly influenced by their pagan culture stepped in mysticism, Paul declares the apostles as stewards of the mysteries of God. In Colossians 1:26 and 2:2 Paul states that God’s mystery is Christ Himself, specifically “*Christ in you.*” There is the mystery of lawlessness which Paul writes about to the Thessalonian believers (1 Thess. 2:7) Deacons are to hold to the mystery of the faith (1 Tim. 3:9) meaning the fullness of what God has revealed. In Ephesians 6:19 Paul asks the believers for prayer that he would have boldness in making known the “*mystery of the Gospel.*”

The mystery of the church is something that has now been revealed. Paul is writing with an Old Testament background in view. The saints of the Old Covenant did not understand and or have in view the Church of Christ Jesus. Paul has already declared earlier in his letter (in chapters 1 and 3) that Christ is the head of the Church and that the Church is the means through which the manifold wisdom of God would be made known (3:10). Is it any wonder that, having declared the Jew and Gentile one new man in Christ, Paul would declare the mystery of the relationship of the Church with Christ as “*great*”?

What a privilege to be a part of the body of Christ, the Church! What a privilege to have a personal relationship with the Lord Himself, having been called into His body, the Church. The picture of marriage, the union of one man to one woman, is a beautiful, divinely inspired and created illustration of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Is it any wonder that the world seeks to destroy what God defines as marriage?

Paul goes on in his summary of marriage and instruction to husbands and wives to state that husbands are to love their wives and wives are to respect their husbands.

The idea of a husband loving his wife has been clearly linked to the way in which Christ has loved the Church. The Lord gave Himself up for the Church. He desires to sanctify the Church and, in short, serves the Church by having given His life for her. The word “*love*” here is *agapatō*, the verb from *agape*, and it is a command. Husbands are to choose to follow the Lord in having this action and attitude toward their wives. Husbands are to sacrificially serve their wives in light of the tremendous example the Lord has given in His love for the Church. Clearly, only God working in and through a husband is able to empower him in this (cf. Gal. 5:22). Therefore, a husband must be rightly related to the Lord first and foremost so as to experience the life changing, transforming power of God in and through his life leading toward his loving of his wife.

Paul concludes that wives respect their husbands. The word for respect (*phobos*, meaning fear and/or respect) is in the subjunctive case. Paul is urging wives, who are equal in value, to submit themselves to their husbands as to the Lord. Respect for her husband and the role that he has in Christ is an essential ingredient to a marriage reflecting the love of Christ.

Our role as the Church is to submit to the leadership of the Lord, who is the Head of the Church. As we willingly defer and or submit to Him, God, working in and through us, begins to reveal Himself, not only within our lives but through our lives so that the love of Christ is recognized. Marriages are a wonderful picture of God’s love.

Are we walking in His grace, His love for one another? Are we following Him?

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Points to Ponder

by David L. Olford

A Passion for the Truth of the Gospel—Part 1 of 4

Text: “*See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.... From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus*” (Gal. 6:11, 17).

Thought: To say that the Apostle Paul is very concerned when writing the Galatian epistle is a gross understatement. You could say that he was grieved, bothered, distraught, angry, frustrated, and righteously “ticked.” To allow such raw disgust to be expressed in Holy

Writ certainly says something about the importance of the issues that Paul is addressing in the letter. To underline the seriousness of Paul’s concerns, we need to note that Paul literally pronounces “anathema” on people as he starts the letter, expresses bewilderment and amazement along the way, and ends by telling the Galatians and everyone else not to cause him any more trouble (6:17). Paul was “hot” to say the least.

Just imagine giving birth to a bunch of children, and teaching them about life and how to live. And someone comes along behind you, when you are absent, and teaches these same children something that absolutely contradicts and renders null and void what you taught and what you stand for. Paul calls these Galatian believers “*my little children...*” (Gal. 4:19). He was deeply concerned for his spiritual children and for their spiritual lives due to the teaching they had received that was not in keeping with the “*truth of the Gospel.*” And he was angry about it!

This “righteous heat” continues right to the end of the letter. As Paul transitions into the close of the letter, he begins by drawing attention to the LARGE LETTERS he has written with his own hand as he closes the letter (6:11). Various ideas have been put forth for this statement on Paul’s part, and the simplest and the most attractive to me is that Paul is stressing again (“boldfacing” so to speak) how important this letter really is. But regardless of the specific reason for the statement, verse 11 indicates that Paul is about to wrap-up his letter. And he does so purposefully and personally. He does not give various greetings or ask for greetings to be passed on. He doesn’t end with a lengthy word of encouragement. Paul seems to bring the whole letter to a close by stating the bottom-line truths that he does not want the Galatians to forget, and then he tells them not to cause him any more trouble, because he has the scars of persecution for Jesus’ sake on his very body!

To purposefully play on words, the crux of the matter for Paul was the cross of Christ, and therefore he needed to respond to those who would rob the cross of its meaning and significance. When we speak of those who would avoid or not boast in the cross, we are speaking of those who present a “*different gospel,*” and specifically in Galatia those calling for submission to the practice of circumcision (and therefore submission to the Old Testament Law) as the means of salvation and sanctification.

There is no question that as Paul wrote the Galatian Epistle, he believed that the truth of the Gospel was at stake. And as he concludes this “letter of liberty,” he really summarized the truth that he has sought to explain and defend in this powerful apostolic communication. And we will consider Paul’s closing remarks in the coming months.

Thrust: How passionate are we about the truth of the Gospel? Do we sense or see how destructive false teaching can be, especially if it robs people of the fundamental truths concerning “*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor. 2:2)? Paul could demonstrate his commitment to Christ by pointing to physical evidence. To what evidence can we point to confirm our commitment to Christ and the truth of the Gospel?

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Jewels from Past Giants

Do What You Can

By Robert Murray M’Cheyne

Previously published in Pulpit Helps, March 2001

“*She hath done what she could; she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying*” (Mark 14:8). From the Gospel of John 11:2, we learn that this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. We have already learned that she was an eminent believer: “*She sat at the feet of Jesus, and heard His word.*” Jesus Himself said of her: “*Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*” Now it is interesting to see this same Mary eminent in another way—not only as a contemplative believer, but as an active believer.

Many seem to think that to be a believer is to have certain feelings and experiences; forgetting all the time that these are but the flowers, and that the fruit must follow. The engraving of the branch is good, the inflowing of the sap good, but the fruit is the end in view. So faith is good, and peace and joy are good, but holy fruit is the end for which we are saved.

If you have been bought with a price, then glorify God in your body and spirit, which are His. I beseech you by the mercies of God, to do what you can for Christ.

I. These Things Which We Can Do

1) We could love Christ, pray, and praise more.

What this woman did, she did to Christ. Jesus had saved her soul, had saved her brother and sister, and she felt that she could not do too much for Him. She brought an alabaster box of ointment, very costly, and broke the box, and poured it on His head. On His blessed head, that was so soon to be crowned with thorns; on His blessed feet, that were so soon to be pierced with nails; she poured the precious ointment.

This is what we should do. We cannot now reach His blessed head, nor anoint His holy feet; but we can fall down at His footstool, and pour out our affections towards Him. It was not the ointment Jesus cared for. What does the King of Glory care for a little ointment? But it is the adoration, praise, love, and prayers of a believer’s broken

heart that Christ cares for. The new heart is the alabaster box that Jesus loves.

2) We could live holier lives. The church is thus [allegorically] described in the Song of Solomon: “*Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the powders of the merchant?*” The holiness of the believer is like the most precious perfume. When a holy believer goes through the world, filled with the Spirit, made more than a conqueror, the fragrance fills the room. If the world were full of believers, it would be like a bed of spices; but oh, how few believers carry much of the odor of heaven along with them! How many you might be the means of saving, if you lived a holy, consistent life—if you were evidently a sacrifice bound upon God’s altar!

Wives might thus, without the word, win their husbands, when they see your chaste conversation coupled with fear; parents might in this way save their children, when they see you holy and happy; children have often thus saved their parents. Servants, adorn the doctrine of God your Savior in all things; let your light shine before men. The poorest can do this as well as the richest, the youngest as well as the oldest. Oh, there is no argument like a holy life!

3) You could seek the salvation of others. If you have really been brought to Christ and saved, then you know there is a hell—you know that all the unconverted around you are hastening to it. You know there is a Savior, and that He is stretching out His hands all the day long to sinners. Could you do no more to save sinners than you do? Do all you can! You say you pray for them; but is it not hypocrisy to pray and do nothing? Will God hear these prayers? You say you cannot speak, you are not learned. Will that excuse stand in the judgment? Does it require much learning to tell fellow sinners that they are perishing? If their house was on fire, would it require much learning to wake the sleepers?

Begin at home. Could you not do more for the salvation of those at home? If there are children or servants, have you done all you can for them? Have you done all you can to bring the truth before them, to bring them under a living ministry, to get them to pray and give up sin? Do you do what you can for your neighbors? Can you pass your neighbors for years together, and see them on the broad way, without warning them? Do you make a full use of tracts, giving suitable ones to those that need them? Do you persuade Sabbath-breakers to go to the house of God? Do you do anything in Sabbath schools? Could you not tell little children the way to be saved? Do you do what you can for the world? The field is the world.

4) Feed Christ’s poor. I am far from thinking that the wicked poor should be passed over, but Christ’s poor are our brothers and sisters. Do you do what you can for them? In that great day, Christ will say to those on His right

hand. “*Come ye blessed, for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat.*” They stand in the place of Christ. Christ does not any more stand in need of Mary’s ointment, or Martha’s hospitality, or the Samaritan’s drink of water. But He has left many of His brothers and sisters behind in this world, some diseased, some lame, some like Lazarus all covered with sores; and He says what you do to them, you do to me. Do you live plainly, in order to have more to give away? Do you put away vain and gaudy clothes, that you may be able to clothe the naked? Are you thrifty in managing what you have, letting nothing be lost?

II. Reasons Why We Should Do What We Can

1) Christ has done what He could for us. “*What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?*” (Is. 5:4). He thought nothing too much to do and to suffer for us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Greater love than this hath no man. All His life, between the manger at Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary, was spent in labors and infinite sufferings for us. All that we needed to suffer, He suffered: all that we need to obey, He obeyed. All His life in glory He spends for us. He ever lives to make intercession for us. He is head over all things for us; makes everything in all worlds work together for our good.

It is all but incredible that each person of the Godhead has made Himself over to us to be ours. The Father says, “*I am thy God*”; the Son, “*Fear not, for I have redeemed thee*”; the Holy Ghost makes us a temple: “*I will dwell in them, and walk in them.*” Is it much that we should do all we can for Him—that we should give ourselves up to Him who gave Himself for us?

2) Satan does all he can. Sometimes he comes as a lion, sometimes as a serpent, sometimes as an angel of light. He does all he can to tempt and beguile the saints, leading them away by false teachers, injecting blasphemies and polluted thoughts into their minds, casting fiery darts at their souls, stirring up the world to hate and persecute them, stirring up father and mother against children, and brother against brother. He does all he can to lead captive wicked men, blinding their minds, not allowing them to listen to the Gospel, steeping them in swinish lusts, leading them into despair. When he knows his time is short, he rages all the more. Oh, should not we do all we can, if Satan does all he can?

3) We have done all we could the other way. This was one of Paul’s great motives for doing all he could: “*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord for putting me into the ministry; for I was a blasphemer, and persecutor, and injurious.*” He never could forget how he had persecuted the church of God, and this made him as diligent in building it up, and hailing men and women to Christ. He preached the faith which once he destroyed.

So with Peter: *“Let us live the rest of our time in the flesh not to the lusts of men, but to the will of God; for the time past of our lives may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.”*

So with John Newton: “How can the old African blasphemer be silent?” So with many of you; you ran greedily after sin; you were at great pains and cost, and did not spare health, or money, or time to obtain some sinful gratification. How can you now grudge anything for Christ? Only serve Christ as zealously as you once served the devil.

4) Christ will reward what we do. The labor that Christ blesses is believing labor. It is not words of human wisdom, but words of faith that God makes arrows. The word of a little maid was blessed in the house of Naaman the Syrian. *“Follow me”* was made the arrow to pierce the heart of Matthew. It is all one to God to save, whether with many, or with them that have no might.

If you would do all you can, the town would be filled with the fragrance. Christ will reward it. He defended Mary’s work of love, and said it should be spoken of over all the world, and it will yet be told in the judgment. A cup of cold water He will not pass over. *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”*

5) If you do not do all you can, how can you prove yourself a Christian? *“Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”* You are greatly mistaken if you think that to be a Christian is merely to have certain views, and convictions, and spiritual delights. This is all well; but if it does not lead to a devoted life, I fear it is all a delusion. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.

III. Let Us Answer Objections

1) The world will mock at us. This is true. They mocked at Mary; they called it waste and extravagance; and

yet, Christ said it was well done. So, if you do what you can, the world will laugh at you, but you will have the smile of Christ. They mocked at Christ when He was full of zeal; they said He was mad and had a devil. They mocked at Paul, and said he was mad; and so with all Christ’s living members. *“Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ.”* *“If ye suffer with Him, ye shall also reign with Him.”*

2) What can I do? I am a child. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God perfects praise. God has often used children in the conversion of their parents.

3) I have too little grace to do good. *“He that watereth others, shall be watered himself.”* *“The liberal soul shall be made fat.”* *“It pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell.”* There is a full supply of the Spirit to teach you to pray; a full supply of grace to slay your sins and quicken your graces. If you use opportunities of speaking to others, God will give you plenty. If you give much to God’s poor, you shall never want a rich supply. *“God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”* *“Honor the Lord with thy substance and with the first-fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.”*

Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1813-1843) was born in Dundee, Scotland, and studied at the University of Edinburgh and at the divinity hall of the university, under Dr. Thomas Chalmers. In 1836, he became the pastor of St. Peter’s Church in Dundee, where he ministered for seven years, until his death at the age of thirty. In these few years, this godly preacher demonstrated an unusual burden for the unsaved, and his sermons reveal his yearning to see souls converted. The notes of M’Cheyne’s sermons and his counsel which he left to a fellow minister reveal his spiritual depth.

Counselor’s Corner

by James Rudy Gray

Appreciation Makes a Difference

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, January 2001.

When we feel appreciated, we are more likely to have greater personal confidence and even security. This will invariably be reflected in our behavior. William James, the pioneer of psychology in America, once noted that perhaps the greatest human need was the need to feel appreciated. Appreciation is a powerful force in building good relationships. Strong, healthy families practice

expressing and gracefully receiving appreciation. Is enough genuine appreciation being expressed in our families today? Are Christian families showing appreciation to one another?

Proverbs 16:24 says, *“Pleasant words are a honeycomb. Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”* We may repeat the little rhyme, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me,” but we know that words do make a difference. They make a difference in how we feel and they influence how we

behave. Encouraging words are important relationship builders in the family and in other relationships.

Drs. Nick Stinnett and John Defrain discovered an interesting trait among the strong families they identified in their research. Strong, healthy families express appreciation to each other. They wrote, “As we scored the questionnaires and interviewed the strong families, the quantity of appreciation they expressed to each other was startling to us. We had not anticipated this finding, but it leapt out at us.”

When we express appreciation to someone, especially family members, we are encouraging them and helping to instill confidence in them. What does it say to a family member when we show appreciation? It tells them they are important; that they belong; and that they are noticed. It says they are loved and wanted.

Inside a family, or group of people important to us, we develop emotional memory. If it is good, it will soothe us in our pilgrimage through life. If it is bad, it can torment us. In some families, physical or sexual abuse never occurs, but verbal and emotional abuse do. Sometimes it is not overt abuse as much as it neglecting to show appreciation. In the end, a kind of unique abuse can occur: appreciation-deprivation. It takes its toll. A ripple effect takes place in

families. We usually live out what we live with, and we reflect in our lives what we have seen in our families.

God built into us the need and capacity for attachment. Attachment is good. Co-dependency is not. In families where a positive and powerful attachment occurs and appreciation is expressed, the greater the likelihood of personal interdependence and emotional health. Appreciation makes a difference in our lives.

Good families don’t just happen. They are built on the foundation of godly values and they work hard at building relationships. They practice the art of honestly giving and genuinely receiving appreciation.

Someone observed that diamond miners will dig through many pounds of dirt to find one diamond, whereas we are often guilty of digging through pounds of diamonds to find an ounce of dirt in our relationships. Love chooses to look for the best. Where there is love in a family, there is appreciation. That is a trait of strong families.

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 editor of *The Baptist Courier*, the official newspaper of the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

The Story behind the Song

by Lindsay Terry

A Promise to Mom

Song: “Rescue the Perishing”

Previously published in Pulpit Helps, August 2007

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:5-6).

Fanny Crosby was deeply interested in Gospel work among poor men who were down and out. One evening in New York, she addressed a large company of men in the slum area. Her heart was moved at the close of her address as she heard a youth, eighteen years of age, come forward and say, “I promised my mother to meet her in heaven, but the way I am now living, that will be impossible.”

After prayer was offered for him, he arose with a new light in his eyes. He exclaimed that since he had now found God, he would be meeting his mother in heaven. As the service continued, her poetic mind began to work, and before she retired at home that evening she had completed the verses to a “battle cry” for the great army of Christian soldiers. Think of the lost as you sing:

“Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.”

To this writer, the third verse of this song is the greatest bit of poetry ever written:

“Down in the human heart, crushed by the
Tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore,
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.”

The Moody and Sankey meetings helped to popularize many of Fanny Crosby’s 8,000 hymns and Gospel songs in this country and in England. Her motto

was, “I think that life is not too long, and therefore, I determine that many people read a song who would not read a sermon.”

Frances Jane Crosby was born in Putnam County, New York, on March 24, 1820. Her sight was destroyed at the age of six weeks because of the misapplication of a poultice on her eyes. She was blessed with a marvelous disposition and accepted her handicap with an unusual display of courage.

Fanny Crosby was born again in 1851. Seven years later she married a blind musician, Alexander Van Alstyne. Her cheerfulness and courage coupled with the simple, child-like trust in divine watch-care enable her to write such heart-warming hymns as “Blessed Assurance,” “Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross,” and “Safe in the Arms of Jesus.”

Friday morning, February 12, 1915, just prior to her ninety-fifth birthday, Fanny Crosby realized to the fullest

the words she had written and recited many times, “and I shall see Him face to face.”

Reflection: Here is another example of a person who would not sit down and feel sorry for herself. In her blindness she thought constantly of others. We, like she, can find peace only as we turn aside to help someone else. All of our service to Christ must be done 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) and *The Sacrifice of Praise* (2002).

Church Builders

by Bernard R. DeRemer

John Foxe: Martyrologist

Originally published in Pulpit Helps, June 1997.

John Foxe was born in 1516 or 1517 at Boston, Lincolnshire, England. Beginning his studies enslaved by unscriptural dogma (as all of his countrymen were at that time), he was eventually enlightened and broke with Roman Catholicism.

He became one of the most outstanding church historians. His monumental *Book of Martyrs*, still widely circulated after more than four centuries, deserves ranking in the same league with such immortal classics as *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Thorough study of the church fathers and ecclesiastical history persuaded Foxe that the official church had distorted Christian truth. His conversion is not clearly documented; however, it seems that soon after obtaining a masters degree as a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, he began to absent himself from college chapel and university church services on all but official occasions.

Correspondence with Hugh Latimer and William Tyndale, both prominent reformers and eventual martyrs, helped influence Foxe in the way of truth.

A series of moves landed Foxe in London near the end of the reign of Henry VIII. His resources nearly ran out before the Earl of Surrey engaged him as his children's tutor. At Reigate, Foxe was ordained deacon.

The reformation England had enjoyed under Edward VI did not, alas, continue. Mary Tudor (“Bloody Mary”) succeeded to the throne; nearly 300 leaders would

be murdered in her maniacal zeal to destroy the hated Protestant “heretics” and their cause. During this tumultuous time, Foxe fled England for the Continent, eventually settling in Basel, Switzerland, with many other British refugees from persecution. Their horrifying accounts of Bloody Mary's atrocities appalled Foxe. In recording these stories, Foxe modestly began the work which would eventually be greatly enlarged and become world famous.

In 1559, after Elizabeth I succeeded her sister Mary, Foxe returned to England in safety. He became prebendary (honorary clergyman) of Shipton in the cathedral of Salisbury, where he devoted most of his energies to literary endeavors. Later he was vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate.

In 1563, Foxe published *History of the Acts and Monuments of the Church*, containing 1,700 closely-printed folio pages. When finally revised and completed in 1570, it gained its present title, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Foxe was so dedicated to his work that once, when dining with a friend, he was asked which course of food he preferred first. “The last,” he replied, so he could return home and get back to work sooner.

He wrote Grindal that no animal was ever “so weighed down and overdone by carrying burdens as I have long been by literary labors.” Indeed his exertions, without adequate repose or recreation, so altered and emaciated his person that occasionally visiting relatives and friends scarcely recognized him! As his book progressed, it aroused a storm of opposition from Roman Catholics, who naturally

sought to discredit and denounce it. Foxe only worked harder to substantiate everything in his volume.

Attacks against its authenticity still occur occasionally. One of the best defenses is J. F. Mozley's *John Foxe and His Book* (1940). It highlights and largely reestablishes Foxe's historical credibility, thus effectively vindicating him.

Foxe's monumental work, which first appeared in Latin, went through several editions during his lifetime. Still published today, it must rank as one of the longest continuously published books. Total circulation cannot begin to be estimated.

Over the centuries, the *Book of Martyrs* has comforted, inspired, and challenged multitudes of

Christians facing trials and persecutions of whatever magnitude. Foxe deserves special honors for his unique role in preserving and publishing many of the sorriest episodes in Church history. His heroic victims "*of whom the world was not worthy...obtained a good report through faith*" (Heb. 11:38-39).

Bernard R. DeRemer chronicled the lives of dozens of heroes of the faith in more than a decade of writing for *Pulpit Helps Magazine*, and continued to serve in this capacity as a volunteer contributor to *Disciple*. He joined those he had written about so faithfully in the Lord's presence in 2014.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel

Will You Transform a Child's Life?

By AMG International Staff

In Mark 10:14-15, Jesus tells us, "*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.*"

In a world where children are seldom regarded at all, Jesus' words are a stinging rebuke. Children around the world often bear the brunt of the bad decisions of adults — the consequences of poverty, famine, broken homes, economic exploitation, political instability, drugs and sexual abuse fall hardest on children.

You and I want to help them, but it is not enough just to address the symptoms of these problems. It takes a life-long commitment to build a **bridge to life** from where they are to who they can become, a bridge to safely carry them over the rivers of brokenness that have trapped their families for generations. The Gospel is the key to that bridge.

Our vision is that every child under our care will hear and respond to the Gospel and completely cross that bridge — growing into young adults who are maturing in their faith in Christ, are physically healthy, and mentally prepared to fulfill God's call for their lives. Reaching a nation with God's truth and love starts with reaching its children.

Partnership through **Child Sponsorship** makes this vision a reality, because our mission is built on making disciples of Christ and fostering relationships. With sponsorship, supporters are able to forge connections with the children they support, sharing letters and gifts, prayer requests and stories. Together in Christ's power, we can transform the lives of children around the world.

Children come to AMG from many different backgrounds, and we try to meet them where they are, while addressing their various core needs — physical, emotional, educational, and social. Most importantly, we want to help each of them become lifelong, faithful followers of Christ who will impact their families, communities and nations for Him. Our holistic approach puts the Gospel front and center, verbally and visibly sharing the love of Christ which leads to life transformation in other areas.

A sponsorship of just **\$32 per month** provides basic needs for one boy or girl, including multiple weekly opportunities to hear the Gospel and learn from Scripture. You can know that these sponsorships result daily in transformed lives around the world.

Don't just take our word for it. This note we received from the father of two sponsored children in the Philippines tells you better than I can about the outcome of what happens when you and I reach out to children: "I am very grateful that through this ministry [my children] Nathan and Ivory learned and experienced the true meaning and value of life... Likewise, with all these blessings, they learned to see how great God is and even to trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior through listening to Bible stories, memory verses and singing songs in the center. The feeling of being loved is a sweet prelude to their tender minds to appreciate the love of God for them through Jesus Christ."

To learn more about AMG's childcare ministries around the world, and discover how you can get involved, please visit www.amginternational.org or call 1-800-251-7206.

Advancing the Ministries of the Gospel (AMG) International is a non-denominational, international missions agency based in Chattanooga, Tenn. AMG's

distinctive has always been its reliance on national workers to carry the Gospel in their own cultures. Today, they operate ministries in more than 30 countries around the world through partnership with national believers.

Marks of the Master

by the Old Scot

Lichens: Lilliputian Forests, Special Relationships

Originally published in Disciple, March 14, 2011.

Lichens are a humble wonder. They hug the earth in miniature forests that we trample underfoot without a thought about the marvel beneath us.

Some lichens provide food for man and beast; others furnish medicines; and still others provide dyes for cloth. But it is not this that makes them remarkable. Some other lichens merit the label “mountain-breaker” because they can break down solid rock—and that is remarkable, but there is a greater marvel yet to tell.

The real wonder lies in the fact that lichens are not normal plants at all. Instead, each lichen is a combination of two organisms from different taxonomic kingdoms which live in complete harmony and mutual interdependence.

One partner is a fungus, and therefore a cousin of mushrooms and toadstools. Most fungi, like the mushroom, must depend upon decaying plant substances for their food, because they lack the ability to manufacture their own food from sunlight as green plants do. But lichen fungi have made a different arrangement. They have entered into life-partnership with algae, which are tiny single-cell plants.

Algae, which contain chlorophyll, are able to turn energy from the sun into food, and in this case they manufacture enough sugars for both themselves and their host fungus. The algae also manufacture various vitamins which the fungal host must have. The fungus, on its part, provides the necessary plant structure and also a means of absorbing precious moisture out of the air.

Together, this union can do things that neither partner can do individually. Lichens, for example, are able to grow upon bare rock, where no other plant can get a foothold. Some lichens seem to enjoy the biting cold and fierce winds of high mountain peaks where no other plant can live. Other lichens endure the baking heat of the world's hottest and driest deserts. Lichens seem to thrive on adversity!

They also grow in every climate, including damp seacoasts. Some are paper-thin, and cling tenaciously to rock surfaces. Other types of lichens have substantial bodies, while still others take the form of gray-green “beards” upon tree limbs.

It is the ability of some lichens to establish themselves on bare rock that earns them the right to be called “mountain-breakers.” They can settle upon any but the very hardest rocks and drive tiny anchor tendrils into the surface. These anchors hold the thin crust of the lichens so tightly to the rock that they cannot be scraped off.

But death comes eventually also to lichens, and with the passage of generations, the surface of the rock is gradually pitted and “weathered.” When dust fills the crevices and wrinkles of the rock surface, other plant forms can grow and continue the mountain-taming process. Eventually, the pioneering lichens may be supplanted by sturdy shrubs and even by trees.

But in the high Arctic and Antarctic regions, as well as at high mountainous elevations around the world, lichens remain the dominant plant form—for the simple reason that nothing else can survive in those places. Thus—aside from modern importations of foodstuffs from the wider world, when available and affordable—lichens may be the only plant food eaten by Eskimos dwelling in the far north. It has been said that Eskimo hunters in this region look forward to a warm meal of lichens taken from the stomachs of freshly-killed caribou or reindeer.

Iceland moss, which is really a lichen, has long been a food source for man in Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It contains approximately 70 percent starch, which compares favorably with potatoes and oatmeal. Other varieties of lichen have been eaten at various times and places throughout history. However, lichens contain certain acids which give them a bitter taste, and which can upset the stomach, so they have never been as popular as the cereal grains—though most of the bitterness can be removed by boiling the lichens in water.

But if lichens are a marginal food for man, they are essential for the caribou and reindeer upon which several peoples of the far north depend. Lichens make up to two-thirds of the food supply of these grazing animals, particularly in the winter seasons when no grass can grow. The Lapps of northern Scandinavia, for example, keep herds of thousands of reindeer, which follow a yearly migration from the highlands in the summer to the snow-covered lowlands in the winter. Strangely, reindeer must

have some lichen fodder the year around, for they suffer from diarrhea if they cannot get it.

In lichens we have another example of the unique creativity of God in Nature. And we must insist that no clear-thinking person could credit the marvel of lichens to chance evolution, if he knew the facts. Separately, neither partner can flourish. In fact, no investigator has ever found the algae partner living independently in Nature; and certainly the fungus partner cannot live without the food provided by its algae partners. Can you conceive of these potential partners groping blindly for each other through countless eons, until at last a chance encounter sparks the vital union? Time is too short when life is at stake.

No, the simple answer is that lichens are a part of God's creation. They fill a niche in Nature that nothing else can.

And lichens also reveal a life-lesson for us: Scientists have discovered that when a rich food source is artificially provided in a laboratory, the lichen union breaks down. The fungus and the algae dissolve their partnership and go their separate ways. Truly, lichens thrive on

adversity but are corrupted by over-abundance. It is a confirmation in Nature of a message found in God's New Testament: "*Godliness with contentment is great gain.... But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition*" (1 Tim. 6:6, 9).

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

Sources:

Symbiosis, William Trager, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., NY, 1970, pp. 47-51. *Forests of Lilliput*, John H. Bland, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, pp. 91-100. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th Ed., Vol. 7, p. 337; and Vol. 26, pp. 299-304.

Book Review—July 2015

Guest Review

The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo, Jared C. Wilson, 2015, Crossway, Wheaton, Ill., ISBN 9781433544613, 240 pages, \$15.99, softcover

There are always many more worthwhile, edifying books published than we have time to read and review here.

Often, good books come out and find traction in the wider Christian community, but we are a little bit too late to the table to provide a worthwhile original review.

This is the case with a recent release, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* by Jared C. Wilson.

As such, we are referring you to an excellent review by Tim Challies: <http://www.challies.com/book-reviews/the-prodigal-church>.

News Update—July 2015

U.S. Congress Will Investigate Planned Parenthood for Selling Organs of Aborted Babies

Committees from the House of Representatives will be investigating allegations that Planned Parenthood sells organs of aborted babies after an incriminating video surfaced online. In the leaked video, a Planned Parenthood executive is seen explaining, over a meal with wine, how abortionists are able to preserve the body parts of babies that are desired by buyers.

Life News reports Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-OH) announced today that the matter will be investigated. He said in a statement, "Nothing is more precious than life, especially an unborn child. When anyone

diminishes an unborn child, we are all hurt, irreversibly so. When an organization monetizes an unborn child—and with the cavalier attitude portrayed in this horrific video—we must all act. As a start, I have asked our relevant committees to look into this matter. I am also calling on President Obama and Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell to denounce, and stop, these gruesome practices."

Planned Parenthood denied the claims that the company profits from the sale of organs.

Christian Headlines

Saeed Abedini Overlooked in Iran Deal

Pastor Saeed Abedini will not be released as part of the Iran deal that was finalized between Iran and six world powers, including the United States. *Christian Today* reports Abedini's wife, Naghmeh, is urging President Obama to reconsider the deal.

"I plead with Congress to ensure that my husband, an American citizen, is not left behind," she said. "With the announcement of a deal and yet silence as to the fate of Saeed and the other Americans held hostage in Iran, their fate lies now in the hands of Congress. I plead with each member of Congress to review the deal with our family at the forefront of their thoughts."

She continued, "Congress holds the key to bringing my husband home, to returning the father to my children. My children have desperately missed the loving embrace of their father for the last three years of their lives. They have grown up almost half of their lives without their father. Please help us ensure the remainder of their childhood includes both a mother and a father."

Saeed Abedini was arrested in 2012 while visiting Iran to assist in the construction of a secular orphanage. He was imprisoned for his Christian faith and is currently serving an eight-year prison sentence.

Christian Headlines

Chattanooga Gunman May Have Been Connected with Islamic Extremism

Editor's note: One of these shootings happened just one mile from our office in Chattanooga. Please join with us in praying for our city during this difficult time.

Authorities believe the 24-year-old man who attacked two military sites in Chattanooga, Tennessee, July 16, killing four Marines and a Navy sailor and injuring others, may have been connected with radical Islam.

Fox News reports Mohammad Youssef Abdulazeez, who was gunned down by police after he opened fire at the Navy Operation Support Center and Marine Corps Reserve Center, was a practicing Muslim who had recently been showing increased devotion to the religion.

An FBI official said, "While it would be premature to speculate on the motives of the shooter at this time, we will conduct a thorough investigation of this tragedy and provide updates as they are available."

Christian Headlines

Charleston Pastors Pray for Lasting Unity

Weeks after Rev. Clementa Pinckney and eight of his parishioners were shot to death in the basement of Emanuel AME Church in downtown Charleston, S.C., questions hang heavy in the humidity of this Southern coastal city: What will sustain the beautiful display of unity among races visible in the shooting's aftermath? How do

churches keep racial reconciliation on the street and not cloistered behind church walls as a relic to be brought out after the next crisis?

"People want to engage and grieve, but there is a lot that works against lasting change," said Bishop Mark Lawrence of the Anglican Diocese of South Carolina. "People want to get back to what they perceive as normal as quickly as possible."

It's that "stasis," as Lawrence calls it, that consumed the prayers of close to a hundred Charleston-area pastors who gathered June 30 next door to Mother Emanuel AME at Citadel Square Baptist Church. Clergy of various denominations and races—some in clerical attire and others in blue jeans, some women but mostly men—joined hands in small groups to pray for personal repentance and that the city would turn from divisions hindering the gGospel message.

They prayed for revival and reconciliation, and for the Holy Spirit to refresh the churches to bring people together and communicate a "multi-ethnic" presentation of the Gospel that speaks to all people.

"There's always the work of the Holy Spirit that has to sustain movements like this," said prayer gathering organizer Craig Tuck, a pastor of Centerpoint Church of North Charleston. "Our intentions are to come together at least in conversation and dialog," something he acknowledged has been happening in the community "in different ways, but not consistently."

"Now is not the time to shrink back," Tuck said. "It's time to press forward, to ask what we can do now. What are the on-ramps out of conversations around tables that will lead us to see sustainable pathways on which to bring about a multi-ethnic Gospel? I believe God has prepared us for this moment, and tragedy is the catalyst to going forward."

Christian Headlines

Kansas Governor Protects Pastors from Lawsuits over Gay Weddings

The governor of Kansas has issued an executive order that protects pastors from lawsuits that could emerge over refusal to officiate gay weddings. The order from Gov. Sam Brownback comes after the Supreme Court ruled June 26 in a 5-4 vote to legalize same-sex marriage across the United States.

In a statement, Brownback said, "We have a duty to govern and to govern in accordance with the Constitution as it has been determined by the Supreme Court decision. We also recognize that religious liberty is at the heart of who we are as Kansans and Americans, and should be protected. The Kansas Bill of Rights affirms the right to worship according to 'dictates of conscience' and further protects against any infringement of that right. Today's Executive Order protects Kansas clergy and religious organizations

from being forced to participate in activities that violate their sincerely and deeply held beliefs.”

WORLD Magazine reports Kansas is the third state to enact a bill of this variety after Oklahoma and Texas. Tennessee is also considering an order that would protect clergy members from potential lawsuits.

In accordance with the Supreme Court’s same-sex marriage ruling, pastors are not required to perform gay wedding ceremonies. As of yet, no clergy members have been sued for refusing to officiate same-sex weddings

Christian Headlines

Sermon Helps—from www.sermonhall.com

Sermon Outlines

Promise of Power

Luke 24:49

I. The Promise: “*And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you*”

- A. Promise of provision of the Spirit.
- B. Promise of the power of the Spirit
- C. Promise of the prospect of the Spirit.

II. The Patience: “*But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem*”

- A. Waiting in prayer.
- B. Waiting with purpose.
- C. Waiting for His plan.

III. The Power: “*Until ye be endued with power from on high*”

- A. Power to worship.
- B. Power to work.
- C. Power to witness.

Croft M. Pentz

What Does Love for Jesus Cost?

John 21

Intro.: The restoration of a person’s fellowship with God must take into account the degeneration of that person’s sin. Peter was called originally beside the Sea of Galilee; Peter denied the Lord beside a fire of coals.

I. There Were Three Denials

II. There Were Three Affirmations

III. There Were Three Commissions

A. Love Commands Our Service: (21:15—17) “*Feed my lambs.*”

- 1. Service over self (21:15) “*Do you truly love me more than these?*”
- 2. Service to the sheep (21:15, 16) “*Feed my lambs...Take care of my sheep.*”
- 3. Service for the Shepherd (21:16) “*my sheep.*”
- 4. Service with sincerity (21:17) “*Peter was hurt.*”
- 5. Service with submission (21:17) “*Lord, you know all things.*”

B. Love Incites Our Sacrifice: (21:18, 19) “*Follow me!*”

- 1. Loss of mobility (21:18) “*Someone will...lead where you do not want to go.*”
- 2. Loss of dignity (21:18) “*Someone else will dress you.*”
- 3. Loss of mortality (21:19) “*the kind of death.*”

Conc.: Accordingly, every person present should ask themselves, “Do I truly love Jesus? What am I willing to face?”

Steve D. Eutsler

Sermon Illustrations

He Goes Before Them, and the Sheep Follow Him

In Judea and other Near East regions, where flocks and herds constituted the riches, and the feeding of them the chief employment of the principal inhabitants, practices prevailed very different from what we have been accustomed to see.

Instead of a keeper following the sheep, and employing dogs on all occasions to drive them (for the use of dogs in Judea was to defend the flocks from the wild beasts of the forest and the field, and to give notice of their approach), the shepherd himself walked before the sheep, whether he led them to pasture, water, or the fold. The shepherd’s going before the sheep and leading them to pure waters and verdant pastures, is a very striking and beautiful representation of God’s preventing grace and continual help.

Anonymous

Fight for Your Faith

“*Fight the good fight of faith...*” (1 Tim. 6:12). The Greek word used here for “*fight*” can be translated “to agonize,” or “to take pains.” Here, Paul implies that the Christian will struggle in promoting his faith. Believing in Christ brings inner peace and joy to the Christian, but belief does not come without conflict.

D. W. Simon says that, “The struggle for faith is a noble struggle, one of the noblest; therefore fight the battle of faith if you wish to be true to yourselves, true to your own highest interests, not to mention the interests of your fellowmen.”

May we as Christians always be true to God’s interests by never giving up the fight! Might is right, say many; and so it is. Might is the right to bear the burdens of

the weak, to cheer the faint, to uplift the fallen, to pull from one's own stores to the need of the famishing.

These four via *The Old Union Reminder*

Spiros Zodhiates I can't find a verse of Scripture that commands a lost person to go to church; I know a lot of Scripture that commands believers to go into a lost world.

Howard Hendricks

Bulletin Inserts
On Witnessing

Witnessing is not just something a Christian says, but what a Christian is!

Richard Halverson

This is the concept of "beginning with the end in mind"—that every new Christian understands the goal of the Church is to reproduce itself elsewhere.

Reach out to a world in need with the Word it needs.

God has more trouble getting Christians to go than sinners to come.

Hoarded religion pays no interest—and the principal is in danger.

These two anonymous

Keep your fears to yourself; share your courage with others.

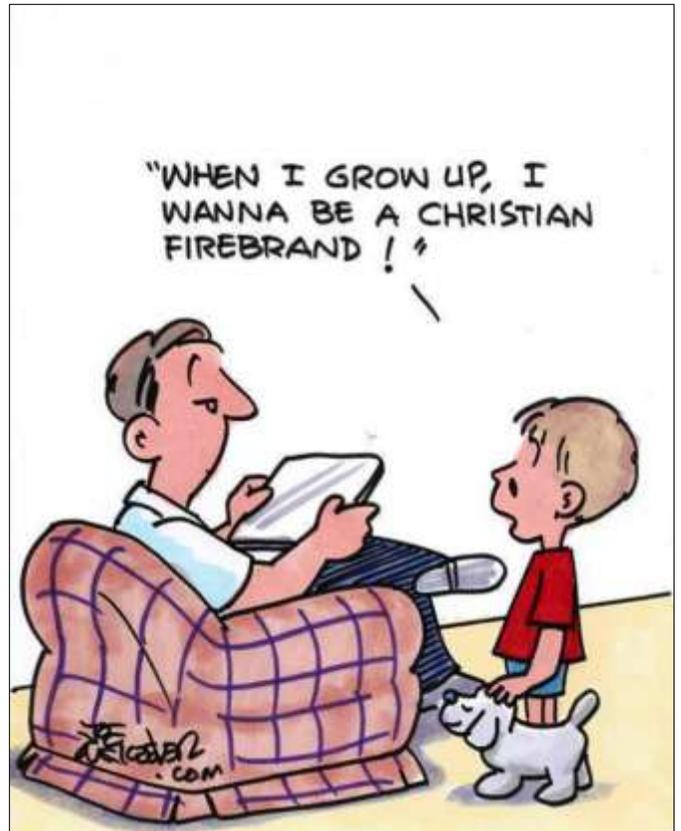
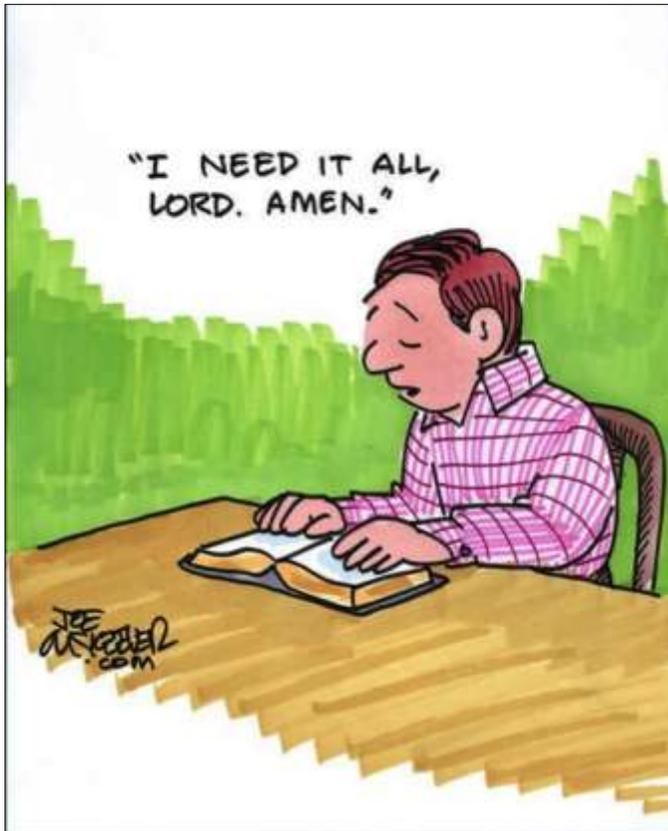
No matter who you are or where you are, God has a purpose for you, and that purpose is to be a witness for Him.

If it had not been for a missionary somewhere, sometime ago, where would you be today?

Andy Chap

Puzzles and ‘Toons

Church ‘Toons by Joe McKeever



Answers to last issue’s puzzles:

Luke (17:3): *“Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.”*
 A. Freedom B. Buffer C. Strength D. Heaven E. Abate F. timidity G. Light
 H. Upharsin I. Kharkov J. Ephraim K. Heiress L. Settee M. Soeey

Hidden Wisdom and Father Abraham

By Mark Oshman

Originally published in *Pulpit Helps*, October 1999

FATHER ABRAHAM’S ANSWERS FROM PAGE 22

1. “Who should be the greatest” (Mark 9:34).	5. Daniel (Mark 13:14); cf. Dan. 11:31; 12:11.
2. James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Mark 10:35-37). The parallel passage (Mt. 20:20ff.) indicates that their mother accompanied them and seconded their petition.	6. Spikenard (Mark 14:4).
3. Bethany (Mark 11:12).	7. Peter, James, and John (Mark 14:32, 33).
4. “Certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians” (Mark 12:13).	8. Envy (Mark 15:10).
	9. Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Mark 15:47).
	10. For their unbelief and hardness of heart (Mark 16:14).

Father Abraham’s Question Box ?
 By Mark Oshman

The Gospel of Luke, Part I

1. What was Zacharias doing when the angel Gabriel appeared unto him? (Luke 1)	6. To which two Old Testament prophets did Jesus Christ allude in the synagogue at Nazareth? (Luke 4)
2. How long did Mary abide with Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea? (Luke 1)	7. Who said to Jesus Christ, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord”? (Luke 5)
3. Who decreed that “all the world should be taxed”? (Luke 2)	8. Who did Jesus Christ heal in a synagogue? (Luke 6)
4. Who spoke of Jesus to “all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem”? (Luke 2)	9. Where did Jesus Christ resurrect the only son of a widow? (Luke 7)
5. What did John the Baptist tell publicans to do? (Luke 3)	10. How old was Jairus’ dying daughter? (Luke 8)

See answers on page 30

Hidden Wisdom on next page

Hidden Wisdom: Bible Acrostic

by Mark A. Oshman

Solve the acrostic by using the clues to guess the words and by transferring the letter above each number to its appropriate place in the diagram. The result will be a Scripture verse of admonition, comfort, or instruction. Further, the initial letters of the answers will contain the name of the book from which the verse was taken. All quotations are from the King James Version. HAPPY SOLVING! You can check your answers on page 18.

1A	2J		3I	4C	5B	6L		7F	8K	9D	10B	11G	12C	13M		14B	15L
16I	17J	18G	19D	20E	21A	22C			23K	24G	25D	26B	27L	28M	29H		
30I	31D	32J	33H	34L	35K		36B	37E	38J		39K	40G		41G	42B	43M	44K
	45D	46A	47E	48G	49I	50K	51J	52C	53H	54L		55E	56I	57A		58C	59B
60H	61K			62I	63L	64D	65F	66H		67J	68L		69B	70G	71F	72A	73J

CLUES

A. Residents of Milford Haven, *inter alia* (alt. spell.)

72 46 21 57 1

B. We read in his book how "the just shall live his faith"

42 59 36 5 69 10 14 26

C. Amer. painter (1882-1945)

58 22 52 12 4

D. A son of Reuben

45 19 64 9 25 31

E. Solomon's daughter-in-law

47 37 20 55

F. Pussycat's partner?

71 7 65

G. A small hole, as on a flute

48 11 70 41 24 18 40

H. Type of antiknock fluid

33 53 29 60 66

I. Do this and the devil will flee from you!

16 49 62 56 30 3

J. "And the _____ shall possess it"

67 17 38 51 2 32 73

K. Dark

61 23 8 50 44 39 35

L. "The Spirit also _____ our infirmities"

54 68 34 15 27 6 63

M. Shaped covering for the head

13 43 28