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# Preacher's

## MAGAZINE

"... SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE ..." Eph. 4:15

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### 100 Years— Los Angeles First



TRANSITIONAL COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY IN MULTICONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY

HOW TO INTERPRET THE PASTORAL VOTE

ANOTHER LOOK AT SUCCESS

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# “Happy 100th Birthday” to the Mother Church from the 109 World Areas of Nazarenes and Other Holiness Sister Denominations

**O**n October 6, 1895, in Los Angeles, Dr. Phineas F. Bresee and Dr. J. P. Widney preached at a new mission in a hall at 317 South Main Street. The *Los Angeles Times* told of it under the news heading: “NEW DENOMINATION. DRS. BRESEE AND WIDNEY WILL FOUND A NEW CHURCH.”<sup>1</sup>

By October 20, the new group organized a church. The charter remained open until October 30, 1895. The original minutes set forth the statements of belief, the Articles of Faith, and the General Rules for the Church of the Nazarene.

The congregation leased a lot on 526 South Los Angeles Street and built a simple tabernacle, which came to be known as “The Glory Barn” (top left picture on cover). A permanent home was built in 1903 at 6th and Wall (top right photo). With changing conditions, a temporary church building was bought at 25th and Magnolia (bottom right photo). Under Dr. Kimber Moulton’s pastoral leadership, they built the present church building near 3rd and Vermont in the Wilshire District. Dr. L. G. Nees led the congregation in the construction of the stately, beautiful sanctuary wing (bottom left photo.)

With ethnic, social, and economic changes that occur in metropolitan areas, new strategies had to be applied to Los Angeles First Church. It was my privilege to follow Dr. Paul Benefiel upon his election as district superintendent. A demographic survey covering an area within 12 blocks of the church indicated 100,000 people—among them 35,000 young adults. So we assigned Ron Benefiel as associate pastor to single young adults. Spanish-speaking people comprised the second-largest group in the area, so we invited Oziel Flores to be the associate to the Spanish-speaking population. Again, David Kwon was added to serve the Koreans of the area. Clarence Crites,



by **Randal E. Denny**

*Spokane, Wash.*

## PASTORS of the FIRST CHURCH of the NAZARENE, LOS ANGELES

**P. F. Bresee, founder**  
1895-1911

**C. E. Cornell**  
1911-18

**A. O. Hendricks**  
1918-20

**C. H. Babcock**  
1920-25

**J. T. Little**  
1925-26

**C. E. Hardy**  
1926-28

**H. H. Hooker**  
1928-34

**H. B. Wallin**  
1934-42

**M. K. Moulton**  
1942-56

**L. G. Nees**  
1957-64

**W. W. Wellman**  
1964-70

**J. Ingalls**  
1970-73

**P. W. Benefiel**  
1973-75

**R. E. Denny**  
1975-79

**W. M. Boggs**  
1979-82

**R. P. Benefiel**  
1982—

evangelism and discipleship ministry, and Ron (Jeff) Jeffries, music and youth, joined with Dr. Victor Peters, visitation, to round out one of the finest church staffs ever assembled. We are still like brothers! Those were memorable days in my own pastoral experience—I felt privileged to serve that wonderful congregation.

The present pastor, Dr. Ron Benefiel, has been a mastermind in creating new avenues of ministry (see feature article). His vision for Los Angeles matches perfectly the vision of our founder, Dr. Bresee:

We seek the simplicity and the pentecostal power of the primitive New Testament Church. The field of labor to which we feel especially called is in the neglected quarters of the cities and wherever also may be found waste places and souls seeking pardon and cleansing from sin. This work we aim to do through the agency of city missions, evangelistic services, house-to-house visitation, caring for the poor, comforting the dying. To this end we strive to personally walk with God and to incite others so to do.<sup>2</sup>

Note the list of 16 senior pastors over the century. At this printing, 8 pastors are still living. The Church of the Nazarene has blossomed around the world from rather humble beginnings—but, I believe, God-inspired beginnings! Perpetuating an institution is of little consequence. Perpetuating the Spirit-filled movement of God through His sanctified people that gave birth to an institution is the challenge of our age. I join you in praying at this centennial celebration milestone, “Do it again, Lord!”

**The 100th birthday celebration  
occurs October 29, 1995!**

1. Donald P. Brickley, *Man of the Morning* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960), 133.

2. *Ibid.*, 137.

# Transitional Communities: A Case Study in Multicongregational Ministry

## INTRODUCTION

Scattered along historic business corridors in central cities across the United States, there they are—massive Gothic cathedrals and Early American colonial sanctuaries. Churches with gymnasiums, spacious dining facilities, and endless hallways connecting countless numbers of rooms once used for offices, meetings, and Christian education classes. Once filled with the energy and life of drive-in homogeneous groups of men, women, teens, and children, now they stand as largely dormant memorials of what once was, occupied scarcely beyond Sunday mornings by the aging remnant. Meanwhile, the surrounding streets are teeming with the abundant energy of multiethnic immigrant life.

Just outside the perimeter of the



by Ron Benefiel

*Pastor,  
Los Angeles*

central city, another familiar scene: more modest church structures tucked away neatly in suburban residential neighborhoods that once housed the white and blue collars of white working America. Now immersed in neighborhoods descriptively labeled as “transitional communities,” pastors lead the depleted weary faithful in still another effort to keep the doors open long enough to discover the key to survival in the changing community.

I offer here an attempt to describe some of the natural psychological and missiological strategic processes that

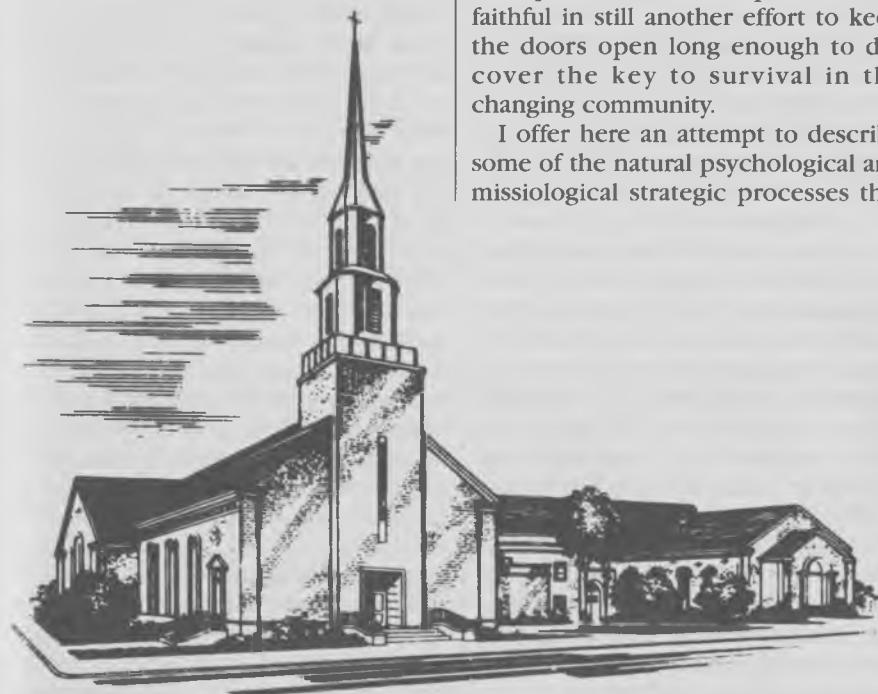
congregations typically experience as they wrestle with issues of identity and “reason for being” in the midst of major contextual demographic transitions. A case study of the multicongregational organizational structure of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene is presented as one church’s effort to embrace changes in the community and to incorporate those changes into the life and mission of the church. Central to its recrafted mission and identity is a theology of place.

## THE CASE IN POINT

Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene is a historic church (by West Coast American standards) with an illustrious heritage. Founded in 1895 by Dr. Phineas F. Bresee, it bears the honor and weight of being the mother church of the denomination. It is literally the first Church of the Nazarene. Briefly stated, its original unique mission was twofold: doctrinal—to preach holiness in the tradition of Wesley; and missiological—a church for all people, with special attention given to the needs of both the indigenous and immigrant poor.

As the social forces of redemption and lift made their mark, many of the original neighborhood converts who were poor became the middle-class faithful who drove in to church from outside the now deteriorating urban center. After serving the downtown area for 44 years, the church decided to relocate to a locale more accessible and suitable to its constituency.

Within a decade, the neighborhood around the new location began to change, and the congregation moved again. This time the move was to L.A.’s Mid-Wilshire district, a mostly middle- to upper-middle-class white neighborhood paralleling the Wilshire



business district a scant but safe three to four miles from the center of downtown. The church prospered with its move. The congregation was by all accounts thriving as drive-in and residential faithful enjoyed an infusion of resource and energy from culturally similar newcomers who found the church to resonate with their social and spiritual needs. A spacious new sanctuary was constructed in the early '60s. It was clear the congregation intended for the Mid-Wilshire district to be "home" for many years to come.

The church can still have an effective ministry in the community as it changes.

Quite suddenly, they found themselves on the front end of a major demographic transition—in Los Angeles generally and very much in their neighborhood specifically. The percentage of non-Hispanic Whites residing within a mile of the church dropped from 80 percent in 1960 to 45 percent in 1970, 25 percent in 1980, and less than 10 percent in 1990. The early years of the transition were especially painful as families with long, multigenerational histories in the church voiced with regret their decisions to relocate or to discontinue their drive in to old First Church. Many of those who left were young drive-in families who felt the need to attend churches that were safer and closer to home for the sake of their children.

The church was clearly at a crossroads. Looming out ahead once again was the decision to either remain in the community or relocate. But more than that, the church was faced with a decision regarding its very nature and mission.

#### FIVE STRATEGIES

Over the years I have observed

scores of churches in transitional communities both in my community and in others across the country faced with decisions similar to the ones faced by Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene. I would like to suggest that the choices they have as well as the strategies they adopt fall roughly into five categories.

*The first of the five choices/strategies is an interim position I have chosen to call "hold out."* "Hold out" is the natural choice when the prevailing belief in the congregation is that the congregation is not yet ready to make a final decision about its future destiny. Since the situation is still changing, the data is not yet all in, "why not wait and see what happens in the next few years before making what could be a costly mistake?" There may be some feeling that the demographic transition taking place will stabilize or reverse itself, allowing the congregation to continue the kind of ministry it has known in the past. "Hold out" for the declining congregation is usually only an option when the church has enough financial resources to feel that it is able to carry on for a while as is.

In the meantime the church leadership may enter into a time of denial of the changes taking place that in some respects is similar to the denial experienced in the early stages of grief. For a church in the "hold out" mode, these years may be the beginning stages of the remnant grieving the loss of the "good old days" when the church was growing and full of life and energy. An interesting tangent may develop in which programs and strategies that were successful in the heyday of the church may be suggested and implemented in an effort to return the church to its past glory. Young pastors reminiscent of previous successful leaders may be called to fill the same cultural backgrounds as the historic constituency of the church. All of this without taking into consideration the crucial difference in the makeup of the community or the degree to which the effectiveness of different programs and strategies has changed with the passing of time.

*A second interim strategy, "keep out," is more entrenched and reactive.* It embodies the feeling that the changes taking place in the surrounding neighborhood are threatening to

the life and future of the church. It is the fear that if the church opened its doors to the cross-cultural population in the surrounding neighborhood, the newcomers would not care for the facility or respect the history of the place in the same way that the current constituency does. Typically there is an increased fear of the community itself with reports of increased criminal activity and vandalism occurring in and around the church facility. Fences are constructed, both literally and symbolically, between the church and the community. The church finds itself in the stereotypical stance of the "fortress."

In its reverence for the history and heritage of the church, the leadership may opt for a "keep out" strategy partly in an effort to protect the memory of what once was. In this sense, it becomes quite literally a "memorial church" with the limited mission of caring for the aging saints and preserving the memory of its heritage. The church is slowly dying.

*A third strategy is a permanent one we will call "move out," the decision to relocate out of the community.* Many congregations in transitional communities feel this is their only survival option. As the makeup of the community has changed, the active membership and finances have declined. People from the congregation regularly move away, while few if any newcomers from the community come in to replace them. Many of those who remain in the church do not live in the immediate community. In many cases, the facility is larger than the church now requires, and the burden of maintaining a large, aging building is a major concern. It is fairly easy to project the numerical and financial trends out a few years with the conclusion that the church does not have much of a future, at least not in that neighborhood. The options seem to be limited to "relocate or die." "Move out" may be especially compelling when there are a number of key members in the drive-in constituency whose future commitment to the church hinges on its relocation.

*Another permanent option is that of "close out."* Here again, this is a situation in which it does not appear to be an option for the church to continue its ministry in the community.

In this case, the congregation is small enough or has declined to the place where the will and the financial resources necessary for relocation are simply not there. The congregation is encouraged to "die with dignity." The predominant mood is one of remembering with pride the ministry the church has had over the years of its existence. The church facility may be turned over to denominational leaders for the purpose of starting a new "ethnic/language" congregation in the community or more likely to be sold with the hope that the financial assets can be divided up and used in starting new churches or strengthening existing ministries in other communities.

The key often lies in reassessing the mission of the church.

Finally, the fifth strategic option is "reach out." This is a strategy adopted by the congregation to intentionally adapt its ministry to the changing demographics and "felt needs" of the people who currently live in the community. In order to move to a "reach out" mentality, there must be a renewed vision of ministry among the laity that keeps them from giving up on the community and a conviction on the part of the leadership that the church can still have an effective ministry in the community as it changes.

#### EMBRACING A THEOLOGY OF PLACE

In most cases, moving to a spirit of "reach out" in a local congregation will necessitate a complete change in the focus, mission, and identity of the church. The sense of who the primary constituency of the church is must change from one designated by ethnicity and social class to one designated by geography, from a ministry commitment to a single "people group" to a ministry commitment that includes all the cultural groupings of

people who live in the surrounding community.

The key in making such a transition often lies in reassessing the mission of the church. When confronted with the question "What is the mission of this local congregation?" most of those in leadership will likely adhere to a statement that prioritizes, or at least includes, a ministry to the people of the local community in one form or another. However, the informally assumed mission is often experienced differently in the life of the church. The unspoken words behind the statement of mission often include the notion of perpetuating a congregation that is culturally homogeneous.

In a homogeneous community, there is nothing to challenge the unspoken assumption of homogeneity in the congregation. However, when the community becomes more culturally diverse, the unspoken assumption of homogeneity is necessarily challenged if the congregation is to take seriously its stated mission of serving the community (to say nothing of the issue of the question of survival if the congregation does not adapt to the changes). If scriptural descriptions and prescriptions regarding the nature of the church are explored (e.g., Acts 2, Acts 10, and Ephesians 2), the desirability and even the necessity of the diverse nature of the church in a diverse community are underscored.

Therefore, assisting the congregation in reexamining its mission, including its mission of ministry to the people of the diversifying community, can become the catalyst for developing a new focus and identity for the congregation. When the leadership, both pastoral and lay, embraces a mission that incorporates "reaching out" to the culturally heterogeneous neighborhood, the door to a new "reason for being" for the congregation is unlocked, a doorway that enables the congregation to adapt its ministry to the changes in the community and to embrace diversity as part of its own identity.

In the case of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, the historical precedent was to move out of the neighborhood when the neighborhood changed. The move was always to a neighborhood that was more

suitable to the current membership. From this it follows that the primary constituency of the church was understood to be the group of people already in the church. Although there were cross-cultural mission efforts launched in the community, the informally accepted priority of the church was to incorporate newcomers who were culturally similar, not only because it was more comfortable, but also in order to sustain the life and ministry of the church in line with its historic ethos. When that was no longer thought to be possible in a given community, the congregation had twice voted to relocate.

As long as there were people in the neighborhood, there was a reason for the church to be there.

In deciding to stay in the Mid-Wilshire community as the community experienced a major demographic shift, the congregation over time necessarily shifted its focus of ministry and mission from addressing the needs primarily of those in the congregation to including, and even to some degree prioritizing, the needs of those in the surrounding neighborhoods. In doing so, the congregation came to the place of making a permanent commitment to minister in the Mid-Wilshire community. As long as there were people in the neighborhood, there was a reason for the church to be there.

With this change in focus, one new indicator of evaluating how well the church was doing in accomplishing its mission became the degree to which the demographic makeup of the congregation reflected the demographic makeup of the community. One of the results was that the once

nearly all-white, middle-class worshiping body greatly diversified. Currently, approximately half of the congregation on a given Sunday are people of color (including American ethnic minority and immigrant groups from 15 to 20 different countries) and half non-Hispanic White (ironically, the non-Hispanic White contingency is now mostly young adult again). Diversity has come to be greatly valued by the congregation and is instrumental in helping to create a spirit of inclusivity. People from a very wide variety of socioeconomic, subcultural, and political backgrounds not only feel welcome but also feel that the congregation is one they can embrace as their own.

This diversity was especially important in working through the issues presented by the L.A. riots. In April of 1992, when the disturbances broke out in L.A., the church found itself in the middle of one of the major riot zones. Scores of businesses in the immediate community were looted and burned to the ground. Racial tensions were extremely high. On the following Sunday, the four congregations of the church met together for a combined worship celebration (along with another sister congregation whose building had burned down in the riots). For those who were present, the memory of the worship experience that day represents a powerful picture of the church. Hundreds of Koreans, Guatemalans, African-Americans, Filipinos, White Americans, Mexicans, Nigerians, and Southeast Asians (to name a few) were singing "How Firm a Foundation" together in the heart of Los Angeles on the Sunday morning following the riots! In addition to the massive cleanup and food distribution efforts that followed, the church became something of a center for racial reconciliation. Community meetings, reconciliation workshops, and town meetings were a natural part of the life of the worshiping body as it wrestled with the questions of what it meant to be the Church of Jesus Christ in the middle of a race-divided city. The combined facts of ethnic diversity and Christian identity created an environment conducive to dialogue, forgiveness, healing, and unity.

As might be expected, in the early stages of the transitions, not everyone

felt comfortable with the changes. While most of the older established leadership agreed with the new directions in mission, and while some were able to fully embrace them, many were not personally comfortable enough with the changes to remain in the congregation. The feel-

The church  
became  
something of a  
center for racial  
reconciliation.

ings expressed often came out in such sentiments as, "This is a *good* thing, but it is not *my* thing." But there were also others, newcomers who were specifically attracted to the church because of its new directions in ministry, albeit not as many as the number who left. Most of those who left were older; most of those who came were much younger.

The spirit of "reach out" in the church has manifested itself far be-

Far from  
intruding,  
these new  
congregations  
were assisting  
the established  
congregation  
in achieving  
its mission.

yond the limitations of the English-speaking congregation. If the reconstructed mission of the congregation was to "reach out" to the people of this community, and if a high percent-

age of those living in the community were Spanish-speaking, then it became apparent that one of the ways to move ahead toward fulfillment of the mission of the church was through the development of a Spanish-speaking congregation. In the case in point, the community was diversifying with the influx of several immigrant populations. A Korean congregation was established, followed by a Filipino congregation, as increasing numbers of Koreans and Filipinos established residence in the area.

With the new understanding of the mission of the church, there seemed to be a greater willingness on the part of the leadership of the English-speaking congregation to welcome newcomers in the other congregations into the fellowship of the larger church family. Far from intruding, these new congregations were assisting the established congregation in achieving its mission of reaching out to the community by touching the lives of people who were culturally beyond the direct reach of the English-speaking congregation.

#### A MULTICONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

In the case of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene, there were numerous attempts to assist new congregations in getting started. Over the course of 23 years, an Armenian, two Southeast Asian, and two Korean congregations were begun that either did not survive or relocated away from the sponsoring body. These sprouted and withered with changes in leadership and demographic movement in the community. However, the existing Spanish-speaking congregation was begun in the middle 1970s, followed by the existing Korean and Filipino congregations of the middle 1980s. Today, the church identifies itself as one church with four congregations: English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Korean, and Filipino.

As the congregations matured, new questions arose regarding such things as the nature of membership, the use of facilities, the ownership of facilities, jointly sponsored programs and ministries, and the appropriate sharing of financial responsibilities. A committee was established to begin exploring the implications of a permanent multicongregational model. After two years of brainstorming, a



trial model was created and implemented. A multicongregational board was elected and began the process of implementing the dream. Over the course of the next eight years it took on more and more of the fiscal and policy responsibilities for the shared operation of the multicongregational church.

The development of the organizational model was guided by a statement of belief regarding the nature and mission of the local church that was hammered out and adopted by the newly formed multicongregational board. Included in that statement of belief were some of the following stated convictions:

- the church had a permanent commitment to minister to the people of the Mid-Wilshire area with the makeup of the membership changing in concert with demographic changes in the community;
- the ministry among the people of the community was to be holistic in nature, addressing the integrated whole of “human and spiritual” needs;
- the unity of the church was to be preserved, that is, the four congregations and the various other ministries of Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene were all understood to be different expressions of one church with a shared, integrated mission in the community;
- diversity of the total church body was embraced and understood to be a strength of the church with a commitment to fostering a spirit of unity in the midst of its diversity;
- the organizational structures of the church were to reflect the spiritual unity and diversity of the church;
- the church facility was understood to be jointly owned by the membership of all congregations (this was legally formalized in September of 1994);
- the maintenance and financial responsibility of the facility were to be jointly held by all congregations;
- all members in all congregations were to have equal standing in the church with parity in access to privilege, power, and policy.

The resulting multicongregational board was made up of representatives from each of the four congregations

with the number of representatives from each based on the size of the congregation relative to the size of the other congregations. A formula determining the number of seats each congregation had on the board was developed, using figures from the

**As the  
congregations  
matured, new  
questions  
arose.**

previous year for membership, Sunday morning average attendance, and financial giving. A similar formula was used to determine the financial share of the combined multicongregational budget each congregation was to be responsible for in the coming year.

The multicongregational board was given authority over all property use and maintenance, the shared multicongregational budget, jointly sponsored ministries, multicongregational

**The four  
congregations  
were all understood to be  
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expressions of  
one church.**

staff members, and all legal and policy matters. Each congregation reserved authority over pastoral selection, individual congregational finances (including denominational obligations), congregational-sponsored ministries, and use of congregationally owned vehicles and equipment.

#### **THE WORKING MODEL**

At this writing, the multicongrega-

tional organizational structure of Los Angeles First Nazarene is nearly nine years into its implementation. Weekly participation in the four worship services (usually between 600 and 700) is larger now than the number attending in the celebrated days of the church before it began its decline. The facility is fully used, not just on Sundays, but all through the week.

There have been many stress points along the way. Facility scheduling and use requires constant attention, especially given the different cultural uses of time. The English-speaking congregation worship in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings at 9:30 A.M., followed by the Spanish congregation at around 11:15. The Filipino and Korean congregation share Sunday morning use of the chapel in similar fashion. Congregations have learned to be patient when it is their time for the use of a facility but those ahead of them in the facility are not yet finished. Christian education space is divided up as a scarce resource. Requests for space use for classes, storage, and offices frequently come before the multicongregational board with the board having no available space to allocate. Negotiations are sometimes challenging.

The notion of how a church facility is to be used vary by congregation and culture. For some, sharing meals is a weekly congregational function after Sunday service every week. For others, the facility is primarily for worship and Christian education. For some, early morning and all-night prayer meetings are critical to the spiritual health and vitality of the congregation. For others, security of the facility at odd hours is a competing concern. For some, children are always present and loosely supervised, symbolizing the sense of extended family experienced by the congregation. For others, the expectation regarding children at the church is one of careful supervision in carefully guarded rooms. These and scores of other personality, congregational, and cultural differences sometimes stretch the limits of patience.

And yet the model continues to work. In fact, despite the challenges, the spirit in the congregations toward those in other congregations is characteristically generous, supportive, and open. With the implementation

of the permanent multicongregational model, pride of ownership among those in the different congregations has had a positive impact on such things as participation in the decision-making process, care for the maintenance of the facility, and the sense of responsibility in the payment of congregational facility use obligations.

All members  
in all  
congregations  
were to have  
equal standing  
in the church.

Examples continually surface illustrating the reality of the sense of being one church with multiple ministries. Frequently, the congregations gather together for combined worship services, baptismal services, multicongregational food festivals, and holiday celebrations. A multicongregational prayer meeting was initiated by the Filipino congregation and continues to meet monthly with the congregations rotating responsibility for leadership. A young adult "coalition" has been formed by the young adults from different congregations. They meet monthly for a Saturday evening contemporary worship service and sponsor a weekly Bible study together. A multicongregational health cabinet has been formed and, under the supervision of a staff parish nurse, offers medical information, workshops, screening, testing, referrals, and weekly clinics to those in the congregations and the community.

In some cases, multicultural families are faced with a choice of which congregation they will join. The spirit of cooperation between the congregations is such that movement from one congregation to another has not been an issue. Some families have chosen to participate in more than one of the congregations. Others

have found the church to be a place where different family members attend different congregations, based on language and culture preferences. One of the serendipities of the process has been how the model addresses the so-called 1.5 of second-generation problem. When children of immigrant families assimilate into the dominant culture more rapidly than their parents and other members of their extended family, their resistance to feeling required to conform to the immigrant culture is often interpreted as rebellion, both toward the family and toward the church. With the open option of attending the congregation in which they feel culturally most comfortable, some youth and young adults who may have otherwise left have stayed in the church but gravitated toward another congregation.

#### CONCLUSION

So, where do we go from here? I have to admit that I face the future with convergent emotions of fear, hope, uncertainty, and expectancy. There is much that can go awry. The multicongregational model assumes a certain cooperative spirit, a willingness to "share and submit" for the common good, and a degree of trust that quickly becomes vulnerability before those who might try to take advantage. Even though the committees and boards have gone to great lengths to include Kingdom perspectives and protective wording in the legal document, the whole model can easily be abused. Diversity expressed by multiple congregations can easily shift from shared mission to competing interests. The energy associated with creating a new organizational model can easily lose momentum. Unity in diversity can become cacophony. Leadership changes can invite disintegration.

And yet I am hopeful. I am hopeful that the true nature of the Church will, in fact, sustain a spirit of unity in the midst of diversity. I am hopeful that people committed to the kingdom of God will find in this place a healthy environment to work out together the meaning of Ephesians 2 rather than to succumb to the temptation to compete, divide, and conquer. I am hopeful that in the future

as there are changes in demographics, leadership, and finances, the church will flex, bend, and grow with the changes. I am enough of a realist to acknowledge that my optimism is sounding a bit like naïveté. Except for one thing—which is central to my hope and optimism. It is simply that by the grace of God, the people of God in the middle of the changing city will continue to seek to discover and rediscover the nature of the emergent church.

Despite the  
challenges, the  
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and open.

Finally, in sum, churches in transitional communities are generally faced with what feels to be difficult options. With the base of leadership and financial support eroding as longstanding members relocate out of the community, the pull to move the church to where the membership is living or to close it down may seem like the only legitimate choices. Other congregations will move into a survival mode, waiting for something to change "in their favor" or resigning themselves to remembering the past and caring for the remnant.

Some congregations are discovering still another option. In reviewing their mission as a congregation, they find the seeds of a new reason for being. Embracing change and celebrating diversity become the keys to reaching out to the new world in their neighborhood. †

## Thanksgiving in Three Tenses

by Willard A. Scofield

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**W**hat a time to offer up thanks to Almighty God!

One highly publicized war and others that we seldom hear about, more crime, more violence, an uncertain economy, the continuing breakdown of families—all these discourage us. Some despairing souls might call for a moratorium on thanksgiving observances.

Yet people have thanked God in times like ours before our day. One of them, the writer of Ps. 66, thanked the Lord for the past, for the present, and for the future.

### THANK YOU, LORD, FOR YESTERDAY

The psalmist recalls the mighty acts of God in the past: "Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf! He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot—come, let us rejoice in him" (vv. 5-6).

Israel was grateful for its heritage—the patriarchs who took God at His word and stepped out on faith, the prophets who courageously spoke the Word of God, the psalmists who sang songs of praise on dark days.

Every Christian can thank God for the great events that have brought us hope for this life and for eternity—the coming of Christ, the Cross, the Resurrection, the great affirmations from the pen of Paul, such as, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Yes, we thank God for our Christian heritage, which has permitted us ready access to the faith. Think of some of the elements of that heritage:

Those who labored to faithfully transmit the text of the Bible

The founders of our churches

Grandparents and parents who were models of what a Christian should be

Faithful pastors and Sunday School teachers

A friend who told us about Jesus Christ

And many more

We can say, "Thank You, Lord, for yesterday."

### THANK YOU, LORD, FOR TODAY

The psalmist says, "Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping" (vv. 8-9).

Let us thank God for life as did a little girl who once prayed, "Thank You, Lord, for Mommy and Daddy, for Grandma and Grandpa. Thank You for John and Joel, and thank You, Lord, for *me*."

There never were any "good old days." The great leaders of the Christian Church despaired over the conditions in their times. However, they believed that God is alive; their actions and writings have blessed the Church for centuries.

Tremendous opportunities challenge the Church today. Large parts of the world, including Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America, are open to the gospel as never before.

We have the technology and the volunteers to reach the 11,000 people groups that have never had a Christian church planted in their midst.

More people of all ages and from all walks of life are volunteering for short terms of overseas Christian service.

Many of the young people ready to do missionary work today come from young churches in third world countries. In the 21st century, they may

outnumber the missionaries coming from North America and Europe.

God is alive, and He is using His people to do good things.

In Europe some bells are strung across a mountain range. There is no rope suspended from the bells; no human hand ever rings them. Their sound is heard when the wind blows. In the fall, there may be a few tingles as gentle winds move them. But they bring forth their most majestic music during the gales of winter.

God brings out the best in us under the pressure of tough times. Let us thank Him that we are alive today.


### THANK YOU, LORD, FOR TOMORROW

The psalmist looks forward to a day ahead: "All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name" (v. 4).

The psalmist saw the day when God will reign and the world will respond to Him in worship.

Though we may not be sure of all the details, we do know the end of the story. God's promises will be fulfilled. His purposes will be completed. God is working in history to bring about His ultimate victory.

So, we work for the Lord because we are confident that He is in control. That was the attitude of a man who lived during days of great turmoil in England. In a chapel at Stanton Harcourt outside of London, these words are engraved on a plaque:

"In the year, 1653, when all things sacred throughout the nation were either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley Baronet founded this church whose singular praise it is to have done the best things in the worst times and hoped them in the most calamitous." 

# How to Interpret the Pastoral Vote

### Editorial note:

Some of the holiness denominations still have a pastoral recall vote. Joseph Seaborn gives good insight to that thorny issue. Those who must face pastoral votes will appreciate this guest editorial.

**A** pastoral vote is a strange animal. If you happen to be its victim, it can attack with all the terror of a crazed tiger. In its more docile moments, it can be as playful as a lamb at a petting zoo.

Whether you are a pastor or a layperson, you have probably seen both sides. You've watched in pain as a person whom you loved was mauled into humiliation by a handful of campaigning beasts who mistook their growls for the voice of God. In a sudden spiritual downturn, a church that was moving along under the vision and power of God suddenly developed a cluster of critics. Within a few days, the pastor and his family were chased into the desert as scapegoats.

On the other hand, there are pastoral votes that go so smoothly that they are almost a waste of time. Everybody knows things are going well. The tone of the services is warm. The balance of programs is right. The bond between pastor and people is strong. So why waste time finding out that 95 percent of the people are unified around the vision, and the 5 percent who aren't wouldn't unify around it if Jesus were pastor?

What can we say about this thing called the "pastoral vote"? Is it really the best instrument for the job? Is it reliable, plus or minus a few percentage points? Is it humane? If you were the one being voted on, would that change your view?

See if you agree with these criteria for interpreting the pastoral vote, es-



by Joseph Seaborn

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pecially when the vote reflects an unusual number of "noes."

### 1. NO MATTER WHAT THE ACTUAL PERCENTAGES, A MATURE CHRISTIAN WILL FIND WAYS TO MAKE IT A WIN-WIN SITUATION FOR BOTH PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

Anybody who gloats over a pastoral vote should never have voted in the first place. He wasn't spiritually ready to assume such a serious responsibility. From what I've seen, carnal celebrations usually wind up being premature. Like Delilah's shortsighted celebration over Samson. Or Satan's overhasty party at Calvary.

People who show up to vote when they haven't shown their faces at church for months or years may strut for a day, but in the long term, they suffer one of the most serious consequences that a person can ever face—a ruined reputation. Even those who may have campaigned with them lose trust in them. When we have lost credibility with our friends, we are, of all people, to be pitied.

Christians who are mature enough to vote always want to cast the results of the vote in the best possible light. They rightly point to issues and not to a person. They might point out that the pastor was not a fund-raiser

and, for this time in the life of the church, that gift is desperately needed. They might point out the impossible chasm between the pastor's vision for the church and the people's vision for the church. They might highlight the trends of a church toward a more upscale segment of society and the need for leadership that has a natural affinity for potential members from that social strata.

But seasoned Christians are always on the lookout for larger dynamics in the life of the congregation that warrant a pastoral change. They refuse to skewer the pastor with such tacky reasons as (a) "We don't like the way he spends his money," or (b) "We feel he preaches his opinion more than he preaches the Bible," or (c) "This man is a lazy bum. He takes our money and sleeps through his ministry." Such comments are beneath a sensible Christian.

Even if those claims contain elements of truth, they are not cited by mature Christians. Believers who deserve positions of leadership take the high road above these accusations and see the bigger picture. They fully understand that dynamics in the church may make it impossible for the pastor to stay, but they refuse to stab him in the back when he's already in retreat. They know that church stories have two or more sides, and they desire that the pastor be allowed to leave with his ego as intact as that of the congregation he is leaving behind. They seek a win-win outcome. In all but the rarest of cases, the win-win is not only desirable but also possible.

### 2. THE PASTORAL VOTE IS TOO SMALL AN INSTRUMENT TO MEASURE THE FULL RANGE OF ISSUES INVOLVED IN A LEADERSHIP DECISION.

Here is the great genius of a pas-

toral vote. At its very best, it is an instrument that gives a partial reading, a sketchy view. Just as you can't play Handel's *Messiah* on a pitch pipe nor fully describe a weeping willow in two short paragraphs, so a pastoral vote doesn't tell the whole story.

It can't. Therein lies its greatest strength and weakness all rolled into one. Because of its inability to give a fully accurate reading, it leaves the door open for interpretation by both pastor and people. The pastor can weigh it with factors that spare him a direct blow, and the people who voted "no" cannot claim that they finally have been vindicated.

Here's a quick list of reasons why the vote cannot give a fully accurate reading:

1. A lot of the votes, both "yes" and "no," are only percentage votes. Many people vote "yes" when they are only 51 percent sure that it's the right vote; and others vote "no" by the same margin.
2. A vote on one person, the senior pastor, does not factor in how much of the vote was influenced because of how the voters felt about the pastor's family or other staff members whom they wanted to keep or get rid of.
3. The people who vote are at varying stages of maturity. Many of them are often living in outright

sin—which gives grave cause for concern about any decision they make, let alone one that affects another person's future ministry. One man said that he voted "no" because he didn't like to see a pastor become arrogant about his position! Not to worry! The holiness churches are not ravaged by pastors lost in ego, pride, and praise!

4. A crisis in the church often needs a scapegoat. The pastor is the easiest person to charge and change. He's a kind of moving wailing wall when people need a place to vent their emotions. As one man put it, "I voted 'no' because, while the pastor was all right, our church needs change, and he's the one person easiest to change."

### 3. WE MUST SEE THE PASTORAL VOTE FOR WHAT IT IS—A HUMAN INVENTION TO GIVE US A HINT ABOUT THE DIVINE WILL.


When the motive of a person who votes is pure and his heart clean before God, the divine element is allowed greater expression. If the motive is tainted with selfishness or if sin is hindering spiritual vision, the vote is skewed by a human factor.

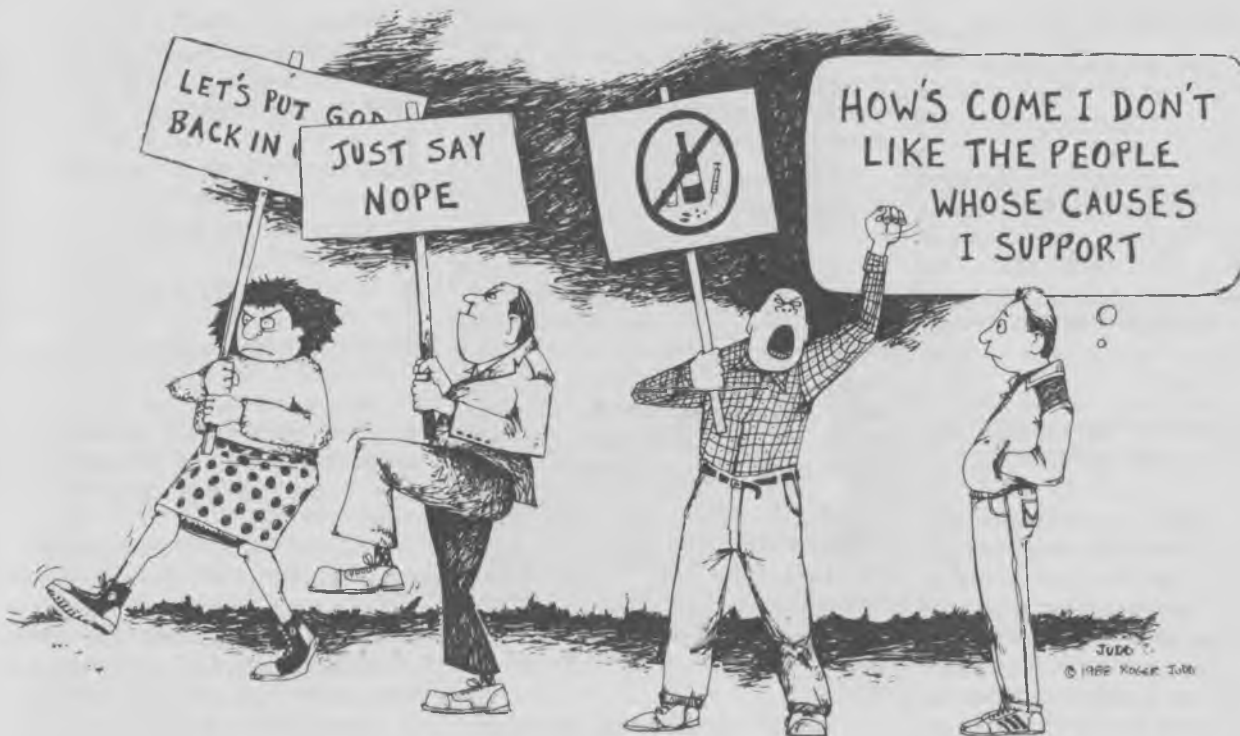
If a vote were fully divine, it would always be unanimous. Clearly the will of God is not partial. God desires that a pastor either go or stay. He can't do

both, and the will of God cannot be both. The very fact that most votes rarely are 100 percent in either direction shows the very human nature of the voting instrument. Far better that a group of people make the decision, however, than one person impose his will by appointing a leader. But the divine element in any pastoral vote is still crowded by a crush of human motives.

The fact that a pastoral vote is partial, limited, human, and imperfect—all at the same time—is good for everybody. Critics of the pastor have no real grounds for elation. The pastor has plenty of room for interpreting the data to his advantage. The pastor who is subject to a vote deserves the leeway of a private interpretation in order to defend himself against the inner taunts of futility and worthlessness. He must, at the very least, have the refuge of "a positive way of looking at things."

If, at times, you are frustrated with the pastoral vote, take the long view. Whether there be votes, one day they shall cease. Whether there be elections, they shall pass away. For now we vote in part and now we ballot in part, but when that which is perfect is come, the process of voting shall be done away.

And now abideth "yes," "no," and "love," these three; and the greatest of these is still "love." 



## Steps to the Abundant Life

**H**ow do we enter this life more abundant?

How can we be filled with the Spirit so as to have power for victorious living?

### 1. BE SURE YOU ARE OBEDIENT TO THE WILL OF GOD AS HE HAS ALREADY MADE IT KNOWN TO YOU.

"If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:15-17, KJV).

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32, KJV).

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, KJV).

Known failures must be confessed (1 John 2:1-2). Desire for His fullness must be sincere (Matt. 5:6). Remember, now you come as a child to his father (Luke 11:13), and anything that would hinder your fellowship with the Father must be put away (1 John 2:4; 3:6-10; 5:18).

### 2. DELIBERATELY CONSECRATE YOUR WHOLE REDEEMED SELF TO GOD.

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13, KJV).

Consecration is different from the repentance you felt at the time of



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your conversion. Then you surrendered your sinful practices and turned from sinning to the Savior. Now you come as a child of God, yielding your talents, your redeemed life, your very self to the Lord to be totally His. This is so contrary to natural impulses that many call it "dying out" (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20).

### 3. DEFINITELY ASK GOD IN JESUS' NAME TO FILL YOU WITH HIS HOLY SPIRIT, CLEANSING YOUR HEART FROM ALL STAIN OF INNER SINFULNESS.

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13, KJV).

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9, KJV).

### 4. AS YOU RECEIVED CHRIST BY FAITH WHEN YOU WERE CONVERTED (John 1:11-12), JUST AS DEFINITELY NOW RECEIVE THE SANCTIFYING FULLNESS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY FAITH (Rom. 6:11).

"That they may receive forgiveness

of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18, KJV; the risen Christ is the Speaker).

"That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:14, KJV).

"What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24, KJV).

As there was a "witness of the Spirit" that you became a child of God when you were converted (Rom. 8:15-17), so there is a witness of the Spirit now to His sanctifying work (1 Cor. 2:12; 1 John 3:24). It is not an emotion; it is the deep conviction that God has done what He promised to do (1 John 5:14-15). Keep your heart open and expectant and your consecration complete until this certainty comes.

### 5. WITNESS CLEARLY TO WHAT GOD IS DOING FOR YOU, AND LIVE FROM DAY TO DAY IN OPENNESS TO HIS SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE.

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, KJV).

"When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak" (John 16:13, KJV).

Holiness is not a place to stop, but a highway to follow (Isa. 35:8). It is a work of grace in the heart, but it opens the door to the moment-by-moment "workings of grace" in your life (Luke 1:73-75).

"The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23-24, KJV).

## Fill It Up, Mister

**I**s your church half-filled?" my speech teacher asked her ministerial students one morning. Most of us nodded yes.

"If so," she continued, "let me tell you why. It's because the pulpit is half-filled."

She was blunt in her judgment, but our red faces told her she was correct. We knew it was the truth because we were preaching to empty seats.

Every Sunday we saw eyes glaze over and close. People didn't invite their friends to come hear us. Visitors came a couple of times and never returned. Our sermons had no "go power." Members were unfaithful to the services or left to join some other congregation.

Yes, we had a problem of running on empty because the pilot wasn't filled. Our teacher let us know there was a price to be paid for premium sermons. If we didn't learn to fill up the pulpit, it would asphyxiate us and our congregations. We needed to pull into the self-service island.

Are you  
running on  
empty,  
brother?

Running out of gas is always embarrassing. It happens because we didn't watch the gas gauge. Running on empty in the pulpit is even more embarrassing. It happens because we didn't fill our spiritual tanks. Our teacher told us how to prevent such an event.



by Harold and Lila Morgan

Pratt, Kans.

"Study one hour for every minute you plan in the pulpit," she said.


"Impossible! I've got too many other things to do to study that much," we thought.

The premium sermon doesn't come cheaply. *Today's English Version* of Prov. 4:7 says, "Getting wisdom is the most important thing you can do."

As a trustee of the Word of God, a pastor must have strong study habits. Week by week, hours spent alone with God are necessary. The layperson does not have the time or calling to dig into the Bible as you do. Water-in-the-gas sermons won't nourish people. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV), said Paul.

Pulling daily into the "infilling station" is our only hope. Prayer, fresh ideas, and some sparkle and wit are needed to power sermons down the road. Putting in a dollar's worth won't work. You've got to say, "Fill it up, Lord."

There's a  
remedy for  
preaching  
power that  
has been  
siphoned off.

When filled to the brim, a pastor can fire up people for the Lord. Spirit-fired messages will attract people as Moses was attracted to the burning bush. Your days of running on empty will be over. You and your church will take wonderful Sunday drives. The embarrassing days of running out of gas will be history. 

# What Should We Do About Failure? In Praise of Failure

**T**here are times in the history of the church when the language of the faith becomes so corrupted that opposite terms and concepts must be used to restore its legitimacy. Terms can become so confused that they lose their ability to guide, so polluted that they poison the faith they were meant to inform, and so darkened that they cease to shed light on the pathway to heaven.

Such a corruption had occurred to the word "works" when, in the 16th century, the Protestant Reformers had to reestablish the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. In the 19th century, Søren Kierkegaard thought the evangelical faith could be restored in Denmark if only the church would admit that there were no Christians in Denmark.

It seems that a similar corruption has occurred in our day regarding the word "success" as it relates to Christian faith and ministry. One would be hard-pressed to find a greater source of malignancy in North American Christianity. If one wishes to find the current point of fusion between the worship of Yahweh and the worship of Baal, he or she would do well to look at the way "success," as defined by consumptive and polytheistic materialism, has displaced "success" as defined by the Christ who took upon himself the form of a servant and became obedient even unto death (Phil. 2:7-8). Today much of North American Christianity functionally has so closely identified Christian success with the materialism now driving this culture that the gospel of Jesus Christ has, in many respects, been effectively silenced. Pseudo-Christianity offers up egocentricity, the valuable as the measurable, the consumable, and the predictable, as the criteria for locating the kingdom of God. It makes the



by **Al Truesdale**

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spirit and the language of the New Testament also inaccessible.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the unwritten standards of a "successful ministry" and a "successful church" that characterize the contemporary ecclesiastical atmosphere. The word "success" is so imprisoned by powers and principalities hostile to the gospel that it cannot free itself. Without major qualifications, the term "success" cannot serve the kingdom of God in any substantial way. The time has come to appeal to "failure" as a better standard of what it means to know God truly and serve the gospel faithfully. Perhaps it is time to restore "failure" to the place of prominence that it has in the Bible and, by so doing, gain entry to the mind of Christ. Clearly, the Gospels and the Epistles consciously index the kingdom of God to standards that this world ridicules and dismisses. Beginning with Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, He consistently rejected invitations to succeed, invitations that His disciples have since too often accepted.

Turning to the Old Testament for a hymn to failure, we need look no further than Jeremiah. Anyone in Jerusalem concerned about his or her min-

isterial image would have done well to steer clear of Jeremiah. The man was professional poison.

However, he is a study in the kind of failure I am celebrating. Jeremiah reluctantly accepted God's call to prophetic ministry while he was still a young man. He protested that he was a mere "lad." Without proper credentials from the religious establishment, Jeremiah began to pronounce God's judgment on the religious and political powers of Judah. Even worse, he began his ministry as a single person and apparently remained so until the end of his ministry. He reported that God told him not to marry. God had even told him not to take part in social occasions.

Had George Gallup taken a poll, Jeremiah would probably have been voted the most unpopular person in Jerusalem with the rating continuing to decline. So what! Jeremiah did not want to be a prophet and apparently did not enjoy his work. He didn't even enjoy the relief provided by a weekly round of golf or a meeting of the Rotarians.

Rather than receiving a promise of a large congregation after a period of noble sacrifice, Jeremiah was assured by God that the people would not listen, or worse, they would fight against him. Many prophets who claimed to speak for Yahweh promised a glorious "day of the Lord" when the siege of Jerusalem would be broken or the Babylonians routed. Optimistic prophets indicated that the "good old days" would return. All the while, Jeremiah was saying that the day of the Lord would be dark and bitter, a day of doom, gloom, and destruction for Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's ministry was rejected almost completely, especially by King Jehoiakim. Jeremiah was publicly beaten and imprisoned.



Jeremiah could have improved his situation by not attacking the well-established sacred cows. Instead, he publicly preached against Temple abuses and ignored the long-established royal covenant theology.

Jeremiah did not always endure his trials graciously. In him we encounter no idyllic hero. He underwent severe tests of faith and often expressed his grief to God. He could match the melancholy of Søren Kierkegaard. He was always asking, "Why does this happen to me?" At one point, Jeremiah even cursed the day he was born (20:14-18). Bernard Anderson says that Jeremiah was as sensitive as a mother bereft of her children. Throughout his career, Jeremiah struggled mightily with Yahweh's word, which he could not refrain from speaking.

The Century 21 Company would not have hired Jeremiah as a real estate agent. While the Babylonian army pounded at the walls of Jerusalem, with only a few hours until doom would fall, with death stalking the streets and coming in at the windows, with food so scarce that some people were resorting to cannibalism, Jeremiah decided to buy property in Anathoth, already under enemy control. His action must have seemed like sheer madness. Would you elect this fellow to the District Advisory Board? Would you want him on a building committee?

The worst of his failures has yet to be reported. Israel, the Northern Kingdom, had been destroyed by the Assyrians approximately 130 years earlier. Ephraim was now but a memory, a mere ghost of its former glory. The region was populated by mixed peoples, the product of forced migration. Yet Jeremiah saw more than a defunct kingdom. In chapters 30 and 31, he affirmed that not only would God restore Judah after the Exile, but He would restore Israel as well. A new beginning was coming for both Israel and Judah. "I will surely have mercy on . . . Ephraim my dear son . . . says the LORD" (31:20, NRSV).

What incautious language! Why take such a foolish risk? Why not play it safe? All empirical evidence opposed him.

Now failure worsens. The prophecy regarding Ephraim was not fulfilled. Simply, it didn't happen. As a

political entity, Israel did not recover along the lines Jeremiah envisioned. The two countries or regions did not form a reconstituted community. By all empirical, bottom-line, Wall Street accounts, Jeremiah's hopes were dashed. If you have any doubt, look at the status of the Samaritans when Jesus appeared. The stories of the Samaritan woman at the well and the good Samaritan confirmed Jeremiah's failure. His legitimate claims to success by measurable standards were that Jerusalem was destroyed and the Exile began.

Have you read enough? Have you heard anything that you would want to place on a résumé? If a denomination were looking for a pastor who "has it all together," or if we were looking for a "successful pastor" to lead one of our "good churches," would we look twice at Jeremiah? What a study in failure! Picture the man at a district assembly. Worse yet, picture yourself associating with him!

By most of this world's standards, Jeremiah failed, but not according to the God he served. In every instance of which we are aware, Jeremiah remained faithful to the divine call. At extreme personal costs, he identified with God.

Did Jeremiah's prophecy regarding a restored kingdom fail? No. Instead, the promise was transformed by Jesus and surpassed in His teaching regarding the kingdom of God. Jeremiah's promises were caught up in a far greater reality than his limited geopolitical, religious anticipations could match. The kingdom of God to which the Son of God introduced His disciples included not only Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, but also "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NRSV). By the close of the Book of Acts, the apostle Paul had already arrived in Rome, "testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them [the Jews] about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets" (Acts 28:23, NRSV). The old "failure" from Jerusalem was there too, helping to make possible the Kingdom's proclamation, his faithfulness being confirmed 600 years later.

The Order of Jeremiah has many New Testament members: Jesus on the Cross; Peter in prison at Jerusalem; Paul dripping wet, shipwrecked,

and snake-bitten on Malta; and John exiled to Patmos.

Repeatedly, Jesus called His disciples to pursue failure: "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt. 6:24, NRSV). Or, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (16:24-25, NRSV). Hear the apostle Paul: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11, NRSV).

What greater commitment could we make than to pursue failure? What if the word were to go out that our seminary wants nothing to do with "success," that its faculty and students intend to follow Jesus and work to break the stranglehold that "success" has on the church? What if the shocking news spread that the Holy Spirit had accomplished a mighty revival of Christian failure in our midst, that the kingdom of God was being taken seriously, that discipleship had broken out all around, and that the Beatitudes had gained the ascendancy? (E.g.: "Blessed are the poor in spirit"; "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"; "Blessed are you when people . . . utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" [Matt. 5:3, 6, 11, NRSV].)

Take note of John Wesley's call to Christian failure: "Always remember that the essence of Christian holiness is simplicity and purity: one design, one desire: entire devotion to God" (John Wesley, in *A Guide to Prayer*, by Rueben P Job and Norman Shawchuck [Nashville: Upper Room, 1987], 368).

I leave with you the question that Pope John Paul II asked the American bishops in Denver on Friday, August 13, 1993: "From our words and actions do they [the youth of the church] conclude that the church is indeed a mystery of communion with the blessed Trinity and not just a human institution with temporal aims?" (*Kansas City Star*, August 14, 1993). ❧

# When It's a Sin to Ask Forgiveness

Author's name withheld

### *Sometimes it's wrong to take the blame*

I sat in John and Brenda's living room, absorbing their angry and unyielding stares. The thought kept running through my mind, "What in the world am I doing here?"

On the surface I knew why. Some church board members had suggested I visit the family to seek reconciliation.

Brenda had been a relentless critic of my ministry, going as far as to stand in a public meeting and read this passage from Jeremiah: "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. . . . "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done" (23:1-2).

Though she stopped short of ending her reading with the words "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21), that was clearly her intent.

A board action that had occurred just before I came as pastor had planted the seeds of conflict. Differences had arisen between a staff member and members of the board. This staff person had a small but loyal following in the church.

Eventually the board asked the staff member to resign. Part of the reason was that "the new pastor will want his own staff." While I had not made the decision to oust this person, his followers held me responsible. In fact, it took me over a year to learn that his supporters were blaming me for his departure.

This group and a few others be-

came increasingly vocal in their opposition to my leadership. To them I was "not the person to lead this congregation."

"All the love has gone out of this church" was their recurring refrain. "You don't seem to care that so-and-so is leaving" was another charge. "We made a mistake when we called you."

What reasons lay behind their animosity? The board and I groped for answers. Theological differences? A power struggle? Resentment over bringing new people into leadership?

We held a congregational meeting, which turned ugly. One woman claimed she had seen a vision prior to entering the building. According to her, an angel appeared on top of the roof directing her to go in and denounce the pastor and elder board.

She wasn't alone that night in her



anger. From the back row came cat-calls and insults: "False shepherd," "liar," and "unloving pastor."

#### **When all else fails, apologize?**

In the aftermath of that horrible meeting, the board members and I met to pick up the pieces. We were at a loss as to just what to do next.

One of the board members who had several friends in the dissenting group suggested another alternative. If I would just go and ask forgiveness, peace could be restored to the church.

I asked him if there was anything in particular I had done wrong that needed confession. He couldn't name anything at the moment, but he felt if I accepted the blame, that might succeed in healing the divisions.

I didn't relish the thought of confronting and groveling before my critics. But battle-scarred and war-weary, I was as anxious as anyone to put an end to the uncivil war. Reluctantly, I agreed to seek out the critics one by one, ask them what I had done to offend them, and apologize.

Since much of the criticism centered around John and Brenda, I decided to begin there. I spent nearly three hours at their house. They weren't reluctant at all to review my shortcomings.

"You've really blown it," John said at one point.

"How?" I responded.

To some I was  
"not the person  
to lead this  
congregation."

"Look at all the people who've left," he shot back. "Doesn't that concern you?"

"Of course it does," I replied. "But in most cases, these people have never expressed any displeasure with me. They told me they were leaving because of the divisions at church. They're weary of people calling them to report the latest rumor or accusation. How can I change that?"

Brenda abruptly brought up another charge.

At the end of the evening, I was still perplexed. Yes, I understood they didn't like me. Yes, they wanted another pastor. And yes, I could see how some of my decisions have given other people more influence. But what had I done that was ungodly and unrighteous?

Yet, I remembered my directive. Apologize. Humble yourself. Ask forgiveness. Then things will get better.

"John, Brenda, I apologize for failing you as pastor. I accept the blame. Please forgive me so we can start again," I said.

They nodded, without warmth. Rather than feeling I had just done something right, I had this awful sense I had done something terribly wrong.

As I walked out the door that evening, no sense of peace descended on my heart. No relief swept over my soul. No burdens lifted. Instead, I just felt empty.

#### **Appeasement in our time**

In the weeks that followed, I had similar meetings with other critics. In each case I left with the same emptiness of soul. A rather odd pattern also appeared in my meetings. Despite the fact I would apologize, almost never did I receive a reciprocal apology or confession of wrongdoing. Nor was absolution pronounced. Clearly, this was a one-way street. A dead-end street to be more precise. If this was genuine reconciliation at work, it certainly didn't feel like it.

I called a denominational official and poured out my heart. He knew this congregation. Overwhelmed by the futility of my efforts, I blurted out, "Do you think the problem is sin in my life? Is that what's going on here? Tell me the truth."

"No," he replied. "If that were the case, I'd love you enough to say so." That phone conversation was a turning point in my own assessment of the situation.

It took a while for the whole impact of what I was doing to sink in. When it did, it hit me with the force of a Wisconsin logging truck—I was confessing to *their* sins, not my own. Much of what they accused me of were precisely their problems: an unloving heart, a calloused spirit, and the abuse of power.

Apologizing to others for their problems left me feeling violated and

angry. I felt I had surrendered a portion of my integrity to regain a measure of peace in the church. If this wasn't appeasement, then historians owe Neville Chamberlain an apology.

If I accepted  
the blame, that  
might succeed  
in healing the  
divisions.

Not surprisingly, my visits didn't lead to a new era of peace in the church. Rather, the apologies seemed to embolden the critics. Feeling vindicated and justified, they went back on the offensive.

Their renewed attacks left many on the board dumbfounded. Why would they continue, now that I had made amends for my errors?

Eventually, the tactics of the beligerents prompted the board to take disciplinary action. Several were asked to resign their membership. The remaining dissenters left with tires squealing.

#### **Confessions of a bruised pastor**

There are several valuable lessons I learned from this long and painful episode.

*There's a difference between accusations and actual sins.* Just because a hostile church member accuses a pastor of being a "false shepherd" doesn't automatically make him one.

Yet, from the moment I was accused of "scattering the sheep," the resulting tension was enough for some people to believe I was guilty. From that point onward, my job was to prove my innocence.

Trying to be a good soldier of the cloth, I unthinkingly accepted a new job description as both pastor and paschal lamb. Only when I began to reflect on the fruitless results of these home visits did it dawn on me how absurd the situation had become.

I remember returning one night from a difficult home meeting. My wife asked me how it had gone.

"I didn't accomplish a thing," I mut-

tered as I slumped down in fatigue on the sofa.

Only later did I find a portion of Scripture that gave voice to what I was feeling that night. Proverbs says, "It is not good to punish an innocent man, or to flog officials for their integrity" (17:26). I had just finished another evening at the end of the whip. Why? Because I had accepted the notion that receiving such floggings would bring peace to the church. This wasn't ministry, it was masochism.

*We can only confess sins we've actually committed.* Though this might seem an elementary point of theology, we cannot confess, or be forgiven, for things we haven't done.

That's really the stuff codependency is made of. When someone else behaves in a destructive manner, yet we fail to confront them and instead assume the responsibility for their actions, we're headed toward serious dysfunction. My apologies only added to the denial process in the church. Sooner or later people would have to face the truth.

Just as alcoholics will deny responsibility for their actions, so did my critics. In essence they said, "You are the reason we're spreading rumors. You are the cause of our

hate campaign. You make us do the harmful things we do."

On the other hand, I *did* need to apologize quickly for my real failings. One night at a Communion service, before distributing the bread and the cup, I gave a special invitation.

"I know there's been a long season of division in our church," I began. "Some individuals have said it's the result of my offending others and failure to be a loving pastor. If that's true, I'd like to ask forgiveness tonight, on a one-on-one basis, before we serve Communion."

There was dead silence in the congregation.

"I'm going to sit on the front row by myself for a period of time," I con-

tinued. "If anyone here has a grievance, or believes I've sinned against them, I invite them to join me here. I won't argue or justify my actions. Just tell me what it is, let me ask your forgiveness, and be reconciled at the Lord's table."

As the organ played softly, no one moved. Then an older man made his way to the seat next to me.

"Pastor, I've been really angry that you haven't visited Mrs. Stover lately. She's suffering with cancer. I'm concerned that if my wife ever got sick, I wouldn't have a pastor to visit her."

I could see the sincerity in the gentleman's eyes.

"I apologize," I said. "Thank you for sharing that with me. I'll go visit Mrs. Stover tomorrow."

And I did. That encounter and confession felt clean, genuine, and liberating. But other than the one elderly gentleman, not another soul came to the front that evening, though several of my most ardent critics were glaring at me from the pews.

*Better a peacemaker than a peacekeeper.* Why is it that United Nations blue-helmet forces seem incapable of bringing resolution to regional conflicts, whether in the Middle East or southern Europe?

I think I understand part of the answer. The problem lies with their mission. They are commissioned to be peacekeepers, rather than peacemakers. Peacekeepers try to enforce a cease-fire, while peacemakers work toward a permanent end to the conflict.

That was part of my problem. I had played the role of a peacekeeper rather than a peacemaker. I attempted to forge a fragile cease-fire through offering unjustified apologies. Instead, I should have worked harder at forcing the real issues onto the table. When the real problems at work in the church were exposed and dealt with, peace was finally restored. 🙏

My problem  
was I had  
played the  
role of a  
peacekeeper  
rather than a  
peacemaker.

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## Another Look at Success

Everyone is interested in success. More books are written about or related to success than most other categories. We are hooked on success. We give effort and time to experience success. The desire to succeed is not bad, for if it is channeled in the right direction, much can be accomplished for the glory of God.

But let's face it—the thought of success is a bittersweet encounter for some pastors. For many, they have given their all—maybe even more than the one with the biggest success has given—in effort and energy. Some have sacrificed, strained, and studied, only to see success elude their efforts. Such pastors are left to ponder one of the great inequities of life.

What happens, too often, is that pastors count up the years and the work, total the sacrifices and the faithfulness, compare it to a success model, and are overwhelmed by the futility of the paradox. At such times, the enemy whispers despairing thoughts that intrude and intimidate.

Is there a word for a pastor like that? Pastor, be encouraged—there is a word. Maybe a couple. One comes from our Lord, who said:

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or



by C. Neil Strait

District superintendent,  
Church of the Nazarene,  
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"What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (*Matt 6:28-33*).

The other word comes from the late Dag Hammarskjöld, who wrote:

Never let success hide its emptiness from you, achievement its nothingness, toil its desolation. And so . . . keep alive the incentive to push on further, that pain in the soul which drives us beyond ourselves. . . . Do not look back (*Christianity Today*, July 18, 1994, 94).


These two words are pointing each of us to look at success square in the face, force it to yield to reality, and silence its urging to compare our success with another. Such an exercise will bring us to proper priority for our lives, which alone warrants focus and resolve. One will, then, feel the surge of purpose and the adrenaline of hope.

Edward Dayton wrote that "to suc-

ceed is to have a sense of self-satisfaction, a feeling of rightness about what one has done and is doing, along with the results of doing it" (Edward R. Dayton, *Succeeding in Business Without Losing Your Faith* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 20).

Our pursuit, then, is not success. It is mission—our reason for living. When we can get a clear picture of who we are, what we are about—and whose we are—then we are ready for the future. Success, then, comes on our terms rather than those prescribed by our peers and leaders, or by some other measurement. When we get a grip on our mission, we set life in the direction to accomplish that mission, undeterred by success stories.

Where life takes this kind of initiative, it marches to a different drummer and walks to a new order. Then it is an order that motivates and inspires. Ben Patterson, in his book *Serving God*, quotes Ruben Alves defining hope as "hearing the melody of the future" ([Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994], 168). That is what the person of God needs to hear. He or she needs to hear the summons of God. When life is at low ebb, the pastor needs to hear the call of God on his or her life. Then, with renewed vision and vigor, go onward in mission, "hearing the melody of the future." Then the heart will be at peace—it will have succeeded.

So, pastor, be encouraged! Success is not the measuring stick with God—faithfulness is. The good word is that all can—and should—be faithful. In faithfulness come fulfillment and peace, which, in the deepest sense, make up success. 

# You Can Please Some of the People Some of the Time

**A**braham Lincoln said, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." The pastor shouldn't be in the business of trying to fool anybody. However, I do know about trying to please people. What I've learned has led to a paraphrase of Lincoln's words.

First, "You can please some of the people all of the time." Not many of them, perhaps, but some of them! Every congregation has a faithful few who are committed to their pastor, whoever he may be, and who appreciate everything he does. Unfortunately, there aren't enough folks like that. May their tribe increase.

Next, "You can please all of the people some of the time." Can you, really? I'm not so sure. There might be a rare occasion when everything is going right and everybody's happy, but there's usually at least one "negative thinking" cook to spoil the broth. Someone will always take the other side just to "keep the process honest." Like the 2 or 3 out of 300 or 400, for instance, who vote against a district superintendent at election time just because "No one should get a unanimous vote." Please everybody? I doubt it! There's always someone around who wants to keep you humble.

Third, "You can't please all of the people all of the time." No one would argue with that. It's a given in the life of the church. No matter what a pastor does or doesn't do, there's always someone who doesn't like it. No matter how successful a new idea or program, somebody will be upset because he or she had something better in mind.

Long ago I concluded that pleasing everybody isn't what ministry is all about. In fact, pleasing people isn't part of ministry at all, unless people



by Bill O'Connor

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happen to be pleased while you're busy being faithful and obedient to the Lord. A pastor's responsibility is to God first, to people second. If pleasing God results in pleasing people, well and good. If not, that's no one's problem but their own.

People in the church have expectations for their pastor. Some of those expectations are indeed right and necessary. They're the same things God expects. When people expect what God expects, there's no problem at all. It's reasonable to expect the pastor to be faithful to God's call, to be obedient to His teaching, to be responsive to His guidance, to be a student of the Word, to be a man of prayer, to be loyal to the church, to make his family a priority, to have a compassion for the lost, and to be faithful in declaring "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, NKJV). When parishioners hold expectations such as these, the pastor can please them by pleasing the Lord.

Frequently people have expectations that aren't the same as God's. That's when trouble begins. When the people in the pews ask the unreasonable or the impossible of the person in the pulpit, disappointment inevitably results.

Years ago someone described what the average congregation wanted

when seeking an above-average pastor:

*The strength of an ox, the daring of a lion, the industry of a beaver, the versatility of a chameleon, the vision of an eagle, the disposition of an angel, the loyalty of an apostle, the heroism of a martyr, the faithfulness of a prophet, the tenderness of a shepherd, the fervency of an evangelist, and the devotion of a mother.*

Anyone who could get that many elements of personality spinning at once would be in danger of splitting apart like an atom and going up in one big puff of smoke.

The fun starts when you realize that each person in the congregation has his or her own expectations, yet the people haven't made any attempt to coordinate those desires. One person wants the pastor to be in the study preparing deep messages from God, while another wants him to be visiting every spare moment. One parishioner expects him to be involved in community affairs as a witness, another expects him to "come out from among them and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17, NKJV). One member expects him to run the business affairs of the church; another wants him to delegate all those mundane details to others.

An unknown author captured the pastor's dilemma in a piece called

### *The Preacher*

*If he's young, he lacks experience;*

*if his hair is gray, he's too old.*

*If he has five or six children, he has too many;*

*if he has none, he isn't setting a good example.*

*If his wife sings in the choir, she's being forward;*

*if not, she's not interested in her husband's work.*

*If he speaks from notes, he has canned sermons and is too dry;  
if he's extemporaneous, he's too deep.*

*If he spends too much time in the study, he neglects people;*

*if he visits, he's a gadabout.*

*If he's attentive to the poor, he's playing to the grandstand;*

*if to the wealthy, he's trying to be an aristocrat.*

*If he suggests improvements, he's a dictator;*

*if he doesn't, he's a figurehead.*

*If he uses too many illustrations, he neglects the Bible;*

*if not enough, he's not clear.*

*If he condemns wrong, he is cranky;*

*if he doesn't, he's a compromiser.*

*If he preaches an hour, he's windy;*

*if less, he's lazy.*

*If he preaches the truth, he's offensive;*

*if not, he's a hypocrite.*

*If he fails to please everyone, he's hurting the church;*

*if he does please everyone, he has no convictions.*

*If he preaches tithing, he's a money-grubber;*

*if he doesn't, he's failing to develop his people.*

*If he receives a large salary, he's mercenary;*

*if a small salary, it proves he's not worth much.*

*If he preaches all the time, the people get tired of hearing one man;*

*if he invites guest speakers, he's shirking responsibility.*

*And some folks think the preacher has an easy time.*

This isn't a tirade against unreasonable church members; it's a recognition of the reality of pastoral ministry. You really can't please all of the people, not even some of the time. No matter how well the pastor does, someone knows he could do better. Regardless of his effectiveness in one or many areas of ministry, someone will always be upset about his lack of effectiveness in another.

To make matters even worse, even more complicated, much of the time the pastor can't even please himself. The demands of pastoral life are such that, whatever you're doing, there is always the vague awareness that you ought to be doing something else.

Many other tasks are always waiting on your "to do" list that got shoved over from last week, and the week before that. Besides, most pastors tend to be perfectionists. They really do believe in excellence. They're all too aware of how short they sometimes fall of that lofty goal.

There's only one way to deal with the frustration of conflicting pastoral expectations: Give them to the Lord and concentrate entirely on pleasing Him. The pastor's duty isn't to please everybody; the pastor's duty is to please the Lord. To paraphrase the Ford Motor Company, "Pleasing God Is Job One."

Obviously Paul was concerned about being true to that first priority when he asked himself, "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men?" (Gal. 1:10a). Every pastor ought to heed his conclusion: "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (v. 10b). The apostle set forth the goal of his ministry when he wrote, "We speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4). He reminded us of the primacy of our preaching task when he declared that "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

Here are some guidelines that I've found practical in dealing with the expectations for ministry placed on me by myself and others. I hope they will prove helpful to you.

**First, when expectations are reasonable and capable of fulfillment, do your best to meet them.** Don't seek popularity above priority. But when it doesn't hurt to do so, give people what they want. The larger the number of people who are pleased with your efforts, the lighter your load will be.


**Second, when expectations are unreasonable, do not allow yourself to be bound by them.** Don't let yourself feel for a moment that you have to please all of the people all of the time, or even most of them. Please as many people as you reasonably and effectively can. But don't give yourself ulcers. Don't neglect the weightier matters of the ministry just to make some-

one happy. Greasing squeaky wheels doesn't stop the squeaking for long. Besides, if you look closely, you will usually find that, like the loose wheel on a supermarket cart, the squeaking wheel seldom helps bear the load.

**Third, when expectations are in conflict, do what pleases the Lord.** It isn't even possible to please all of the people when half of the people want one thing and half want another. Their desires are in opposition. If you please one half, you will upset the other, and vice versa. When you face that sort of situation, there's only one question that really matters: "God, what do *You* want me to do?"

**Fourth, when expectations are impossible to meet, rather than worrying about them, leave them in the hands of the Lord.** In spite of all the assumptions to the contrary, most pastors aren't supermen or superwomen. We're all finite with human strengths and weaknesses. We each have spiritual gifts and God-given abilities, but not the same ones. None of us can be all things to all people. The important thing is to be what God has gifted and equipped us to be, and to leave the rest to Him.

You might as well have some fun with these expectations. If you don't, they'll do you in. So have a good laugh when someone wants you to do something for which you're completely unequipped. With a great big smile on your face, learn to say, "You want what?" With the sound of laughter in your voice, learn to say, "You want it when?" Learn to promise only what you can deliver.

For everything else, remember to trust the Lord. Paul did that all the time. He reminds us not to rely on ourselves: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). Here's the good news: in the midst of all the demands and expectations of ministry, we serve a God who has all the resources we need. When you face the next set of expectations, reasonable or otherwise, remind yourself of Paul's words: "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (9:8). 

## Making Evening Services Live

**E**vening services have been traditional in the holiness churches. Evening services were times of inspiration and salvation for thousands of people.

I remember when the youth organization held the first service in the evening. Sometimes the attendance beat the Sunday School attendance, for we had a program that moved with lots of participation, fun, and drama. Some of us learned how to speak in public, or at least how to stand before an audience and read a piece. Our hearts were prepared for the evening service after the youth meeting.

One of the signs of a degenerate church is the closing of the doors in the evenings. The old-line churches gave up many years ago on having more than one service a week.

We must not let the evening services become just more of what went on in the morning, but less important.

### **I. EVENING SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:**

1. It is nearly impossible to make strong disciples with only one contact each week. A prayer meeting or a home Bible study would be a help, but how many people are involved in these meetings? Something must be done to design a service that will draw the majority of our members.

2. The alternative is to let them watch television. What can be seen Sunday night or any night during prime time is usually so bad that any input you might have had on Sunday morning is annulled by what they see in the evening.

3. When revival time comes, if your members do not have the habit of coming evenings, they will not come to the revival either. After the revival, those who did come to the



**by Harry A. Rich**

*Former District Superintendent,  
Quebec District,  
Quebec, Canada*

meetings will soon sink back into the same apathy unless strong measures are taken.

### **II. WHAT CAN WE DO TO RENEW THE EVENING SERVICES?**

1. Begin by announcing the ser-

vice in every other service, print it in the bulletin, and put it in the newsletter. Speak of it in your message. Most everything you announce will become important to your hearers. Tell them that the church is open for the work and that their absence is a vote to close the church.

2. Prepare for this service as you prepare for Sunday morning. Sometimes members can see by the lack of preparation and planning that the evening service has little importance. They will soon see it as a waste of their time. Prepare something new. Make it pertinent and lively. Do not use all your old messages. Also, do not preach too long. Preach a short series on something of general interest. Prepare the music well. Ask beforehand for a solo, or invite someone to come to sing. Have lots of specials.





Begin a choir and have them sing every Sunday night. Prepare for participation. Try to involve everyone. Billy Graham discovered that 3,000 in the choir brought 15,000 to the crusade. Then 30 people participating might bring 150 to your service.

3. The evening's activities should be designed for everyone. Your family should be an example. They should be there, and they should take part in the service. The church board should be there. No one ought to be elected to the board who does not attend all the services of the church unless providentially hindered. Sunday School teachers should be there to provide a good example and also to be ready to pray for any of their students who might come to the altar. Teach the new converts that their conversion includes attendance at all the services of the church unless there is some compelling reason to be somewhere else.

4. Make the service evangelistic as often as possible. Don't call it a service, a prayer meeting, or a Bible study. Call it an evangelistic service, and preach for a decision. Dr. V. H. Lewis used to tell us to let down the net at the end of each service. The church should be known as a place where you can bring lost people, knowing that they will be given a chance to accept the Lord.

### **III. VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE. HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ADD SPICE TO YOUR SERVICES.**

1. Have a fellowship night each month. Invite your friends who do not know the Lord. After the service, have refreshments, games, or a sing-along. This could be held in the fellowship hall or in someone's home.

2. Show a religious movie or a Christian video once a month, but make sure that it is general enough to attract everyone. Youth films or films on subjects having a limited interest will exclude a lot of people from your services. Make sure your taste represents the church people. At any cost, avoid anything that would tend to exclude people from your evening services.

3. Hold an interview during the service with someone important, or with a new family, in order to introduce them to the church.

4. Have a different family involved

in leading the service one night a month.

5. Invite a musical group or a soloist. Watch for the theological leaning of the group. They could sow tares among your wheat.

6. Make the service a musical service, with only a short meditation at the end, in order to invite people to come find the joy of the Lord.

7. Ask ahead of time for a testimony from someone who has really had an outstanding answer to prayer.

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8. During revivals begin again to underline the importance of the evening services. Call an evangelist who will work with you on this problem.

9. Consecrate a night for the laymen. Let them do everything. Work with them in the planning. Watch out for a "dud" service. Just one service like that will keep a lot of people away. Remember, just one bad meal at a restaurant, and you never go back.

10. Let the teens hold a service. Let them do everything. Work with them in the planning.

11. Have a "Family of God Night" once a month. Have a banquet in the fellowship hall. Sing and preach at the table. Use paper everything. Save the women from washing dishes, and they will be able to appreciate the service.

12. Hire a nursery attendant, and pay her even if no children are there. Be ready for the young couple looking for a church home. Hire someone who is not a member. The members need to be in the service hearing the message. A mature woman who takes in children is ideal. Do not use the teens. Some of the young couples will not want to leave their precious child with someone who is inexperienced.

13. Preach a series of messages on a current topic, and allow time for questions at the end of the service.

14. Don't let the service last too long. Begin on time and quit on time, unless God visits you in a very remarkable manner. The parents of small children will not come if the service lasts too long.

15. If you do not have a good song leader or good musicians, then hire them. Excellent music will draw a lot of people to your church.

16. Begin a drama team or a mime team.

17. If you still can't get many people out in the evening, then invest your life in those who come. We call this making disciples these days. Successful pastors spend time preparing the leaders for their churches. Why not do it Sunday evenings?

18. Now, put on your thinking cap and come up with some good things to do.

19. Have a Sunday Evening Victory Service. Teach people how to live the victorious life through the week.

I know that some traditionally minded people will pull out their hair when they read these lines, or when something like this happens in their church. But it is becoming more difficult to continue to do things like we did in the past. We may have to change.

Whatever you do, don't yield to the suggestion to close the church at night, even if it is easier to do. I think that every church can have a profitable evening service on the Lord's day. I think that those who have services could easily double the attendance by using some of the suggestions above. A powerful Sunday evening service would electrify our church and give us another means of influencing our world for Christ.

**LET'S MAKE OUR EVENING SERVICES MOVE!**

## A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Pulpit

**A** preacher without a sense of humor is in for some very uncomfortable experiences. We work with some of God's funniest and most unpredictable creatures, so we might as well laugh. God made us like we are—weird!

Surely you have heard the saying, "One of the best evidences that God has a sense of humor is the existence of man." If you have trouble with that, look around at the people you meet. Honestly, some of us are really funny to look at! We come in all sizes, shapes, and colors.

I love to watch people, to sit back and watch people being themselves. I sat in the airport at Denver on one of



**Gene Williams**

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my trips and deliberately located myself where I could watch "the animals parading into their arks." It was hilari-

ous. Some were fussing, others were off in never-never land, and still others were visiting with friends and having fun. One thing became crystal clear: no two were alike. As I watched the passing parade, I thought to myself, "This must be how God felt as He watched Noah load the ark."

This incredible variety of shapes and sizes of bodies, noses, ears, necks, and heads gives us our different personalities. The next time you are tempted to think a giraffe is a funny-looking animal, spend some time in a major airport watching people parade by. We are funny creatures, and there is nothing wrong with that!

Imagine how it would be if each one of us looked exactly alike! Boring! So God built in a humorous variety of appearances that are often reflected in our actions.

This proneness to be human causes some funny things to happen—even in church. Anytime you get a group of God's funniest creatures together, be prepared for things to happen that do not fit into the normal understanding of sacred activity.

Every person who is privileged by God to be a pastor needs to understand with whom he is working. Learn to accept people as they are; then you will not live in the constant pressure of trying to put square pegs into round holes.

Frankly, I am not sure why we strain so much to make a sacred opportunity for pleasure-filled worship into a solemn act that is often boring. I recognize the majesty and holiness of God. He is to be exalted, worshiped, and praised. Yet, remember, "It is he that hath made us, and not



we ourselves" (Ps. 100:3, KJV). And He made us funny!

I have had some crazy experiences at not so crazy moments. If it were not for a God-given sense of humor, I would have surrendered my sanity long ago.

I'll never forget a Sunday afternoon baptismal service while serving in south Florida. Frankly, I've never understood why our churches have not made better provision for the very special experience of baptism, but that's another story.

On this beautiful Sunday afternoon, we had borrowed the facilities of a neighboring Baptist church. I was all set for the spiritual celebration that would climax with 15 new believers "following their Lord in baptism." This was a sanctified setting.

However, it didn't quite work out that way. My pastor friend had forgotten to turn on the water heater. The water was frigid. Even in Florida, the water comes out of the ground at about 72 degrees. Stepping into that without warning will get your attention in a hurry! No one realized what had happened until it was too late.

After the sacred preliminaries of songs, an appropriate message from God's Word, and a verbal affirmation from each candidate, we moved on to the solemn act of immersion. The moment I stepped into the pool, I realized that something was wrong. I gasped as the cold water took my breath away. It was freezing! Now what could I do? I decided that I was the only one who would be standing in the water for any length of time. I would tough it out. It wasn't long before my legs were numb, and I couldn't really feel the cold.

As each person stepped into the water, we could hear him or her catch a breath. I saw expressions of near panic on their faces. Since I had them by the hand, I proceeded to baptize them as quickly as possible. It did not take long for everyone present to catch on to what had happened, but none of us anticipated what was coming.

A young girl of about 15 years of age, whom I did not know was going to be baptized, joined the line of candidates. She was a little slow to understand. We had all worked hard over the years to make her feel loved

and accepted. I would not embarrass her now by declining to baptize her. But I was not prepared for what happened next!

This young lady had watched 10 people endure the icy water as they were baptized before she stepped into the pool. Notice the word, "STEPPED!" She decided on a different approach. I heard her call out, "Cold water never bothered me!" With that, she dove headfirst into the pool! Water went everywhere!

I caught her as she swam by me, guiding her into a quick U-turn and back up the steps. To this day, I'm not sure if she was truly baptized or not! The words I said were not, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"!

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## "One of the best evidences that God has a sense of humor is the existence of man."

Any semblance of solemnity was gone from that service. The congregation and I laughed out loud in church! Then we proceeded with the service. It was hilarious!

Such hilarity could wreck a preacher's dignity if he allowed that to happen. I am grateful that God has enabled me to learn to laugh at things I cannot help. I try to learn from the situation, although sometimes I can't seem to keep up.

After that experience in the cold water of south Florida, I always check the temperature in the pool right before the service.

In my present church, I did that one evening and found the water to be nice and warm. I promptly went to the furnace room to turn off the water heater so the water would not get too hot. I turned off the valve and returned to my study to make my final mental preparations for the evening service.

After the service, the beaming new

Christians came forward to participate in this beautiful moment. They gave public affirmation of their faith. It was a touching time for all of us. Then they went on their way to prepare for baptism, and I went my way so we could meet at the pool. And we did! Only then did we realize that there was no water in the pool. Can you imagine my chagrin when it became obvious that I had turned the wrong handle? The pool had drained dry while we were singing and having a great service.

At a time like that, one will either laugh or cry. I chose to laugh. I confessed my ineptness as a plumber while my face turned several hues of bright red. The congregation laughed with me. We all went home planning to attend another "sacred service" at a later time!

One never knows when something will go wrong. There is no more solemn occasion than a funeral service. Yet even then we must be ready for some odd occurrences.

I remember one bitter cold January day driving in a funeral procession to a small country cemetery. When we arrived at the burial site, we knew immediately that something was wrong. There was no tent to protect the funeral party from the cold wind. Not only was there no tent, but there was no rack upon which to place the casket. There was just an ominous hole in the hard, frozen, snow-packed ground.

The mortician and I sized up the situation and proceeded with the quickest committal in history. What else do you do when the chill factor is -42 degrees? It wasn't funny, but neither was it the tragedy it could have been had either of us let the situation dictate our attitudes. We did what we needed to do and added another experience to our scrapbook of memories.

Speaking of funerals, nothing I have ever experienced compares with what happened at a service where my friend, Rev. Eugene Simpson, was officiating.

In one of his pastorates, a family had four sets of twins, all girls. Two sets of these twins seemed more like quadruplets because there was only a year's difference in their ages. They were often dressed alike.

When these girls were 21 and 22

years of age, one of them got married. About a year later, the couple had a baby. Unfortunately, the infant lived only a few days. As their pastor, Gene had a funeral for this newborn baby, a very sad occasion. Leaving the funeral home after the service, the young mother fainted in the foyer. The attendants laid her out on the floor. Within a minute or so, the other three sisters also fainted and were laid out on the floor side by side. After a few hectic moments, they were revived enough to proceed to the funeral coach and make their way to the cemetery for the committal.

Following the brief service, the young mother took three or four steps and fainted again. Bystanders laid her on the grassy hillside. Again, one by one, the other three sisters also passed out and were laid next to their sister.

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Anytime you get a group of God's funniest creatures together, be prepared for things to happen that do not fit into the normal understanding of sacred activity.

Now what does a pastor do in a situation like that? No, it isn't funny, yet it is. A minister learns to make the most of every situation. Sometimes that means laughter. It is very difficult to make every experience in church a sacred one. Gene could hardly tell me his story for laughing. Maybe that's

why he, too, has remained in God's ministry for over 40 years!

I could tell you of times I have made some major faux pas while preaching, and my face has beamed like a Christmas tree. There were times when babies spit up on me—or worse—while I was dedicating them. There were weddings like that of my sister, Joyce Ann, where the candles ignited the ferns. Since I had my back to the candles, I was the last one to realize what was happening.

There have been other equally hilarious things that have happened at weddings. On one very formal occasion, I was really into the solemnity of the service until I invited a very nervous groom to "put this 'fing' on her 'ringer.'" The last syllable was hardly out of my mouth before the entire wedding party doubled up in unholy mirth.

Now, I had a choice. I could have taken the position that I was incapable of doing weddings or that this was just a job to perform. However, I have learned to relax. If something goes wrong, it's not the end of the world. As a result, I have presided over fainting brides and quaking grooms and in the process gathered some very pleasant memories.

Oh, sure, there have been some weird and uncomfortable encounters with brides who thought the world was supposed to stop for their wedding. There has been a scattering of parents who ordered everyone around, thereby making us all uncomfortable. But the good times, fun times, and happy memories are so many that I frankly look forward to every opportunity to share this most special moment in a young couple's life.

There have been interruptions in church services at the most inopportune moments. One morning I was coming to a major point in a serious message. After making a profound statement and pausing to let it sink in, a little old man spoke up and said in a voice heard by all, "What I want to know is what you are going to do about those Japanese bombers on the

Burma road?" It was a totally off-the-wall, clear-out-of-the-blue interruption that caught everyone by surprise. The congregation sat there bouncing in their pews, choking back their laughter. I responded in one word, "Nothing," and then proceeded with the message. Amazingly, God helped us to complete a good service.

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I have presided over fainting brides and quaking grooms and in the process gathered some very pleasant memories.

The people knew that the little man had emotional problems as a result of being in the armed services during World War II. Sure, there was a snicker or two, but the people really appreciated the fact that we did not let an "odd, unplanned encounter" take charge of the service.

I guess one of the best ways to sum up what I am trying to say is to "lighten up." Learn to be flexible. Great bridges move several feet as they flex with the load of the moment.

I am the pastor to several engineers of the Boeing Aircraft Company. They assure me that if there is no flexibility in the wings of the great airplanes that they make, the wings would break with the strain of unexpected turbulence. Perhaps we preachers need to learn that our survival in the great calling God has given us will be greatly enhanced if we learn to yield to the unexpected things that are going to happen. †

## Picture Windows for Preaching

Compiled by Derl G. Keefer

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### AVAILABILITY

In January 1930, King George V of England spoke before the London Naval Conference concerning peace efforts. That speech was to be aired to the United States through the Columbia Broadcasting System. Moments before the speech transpired, an official of CBS, Walter Vivan, discovered a problem with the wiring that would destroy the transmission of the king's speech. Without hesitation, he grasped the ends of the broken wires, in each hand, to restore the circuit. The shock of the 250-volt charge and the leakage of the current shook his arms and burned his hands, but he held on while the king's message of peace went through him.

G. B. F. Hallock commented:

Jesus gave His body to be broken in the ruptured line between His Father and His lost children, but even so he kept the connection intact until the virtue of his life flowed into the world and the good news of the gospel is being heard on every shore. Are we willing to stand in our places and let the current of God's grace flow through us when it costs sacrifice?

G. B. F. Hallock, *2,500 Modern Illustrations* (New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1935), 7.

### COMFORT

Howard Maxwell of Los Angeles had a four-year-old daughter, Melinda, who loved the story of "The Three Little Pigs" and demanded that her fa-

ther read it night after night. Mr. Maxwell struck upon the idea of tape-recording the story for his daughter. The next night she predictably asked her dad to read the story. He pulled out the tape recorder, pushed the play button, and Melinda snuggled in her bed and went to sleep. This went on for a few nights. One evening she came in to where her father was sitting and had her storybook, pushing it into her dad's hand. "Now honey," he said, "you know how to turn on the recorder."

"Yes," said Melinda, "but I can't sit on its lap."

Eleanor Doan, comp., *The Speaker's Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 65.

### ENCOURAGEMENT

Maggie Kuhn, head of the Grey Panthers, tells of some interesting facts about sandhill cranes. It seems that these large birds, who commute great distances and traverse continents, have three remarkable qualities. First of all, they rotate leadership. No one bird stays out in front all the time. Second, they choose a leader that can handle the turbulence. And then, all during the time one bird is leading, the rest are honking, signaling their affirmation. That's not a bad model for the church. Certainly we need leaders who welcome turbulence and who are aware that leadership ought to be rotated. But most of all,

we need a church where we are all honking encouragement.

James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 124.

### GOD'S CHILDREN

Several years ago a Sunday School superintendent greeted two new boys in her Sunday School and asked their ages in order to register them. The bolder one responded, "We're both seven. My birthday is April 8, 1976, and my brother's is April 20, 1976."

"But that's impossible!" answered the superintendent.

"No, it's not," answered the quieter brother. "One of us is adopted."

"Which one?" asked the superintendent before she could hold her question.

The bolder boy responded for the two, "We asked Dad a while ago, but he just said he loved us both, and he couldn't remember anymore which one was adopted."

Paul reminds us: "Now if we are [God's] children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Through faith in Jesus we become God's adopted children—sons and daughters of God. As fully adopted and accepted children, we share the same inheritance as the begotten Son, Jesus. What a wonderful thought: God's child with no strings attached!

James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1988), 251.

# When the Covenant Is Broken

**I** believe that there is such a thing as a scriptural right to remarry after divorce.

I believe that no such right is given in the Scripture except in the case of the other's marriage partner being deceased.

Disagreements are heard everywhere concerning the crisis of divorce and remarriage among Christians today. Not only has there been much confusion, but also much pain and bitterness has been propagated by the lack of scriptural understanding about this subject.

I am aware that God's truth never changes and that no circumstance, no matter how painful, is ever justification for departing from the clear instruction of the Word of God. But I am equally aware that we must always be growing in our understanding and righteous application of God's truth. On this subject of di-



by Gary L. Durham

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orce and remarriage, many questions are raised by our present circumstances in Western culture that are not directly addressed in Scripture. Some of those unaddressed areas are matters of real concern. It takes a lot of prayer for wisdom.

No matter how carefully one tries to explain what the Bible really teaches on this subject of broken marriage

and remarriage, one thing is certain: many will not agree, and many may even be offended.

With that understanding, maybe a little clearing of the confusion is still possible; certainly it is needed in the Body of Christ.

### DOES THE SCRIPTURE ALLOW DIVORCE?

Marriage is a blood covenant. I am amazed at the implications of our ignorance of something so foundational as the blood covenant to the whole message of the Bible.

When we understand that marriage in ancient times was a blood covenant contract, it brings an awareness of the permanence with which marriage was viewed. A blood covenant was unbreakable except by the death of one or both parties *within the terms of the covenant*. All covenants had *terms* that set the boundaries of their influence. A covenant could be as exclusive or as inclusive as the contracting parties desired. Once the terms were agreed upon and enacted by covenant ceremony, it was binding.

In most of the ancient cultures, the community, tribe, village, or nation in which people lived considered it the solemn duty of the community to enforce the terms of any legal covenant. To violate a legal blood covenant carried the death penalty. And it was often carried out with great swiftness.

Marriage was one of the most inclusive contracts that could be entered into. It included and affected every area of two people's lives. In fact, it was considered a contract between two families, not just two people. Only as we understand the fact of marriage being a blood covenant do we understand why the God of Israel demanded the death penalty for the violation of the marriage contract.



Because the Old Testament cultures allowed polygamy for men, the consistency of this rule of death is often misunderstood by those who read the regulations of marriage in the Bible. In polygamous cultures, the woman was consecrated to one man, her husband, but the man was not consecrated to one woman by the covenant. He was pledged to be his wife's protector and provider, and to give her children, which was considered a great honor. In Israel, a man could take another wife only if he could show that he could provide for the second without violating his covenant of provision to the first. So, if he had proved his ability to take another wife, a married man could court an unmarried woman without any accusation of unfaithfulness to his present wife. This did not, however, exempt him from the inherent evils of polygamy itself. Almost every Old Testament example shows polygamy to cause great strife, bitterness, and unhappiness (Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Leah, Hannah and Peninnah, etc.). Polygamy violates the exclusiveness that is needed between two persons for true intimacy to be maintained. When true love does come within such an arrangement (Jacob and Rachel, for example), it is unwelcome and creates jealousy (Gen. 29:28—30:24). God did not create Adam and Eve and Nancy. Polygamy breaks God's intended design, as Christianity rightly insists by rejecting polygamy.

The New Testament instructions of the apostle Paul make it quite clear that divorce was not an acceptable practice for Christians:

*"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Cor. 7:10-11).*

Even in these commands, there is recognition of the fact that sometimes a breakup of the home, while undesirable, may still happen. The Lord's commands to us through Paul are these:

*1. A Christian wife is not to leave her husband. This instruction is stated this way because in most ancient cultures, a woman did not have the*

*right to sue her husband for divorce—though it sometimes happened (e.g., Mark 10:12; 1 Cor. 7:13). In most cases, only the husband could initiate divorce. Her only recourse was simply to leave. Paul forbids Christian wives to do so.*

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## Many questions are raised by our present circumstances in Western culture that are not directly addressed in Scripture.

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*2. If there are circumstances that make it necessary for a wife to leave her husband—physical violence or emotional abuse beyond a certain point of endurance—then she is not free to remarry another. She must remain single or else be restored to the one who is still her legal husband.*

*3. A Christian husband is not allowed to divorce his wife. Even though the Jews had allowed the husband the right to divorce his wife, Jesus declared that Moses had allowed divorce only because their hearts were hard. He then forbids His followers to follow the practice (Matt. 19:1-12).*

In our Western culture a wife can sue for divorce. Often the husband or wife feels he or she must divorce to protect himself or herself from other problems that arise under our present system of law: i.e., the financial instability of an irresponsible husband; to keep the bad influence of a wife or husband from the children; to insure proper custody; etc. The principles that the Lord lays down here must be and can still be met without turning one's back on these very difficult problems.

On the whole, we conclude that the Scriptures do not allow for Christians to divorce.

### IS THERE AN EXCEPTION CLAUSE?

In all His comments on divorce in the Matthew account, Jesus mentioned that divorce is unlawful "except for marital unfaithfulness" (Matt. 5:31-32 and 19:1-12). This, however, is not mentioned in Mark 10:1-12 and Luke 16:18. However, even once in God's Word would be enough to confirm that such a provision does exist. It need not have been mentioned every time the subject came up. We must be sure that we are aware of the context of the culture and the problems that Jesus was addressing. We must be careful that we do not read our Western ideas into this context where it should not be. Such neglect of context has led to many unwise and unscriptural conclusions.

Jesus, in all four passages, was attacking a sinful manipulation of the *Mosaic Certificate of Divorce* by the Jews of His day. While polygamy was not a common practice among the Jews in Jesus' day, it was not because the Jews had actually settled for monogamy.

A Jewish man had to show his ability to support a second or third wife without doing any injustice to any of his former marriage covenants before he could take a second or third wife. This explains why only kings could usually afford to marry many wives. But the Jewish men had found a way to indulge their sinful lust and get around this requirement. They misused the *Mosaic Certificate of Divorce* and practiced what I call *serial polygamy*.

In other words, when a married Jewish man saw another virgin or divorced woman whom he wanted as his wife, he need not be able to afford the second wife if he first got rid of his present wife. He would hand her a certificate of divorce (which with pen and paper could be done at a moment's notice). Now he was able to afford the other woman as his wife. His sin was not, in that culture, in the taking of the other wife—unless she were improperly divorced from another, in which case he committed adultery against her former covenant that God still considered in force—

but in his irresponsible treatment of the present wife with whom he was already in blood covenant. God is a God of covenant who always keeps His promises. He will not tolerate His people to deal deceitfully in their oaths (Eccles. 5:4-7 and Mal. 2:13-16).

In preaching to the Pharisees of His day, who were among the most guilty in this technical manipulation of the Mosaic provision, Jesus was pointing out that God was not fooled by their deceitfulness and would not be mocked by their twisting of His law. He served them notice that God did not recognize their unlawful *Certificates of Divorce*. He considered them guilty of *causing* their wives to commit adultery (Matt. 5:32)—because they would marry again to find livelihood. When a man married a woman who was unlawfully divorced in God's eyes, he committed adultery himself against her former covenant. That was strong language to a Jew. Known adultery carried a death sentence!

In Old Testament times, whenever anyone within a marriage covenant violated that covenant by sexual unfaithfulness, he and the one with whom he violated it were subject to the death penalty (Deut. 22:22)—she because she was unfaithful to the covenant she had made, and he because he dared to violate another man's covenant by touching a woman consecrated to that man.

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## Sometimes a breakup of the home, while undesirable, may still happen.

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When this law was obeyed by Israel, there was never a question about the lawfulness of divorce or remarriage when a marriage was dissolved by sexual unfaithfulness. The guilty party would be dead by capital punishment, and the innocent party would be free to remarry because the former marriage partner no longer lived. All this

was according to the terms of the covenant that had been made.

Of course, this is not the situation in our Western culture today. We have many who have been divorced due to the sexual unfaithfulness of their marriage partners, and those partners yet live. The question arises: Are they or are they not free to remarry?

### DOES THIS EXCEPTION ALLOW REMARRIAGE WHILE THE FORMER MATE LIVES?

To answer this question, we must go back to 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul deals with this subject. He sums up his treatment with this statement:

*"A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord" (v. 39).*

Some people will think this statement one-sided, "dealing only with the woman." I cannot change the fact that most ancient cultures did not make exclusive covenants for men in the matter of marriage. But I think it is clear from the other scriptures we have just dealt with that a man is held equally accountable to God to keep his marriage covenant and is bound to his wife as long as she lives. So that no one will have liberty to twist my meaning, I must state that in Western ("Christian") cultures, we *do* make exclusive covenants—a man vows to be bound unto one woman, alone, for life. And God holds each man to the vow he has made; for he is bound by the terms of the covenant. Any sexual unfaithfulness on his part is adultery—a serious offense of deceit and violation before God.

While 1 Cor. 7:39 is clearly the rule of practice for the Church, Paul, in his earlier admonishments, does seem in one particular case to make an exception for remarriage while the former mate is still alive. Once again, I warn you that we must read carefully what Paul says and be sure we do *not* read into it our Western perspective.

In verses 12-16, Paul deals with the laws for a believer who is married to an unbeliever. He points out in verses 12-14 that the believer is *not* free to divorce the unbeliever if he or she is willing to live with him or her. But in verse 15, Paul makes this statement:

*"But if the unbeliever leaves, let him [or her] do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in*

*such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace."*

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## God is a God of covenant.

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Two things must be understood: (1) The unbeliever is the one doing the leaving. It implies abandonment and possible violation of the marriage covenant. (2) The phrase "*is not bound*" is a strong term implying that the covenant is no longer *binding*. To be *bound* is a covenant term. Here Paul uses a very strong term to point to the fact that the marriage covenant in such a case is not to hold the believer like that of a yoke of bondage—the terms of the covenant are now null and void.

This seems to imply that since the terms of the covenant have been violated, the believer is *unbound*—which means no longer under contract by covenant—and is free to marry as anyone else not under covenant contract.

Since we do not put people to death for adultery in our culture, the exception clause given by Jesus for adultery also frees the faithful party from the covenant in the same manner. The unfaithful mate is "dead" to the marriage covenant by virtue of his sin. The former covenant between them is dead by virtue of its violation. So I see *only* these two allowances.

### WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY UNLAWFULLY MARRIED?

You may find yourself saying: "Too late now. Already done. So what about us? Are we forever living in sin?"

The answer to this is "NO!" It is not necessary for anyone to continue to live in sin, since there is a remedy for all sin, save one, in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Adultery, contrary to the way many treat it, is *not* the unpardonable sin. It is forgivable if we turn to God in true repentance. There may be circumstances we have created by our past sin that can never be undone or repaired and with which we will have to live in some sense all our lives.



That does not mean God does not forgive. It simply means that you should realize that God has not promised to undo all the present consequences of your sin in this life. But you should seek His mercy and wisdom in bringing about whatever healing is now possible by His grace. It may not be what it could have been, but in many cases it can be more than it was in the ways that really count. Don't underestimate God!

But I must give some words of instruction because some have given very unscriptural counsel to persons in these circumstances. The first thing I must say is: You cannot unscramble scrambled eggs, nor does God allow you to do so!

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## Words spoken in marriage covenant are held in trust by God.

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Do not allow anyone to insist that you must abandon your present marriage. That is unscriptural. By whatever covenant you are presently bound before God, you are required to keep the vows of that covenant. The fact that you broke another covenant to enter this one is a sin against the other covenant for which you need forgiveness—if you have not already asked and received it. You are bound by your present covenant, not by the

one that is now null and void. You cannot make right the former wrong by repeating unfaithfulness all over again. Sin can never correct sin.

In fact, if you are divorced and remarried, it is not scriptural for you to return to your former mate—God forbids it. In Deut. 24:1-4, God says that returning to a former mate after having married another is “detestable” to Him (“an abomination” [NKJV]) and must not happen even if the second mate dies.

On this matter, Paul says:

*“Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called [saved] him” (1 Cor. 7:20).*

In other words, we must now be faithful to all the covenants we now have in our life. Paul suggests the avoidance of making a marriage covenant if it does not already exist.

People have struggled with statements of some Christians telling them that they are “living in adultery.” I would simply point out that this statement does have a legitimate application, but it does not apply to what we are here discussing, as many Christians have wrongly concluded. The Scriptures, it should be observed, speak of adultery as an *act* (“commits adultery”), not as an ongoing state. To adulterate or pollute something is the act of a moment. It is then impure and will remain so unless healed by the forgiving, cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

In closing, I must make this most important point: *If your mate is sexually unfaithful to you, God's highest will is that you live in forgiveness and seek reconciliation.* Reconciliation must demand that the offending mate leave off his or her sinful offense and come back to faithfulness


to the covenant between you. You are not allowed to condone his or her continued unfaithfulness by closing your eyes to unlawful violations by your mate; this can never lead to true restoration.

.....

## Marriage is a blood covenant.

.....

*Do not be quick to seek divorce if your mate is unfaithful.* God wants you to be forgiving and allow time for repentance. How long? You and God will have to decide. But be sure you are listening to God and not reacting out of hurt or bitterness as an excuse to become adulterous in your own attitude. As long as there is hope, you should cherish the marriage covenant and keep it alive within you—setting an example of fidelity, even though your mate is unfaithful. This cannot go on forever, but it may go on long enough, with God's help, for a miracle of transformation and reconciliation to take place. I only know it is the high road of faith. It should be embraced with great humility, seeking God's provision and instruction.

Our God of Covenant requires that those persons created in His image are to be faithful in their vows. This He demands. He has declared to us: *“For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37).* Words spoken in marriage covenant are held in trust by God against the day of judgment. 

## What About Creation Science?

**V**ISTA BOARD OKS TEACHING OF CREATIONISM," emblazoned a *Los Angeles Times* headline recently. "The embattled but resilient Christian right majority of the Vista school board achieved what its three members had been promising for months: It formally opened the door to the teaching of creationism in the city's public schools. It did so in defiance of state educational guidelines and its own vehement teachers association . . . at an emotional public meeting Thursday night that dragged on past midnight" (Aug. 14, 1993). Not since the infamous Scopes "monkey trial" of 1925 has creationism commanded such front-page attention in the secular press.

"Creation science," also known as "scientific creationism," is a remarkable recent phenomena. It has arisen as an organized reaction against a major defining element of the modern scientific worldview: the theory of evolution. It is a parachurch lay move-



by C. S. Cowles

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Nampa, Idaho*

ment that has formed entirely outside the councils of the institutional church, its colleges and seminaries. Yet it has struck a sensitive nerve among many conservative Christians alarmed about the arrogance of scientific naturalism and secular humanism, which parades as the pseudoreligion of our time. Its militant social agenda has made it a matter of public contention in many places.

While the term "creationist" ought

to include all who believe that God created the heavens and the earth, the term has been co-opted by "creationists" to describe one particular interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis: namely, that God created the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, in six literal days (144 hours); that He created it as a perfect and finished work (thus ruling out any sort of evolutionary processes); that He did it between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago (based upon biblical genealogical lists); that fossils, continental shifts, layered rock strata, and other geological phenomena that suggest an ancient earth can be accounted for by a worldwide deluge during the days of Noah; that the Bible teaches catastrophism due to man's fall into sin (described in Newton's second law of thermodynamics, the law of entropy) as opposed to the uniformitarianism of evolution's doctrine of progressive development; and that the facts of empirical science, when rightly interpreted, support such claims.

The creation science agenda is threefold: to disprove and demythologize evolution on empirical scientific grounds, to prove the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, and to gain equal time for the teaching of creationism as science—and not as religion—in public schools. To advance these goals, over a hundred organizations have sprung up during the last three decades to promote creationism, the most influential being the Creation Research Society (1963) and its companion Institute for Creation Research (1972) in San Diego. Hundreds of books have been published, thousands of articles have been written, and curriculum and videos for churches and Christian schools have been produced. They have been active in broadcasting, seminars, and public debates with evolutionists.

The contemporary creation science



movement can be traced to a book, *The Genesis Flood* (1961), coauthored by John Whitcomb, a Grace Theological Seminary theologian, and Henry M. Morris, a hydraulic engineer of Southern Baptist persuasion. They, in turn, were influenced by an earlier work, *The New Geology* (1923), by Seventh-day Adventist armchair geologist George McCready Price, who sought to provide scientific credibility for Ellen G. White's young earth and deluge theories. Whitcomb and Morris also reacted against Baptist theologian Bernard Ramm's *Christian View of Science and Scripture* (1954), which proposed a synthesis between the biblical doctrine of creation and science by allowing that God may have utilized evolutionary processes as part of His creative activity. Whitcomb and Morris believed such "theistic evolution" to be a contradiction in terms, as well as another example of mainline evangelicals compromising the literal truth of God's Word. While Ramm's book was scarcely noticed outside of academia, *The Genesis Flood* went through 29 printings, with sales exceeding a quarter of a million by the mid-1980s. The rest is history.

How do we explain this surge of broadly based and yet focused attention upon what was, until recent times, a marginal concern within the larger framework of biblical studies? First, in a secular age, creationism restores a biblically based and yet scientifically credible worldview for believers. The historic tension between reason and revelation, between science and religion is resolved in favor of the Bible. Creationists offer a new synthesis between the traditional literal reading of the early chapters of Genesis and the empirical facts of science.

Second, creationists have capitalized upon widespread resentment against the intellectual elitists who control the universities, the scientific establishment, the textbook publishing industry, and the media and who presume upon their professional credentials to speak authoritatively about all things, even those matters that lie entirely beyond the boundaries of scientific investigation (such as origins and destiny), and who have created a humanistic society in which a godless

theory of evolution is welcome in the public domain but the Bible is not. Creationists have risen and said, "Enough!" More than that, they have dared to stand up against the scientific colossus, challenge its atheistic theories, and fight it with its own weapons of empirical data and rational argument. They have done so well that Dr. Duane Gish recently boasted that creationists have yet to lose a public debate with evolutionists.

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Why such faint praise for creation science among mainline evangelical scholars? Why have accredited evangelical liberal arts colleges and seminaries failed to teach it? Why have fundamentalist denominations, such as the Southern Baptists, steered clear of officially embracing creationist dogma? And why have the most scathing critiques of creation science arisen, not from outside, but from within the academies of institutions committed to the infallibility of the Scriptures, such as the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship in Grand Rapids? There are long answers (see bibliography below), and there are short answers to which we must confine ourselves.

On the scientific front, the last thing creationists seemed to be concerned about is the study of the natural world for its own sake. Their interest in science is strictly polemical: to press the battle against evolution and to prove the Bible. Consequently, creationists have undertaken a massive critique, not only of speculative systems such as Darwin's theory of evolution, but also of those applied sciences that they believe are in conflict

with the Bible: such rigorously controlled disciplines as biology, geology, paleontology, anthropology, archaeology, and astronomy. Everything is submitted to the litmus test of whether it accords with their literal reading of the early chapters of Genesis. If not, it is rejected out of hand as pseudoscience, regardless of the weight of empirical evidence in its favor or of their inability to field credible counterevidence for evaluation and verification by scientific professionals in the public arena.

The result of such radical "revisionism" is that the autonomy of science is sacrificed upon the altars of religious dogma. Science dissolves into apologetics. To treat science in such a cavalier manner but then parade unsubstantiated counterclaims as established empirical facts is, according to Christian biologist Jean L. Bertelsen Pond, dishonest and may border on "lying for Jesus."

On the biblical front, evangelical scholars share much with creationists, particularly their commitment to the Bible as the infallible Word of God and their rejection of nontheistic evolutionary theories. Yet they have been reluctant to weigh in on behalf of creation science for three reasons. First, by locking themselves into one particular, narrowly conceived, literal interpretation of Genesis, creationists have caused unnecessary and counterproductive conflict between the Bible and the applied sciences—particularly in the matter of the age of the universe. Second, they are so dogmatically sure of their interpretation that they attack all rival points of view with the same intensity as when doing battle with evolution, thus causing acrimonious division within the Body of Christ. Third, and most critical, conservative biblical scholars believe that by focusing undue attention upon the physical and chronological aspects of the creation events—the "outer husks"—creationists have missed the whole point, the "theological kernel" of what God through the biblical authors was trying to convey. Consequently, the grand biblical doctrine of creation, which has formed the bedrock of every systematic theology that has ever been written, has been narrowed down to disputes about the length of days and the age of the

earth—as if it makes any difference (see 2 Pet. 3:8).

Creationists impose their own mechanistic, quantitative, and rationalistic presuppositions upon the early chapters of Genesis, a 20th-century perspective utterly alien to the ancient prescientific world of the Bible. They presume, therefore, that Genesis 1 is a descriptive historical report rather than a celebration of God's creative and saving activity expressed in evocative figurative language (Augustine), or revelation framed as saga (Karl Barth), or a theological narrative declaring God's great saving deeds (H. Ray Dunning), or a "creation hymn" (H. Orton Wiley).



## Why have fundamentalist denominations steered clear of officially embracing creationist dogma?



Consequently, creationists insist that the days of creation are 24-hour time periods and not "creative eras," even though the sun wasn't created until the fourth day. They assume that the Old Testament provides a complete and unbroken genealogical record from Adam to Jesus, even though there are marked differences between various parallel genealogical lists; that the language of creation and the Fall can be none other than descriptive and propositional, even though God's truth is frequently communicated throughout Scripture by the utilization of such literary devices as metaphor, simile, poetry, parable, personification, hyperbole, fable, apocalyptic, and all sorts of symbolic and figurative language; that the biblical authors were under the same constraints of scientific exactitude and

historical accuracy as those that control scholarly writing today; and that Genesis 1 is a scientific treatise made to order for a 20th-century cosmology.

Because creationists believe that "God wrote the Bible," there is no real effort to take the human authors seriously. Nor is any consideration given to the language of the text, the literary styles employed, the historical context in which the original autographs appeared, the cosmological worldview of biblical times, or what the authors had in mind as they conveyed the truth of God to their world in an idiom intelligible to their generation. These vital concerns, to which generations of dedicated biblical scholars have devoted themselves, are of no interest to creationists. The result is that the creationists may have missed the whole point of what God was trying to say when the creation and Flood accounts made their first appearance and thereby what He has to say through the text to us today.

The problem with imposing a literal reading upon the early chapters of Genesis is that it leads into all sorts of conundrums. For instance, the early chapters of Genesis give us not one but two separate, self-contained creation accounts (the second, Gen. 2:4—3:24). While they are similar, they are also quite different. In the first, humankind is not created until the last part of the sixth day; in the second, God forms man before there is either vegetation or animals. In the first, God creates male and female simultaneously; in the second, the woman is not taken from the man until the final movement of creation. In the first, God creates (*bara*) humankind *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; in the second, He forms (*asah*) the man out of the dust of the earth and the woman out of the man. In the first, God does everything by "remote control," as it were, through the power of His word; in the second, He gets down in the dirt, forms man from the dust, breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, plants a garden, and invites the man to name the animals. The Fall is not mentioned in the first account but is told in great detail in the second. Even the names used for God in the Hebrew text are different: Elohim in the first and Yahweh in the second.

Both creation accounts stand side by side in sacred Scripture. Both claim to be "the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (Gen. 1:1; 2:4). Both are equally inspired by God. Yet they are irreconcilably different in details. It is difficult to see how, if interpreted literally, they could both be historically factual. While creationists are aware of the second creation account, they dismiss it as an explication of the sixth day of Genesis 1, the history of humankind rather than the cosmos, in spite of the clear statement of Gen. 2:4 to the contrary, as well as the totally different order of creation presupposed in verses 5-6.





## The autonomy of science is sacrificed upon the altars of religious dogma.



To turn the Bible into something it is not, such as a textbook of scientific facts, is to risk the same trap into which the imperial Catholic Church of the 17th century fell. That embarrassing story begins with Nicolaus Copernicus, a Christian and churchman who suggested in a pamphlet published in 1543 the then radical proposition that the sun and not the earth was the fixed point in our solar system, that the earth and the planets revolved in orbits around the sun, and that the earth turned upon its axis, creating the illusion of the sun moving across the heavens. When Martin Luther heard of Copernicus's theory, he scoffed and replied, "The Bible says that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth."

Copernicus's revolutionary theories drew scant attention until Galileo Galilei, another influential churchman, made a telescope for himself after learning about the invention from the Dutch. His observations led him, not only to conclude that Copernicus

was right, but also to say so loudly. The inquisitor in Florence became alarmed and denounced him thus: "The proposition that the sun is the center of the world and does not move from its place is absurd and false philosophically and formally heretical, because it is expressly contrary to the holy Scripture." The inquisitor marshaled many scriptures in support of his attack upon Galileo, including Ps. 93:1: "The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved." In 1633 Galileo, 70 years old and in failing health, was hauled before the inquisitor in Rome and forced to recant. His theories were formally declared to be false, his works were banned and burned, and he was posthumously excommunicated from the church.

  
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In its first frontal skirmish with experimental science, the church won the battle. And lost the war. The church lost, not because it misread the plain statements of Scripture nor because it misunderstood the literal meaning of the text.

The church lost because the earth turns on its axis and orbits the sun.

The church lost because the Bible is not a book of modern science but a timeless revelation of God's great salvation, expressed from multiple points of view (i.e., the four Gospels) and utilizing many different literary styles. Its concern is not geology but theology. Its claims can be neither verified nor falsified by empirical proofs. Its purpose is not to enlighten us about the formation of the heavens but to show us how to get to heaven. Its objective is not to speak authoritatively about everything under the sun

but to lead us to the Son of God, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Paul added, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [and not even against evolutionary processes as such], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, NASB).


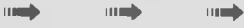
The problem of two creation accounts, for instance, melts away if we view them as portraits from the hand of two literary artists, each declaring in his own way and from his unique perspective the grandeur of the creative event, which, we must admit, is finally beyond all human powers of comprehension and expression. As Paul confessed in his struggle to articulate the height and depth, the length and breadth of the revelation of God given to him, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror" (1 Cor. 13:12). One creation account could no more say it all than one photograph can really convey what Yosemite is like. Truth is a many-splendored thing. It is not only the red that makes a rainbow, but the blue and green—each radically different from the other but all working together to form a complementary whole.

The battle against secular humanism and scientific naturalism will not be won by worldly weapons of scientific data or rationalistic arguments. Our best strategy in defeating the forces of darkness, wherever they manifest themselves, is by proclaiming the gospel.

The early chapters of Genesis are first and foremost "gospel"! Good news! The biblical revelation of God's creative and saving deeds was very good news to the world into which it originally came, a cosmos thought to be inhabited by violent and immoral deities. For instance, in *Enuma Elish*, a major Babylonian creation myth, Marduk, the sun god, overcame Tiamat, the female goddess of the primeval saltwater ocean, by splitting her in half. The lower half became the oceans below and the upper half a watery canopy above (compare Gen. 1:6-7), which caused rain when it leaked. The sun, moon, and stars

were celestial deities whose activities directly affected what happened on earth (the origins of astrology). The Egyptians believed that Atum was the first of the gods who, after emerging from the primordial waters and taking his stand upon a high hill (of which the pyramids were representative), copulated with his hand, thus generating a whole pantheon of other gods representing various aspects of nature. Common to most creation myths is the presence of a dark and chaotic primeval deep (Gen. 1:2) from which the gods emerge and to which everything finally returns.

Into that kind of chaotic and demonic universe came good news about God: a God who already is before anything was—the great I AM; a God whose Spirit brooded over the primeval deep like a dove over troubled waters; a God who conquered the dark powers of chaos by the power of His word; a God who saves the universe from the fate of *tobu* and *bobu*, formlessness and nothingness; a God who graciously "created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1; 2:4) as a benevolent environment for the crown of His creation, humankind; a God who enters into a loving covenantal personal relationship with the man and the woman; and a God who rejoices in what He has made. Thus primeval chaos is robbed of its mythic energy, its god-making power and life-threatening terror. It is, henceforth, just waters.

  
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Over against a confusing pantheon of gods is the presence of the one God who is Creator and Lord of all.

The fierce sea monsters, the dragons of the deep that surged along the fragile boundary of the ancient world, are declared to be mere creatures, like the fish, playful denizens of the ocean depths (Ps. 104:26). The sun, moon, and stars are not omnipotent and fearsome deities but servants to minister to the needs of God's good creation. The mysterious powers of life and its generation are not an extension of the sexual activities of the gods but are blessings conferred upon the creatures that the Lord God has made.

The Genesis accounts are free of the intrigue, violence, and bloodshed so characteristic of pagan creation myths. The good news of the early chapters of Genesis is that human beings are not helpless slaves, abject pawns in the immoral liaisons and power struggles played out by fickle celestial deities. Rather, the man and the woman stand at the apex of God's gracious creative activity in Genesis 1 and emerge as the supreme object of His sculpting artistry in Genesis 2. They alone are called into an inti-



Where science  
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does!



mate, personal, and dynamic relationship with himself. **This is the point of the Genesis accounts: this is the point of the whole Bible.** All else, including the origins of the physical universe and the chronology of creation, is tangential, mere prologue. "It is . . . the love and not the creatorship," declares early Nazarene theologian H. Orton Wiley, "which forms the essence of the Divine Fa-

therhood" (*Christian Theology*, 1:445).

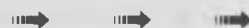
What was good news for the ancient world in which the original message of Genesis came is still very good news for us today. Where science cannot go, the Word of God does! What the Scriptures offer that science does not is a cosmos with a heart, a universe with a personal center, a human existence that has meaning and purpose because it is grounded in the creative and redemptive power of a graciously personal God.

It is not enough to prove evolution false. It is not enough to serve up the mechanics of the biblical narrative of creation, Fall, and Flood, stripped of its revelatory theological content. It is not enough to teach creationism in public schools; what then is to stop Mormons and Muslims from teaching their version of creationism as well? It is not enough to focus inordinate attention upon the first few chapters of Genesis to the neglect of the gospel of Jesus Christ who alone has power to save.

Only the good news of a graciously creative and lovingly redemptive personal God who has fully and finally revealed himself in Jesus of Nazareth can satisfy the deep longings of the human spirit. Only a personal relationship with a personal God can offer a hope that will endure long after the physical heavens and earth have passed away. This is the point of the creation accounts. This is the heart and soul of the entire sweep of the Scriptures as they culminate in the Word become flesh in Jesus. This is what the Bible has to offer that science does not.

Perhaps we need to revisit the "two books" metaphor, originally spelled out in the 16th-century Belgic confession and later affirmed by John Wesley, as a way of harmonizing the witness of God to himself through nature studied and described by science, as well as through the Scriptures—without sacrificing the autonomy or unique idiom of either. It states that:

We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to *see clearly the invisible things of God, even His everlasting power and divinity*, as the apostle Paul says (Rom. 1:20). . . . Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation (1561, Article 2).




It is not enough  
to prove  
evolution false.



#### FOR FURTHER READING

Henry M. Morris, *Studies in the Bible and Science* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1966) presents a clear and readable exposition of the creationist position. Henry Morris has emerged as the most prolific writer and eloquent spokesman for the creation science movement.

Howard J. Van Til, ed., *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990) critiques creationist dogma from the perspective of a like commitment to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible as the Word of God.

Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993) has done a great service by writing this definitive, sympathetic, evenhanded, and exhaustively researched history of 20th-century creationism. 

# Today's Books for Today's Preachers



## A Publication Event

**T.** Crichton Mitchell's just-published book, *Charles Wesley: Man with the Dancing Heart* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994, 279 pp.; PA083-411-4496, \$16.95), will help further to rank him with the most knowledgeable Wesley brothers scholars of our time: the late Albert Outler, Frank Baker, and Richard P. Heitzenrater.

Outler asked Mitchell to work on Charles Wesley in the 35-volume *Works of Wesley* still being published (now by Abingdon), but his professional duties at the time made it impossible for him to accept the assignment. Now, however, having given us two books on John Wesley, Mitchell has gotten around to giving us a major work, indeed his major work, on Charles Wesley—who, Mitchell thinks, is too often underrated in relation to his older brother, John.

It is true that John is usually thought of as the more gargantuan church history figure; but Mitchell



by J. Kenneth Grider

*Distinguished visiting professor of theology,  
Olivet Nazarene University, Kankakee, Ill.*

knows, and reminds us, that since Charles is the main hymn writer of all Christian history, belonging to the whole Body of Christ, it is Charles, instead of John, with whom Christians by the tens of millions are much more familiar.

The present work as sent to the publisher was over 700 pages in manuscript form; but the same thing happened to him as happened to me also with my biggest book: it was thought to be much too lengthy and was reduced by about one-third.

Even so, these 279 printed pages give Mitchell much space for his well-worded, often euphonious, eulogistic treatment of the dancing-heart man that he describes also as "the Methodist music maker" (p. 125) and "the songster of the Spirit" (p. 131).

This publishing-event book is thoroughly researched, not only in the primary materials of Charles and John's poems, journals, and other writings, but also in writings about the "twin" brothers. Regarding the

secondary sources—early, later, and recent—he sometimes uses observations made in them when you know he could have made them himself with perhaps more finely tuned insight and with no doubt more euphonious wording.

Our author knows the wider 18th-century environment of the brothers as few writers have described it. He fills the reader in on it. He knows the thought currents of the time (deism, unitarianism, Arianism, antinomianism). He discusses the content of the books that the brothers Wesley read, at various times in their lives, so specifically that he is telling you he has read them also. He knows what is in them and, more, what is not in them. He knows when Charles seems to be borrowing from somewhat obscure poets (Young, p. 206); when Charles "presents" something "in hundreds of places and implies it in hundreds more" (p. 212). He knows the hymns that were being sung in the Methodist society meetings, and why (p. 204). He knows of the laxities of and the direct opposition of many of the Anglican clergy. This was so considerable that John Wesley finally relaxed his expectation that the Methodists would receive Anglican Communion—which relaxation Mitchell and others say was the beginning of the development leading to Methodism's becoming a denomination after the death of the brothers.

All the time, as Mitchell blesses us with the dancing heart man, we digest John also. You know he could



tell their story from John's standpoint as well—since he has already done so.

Charles and John both felt that the people could be best educated in theology from the hymns, a few written by John—the most recent count being at over 9,000 by Charles over his lifetime of 81 years; some, admittedly “pedestrian and monotonous” (p. 190). Mitchell works through the whole gamut of theology as it is expressed in the hymns—those on the Trinity, especially those on our redemption as stemming from the Atonement (see pp. 200 ff.), and, finally, those on eschatological subjects—concluding with poetry as in a eulogy of George Whitefield and hymns on death.

These brothers, appraised by Mitchell as the most significant team of blood brothers in the whole history of Christianity—and with Samuel II, early, a threesome of sorts—although engaged almost constantly together in itinerant evangelism for some 15 years after their conversion in May of 1738, agreed on most matters but were sometimes in disagreement.

Several particularly interesting matters are to be found in this book. One is that Charles Wesley, whom we have all appreciated as our most significant hymn writer, was also most outstanding as an evangelistic preacher. Mitchell often reminds us that Charles was as a preacher the more eloquent, the more fiery, of the two. Of Charles, John, and George Whitefield, Mitchell observes that Charles was “in many places the most popular of the trio of field preachers” (p. 81). This is high praise of Charles, because a recent *Christianity Today* article on Whitefield states that Whitefield was so popular in America at about the same time that 22,000 heard him on the Boston Common. Following Whitefield's lead in preaching in open fields, as John did also, Charles preached to large groups. At times, as at Gloucester in 1739, it was a “three-hour sermon” heard by “thousands” (p. 82). Mitchell calls him “the revivalist poet” (p. 96) and calls Charles and John “a pair of firebrands” (p. 95).

Again, while we all know of Martin Luther's direct contribution toward John's heartwarming conversion at a small meeting place on Aldersgate

Street in London, we learn here that Luther's writings also helped to precipitate Charles's being converted three days earlier, on Pentecost Sunday, May 21, 1738. Luther's preface to Romans had helped John; Luther's comments on Galatians, Charles (p. 69).

Likewise, William Law influenced John Wesley in John's preconversion years (1725-38). This book tells us that Law was also mentor to Charles in most of those years. The Wesley brothers, of course, both read Law's books; but they would also walk long distances to consult with him. Law was mentor to both of them. Charles saw to it that his Oxford friends read Law. But Law, while helpful on what we now call spiritual formation, did not vibrate with the matter of these Oxford-graduated, foreign-missionary, Anglican priests becoming converted. They had to get loosed from the influence of Law in order, by the help of Peter Böhler and other Moravians, to obtain instantaneous conversion by faith alone.

Of interest, too, is that Charles interned as he did into what we now call “one-on-one” (preferably “one-to-one”) personal evangelism. Mitchell tells us that in June, just after his conversion (as well as late in his ministry), Charles's *Journal* is crammed with instances of his witnessing and with cases of conversion” (p. 74).

Another matter of interest to me was Charles's frequent and near-death illnesses, for years, in Georgia during his failed missionary stint and later. The night before Charles's conversion, “John . . . and a few of his friends, fearing that Charles was about to die, spent the entire night in prayer for him” (p. 64).

Of interest, further, is Charles and John's courage in the midst of mob violence in many places, as at Devizes (p. 89)—often “sponsored and prompted by ministers” (p. 90) who, in England, had the say about who preached in their parishes. In this “saga” of the Wesleys, we find that they were in “travels oft” and “in perils oft” (p. 91). For some 15 years afterward, they were almost inseparable itinerant evangelists.

Interestingly, when their evangelism blitz began in 1739, “there were not more than four ‘good roads’ in the land” (p. 91). The path-roads often be-

came rivers or were muddy. The brothers often rode horses; but long before the itinerancy, they both walked long distances for days at a stretch in order to see William Law.

Readers will also find such matters as this to be interesting: that Dryden probably influenced Charles in what Mitchell thinks of as perhaps the most popular of all Charles's hymns. Dryden had written of England, “Fairest Isle, all Isles excelling,” and Charles wrote for us, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” In a like vein, it is interesting that Charles and John's friend, George Whitefield, perhaps the single greatest preacher of the era, edited to the good some lines of Charles that the whole world sings. Charles had written,

*Hark! how all the welkin rings:  
Glory to the King of kings . . .*

Whitefield changed it to:

*Hark! the herald-angels sing  
“Glory to the new-born King.”*  
(p. 196)

Fine points of theology are correct in Charles Wesley, and in Mitchell's portrayal of Charles. For example, Mitchell quotes, “Sufficient, sovereign, saving grace” (p. 152)—evidently from Charles. That word “sufficient” is important. The Calvinists were teaching that God's grace is “efficient”—that it accomplishes what it ordains, regardless. The Arminians taught that God's grace is sufficient for everyone, but not efficient for anyone.

More than 40 years ago I said of Mitchell that he picks his words with tweezers. He is still using that instrument. Here he writes that with Charles, “Evangelism is not a program but a passion” (p. 160). And he says, “Charles Wesley felt that he had no good news for anyone if he did not have good news for everyone” (p. 157). He speaks of Charles's “predecessor, John the Baptist” (p. 162). This is language that is lively, that contains metered repetition of sounds, that is itself poetic—as Charles the bard is held before us.

It is to be expected that references to the experience of Christian perfection, entire sanctification, would be found in numerous places in this material on Charles and John Wesley, and such is there. Yet Mitchell treats this subject in a specialized way in a chapter of nine pages. In it he treats with



care the brothers' "differences of opinion" (p. 165) on this matter. Mitchell says that among the preachers of the Methodist societies "the big question was whether Christians should expect to be saved from all sin *before* the instant of death." He adds, "John said yes but Charles was far from saying so" (p. 166). He continues, "From the late 1740s, Charles Wesley appears increasingly hesitant about regarding or at least asserting entire sanctification as a crisis experience in the life of the believer." Mitchell observes that by that time, "The former confidence of the early years of the Revival is now qualified" (p. 166). Whereas Charles had earlier written

*In all the confidence of hope  
I claim this blessing now!*

certain "spurious profession of the blessing . . . and . . . pitfalls he thought he saw . . . caused Charles to modify his approach" (p. 167). This reticence on Charles's part stemmed from his "'setting perfection too high,'" as John said. Charles felt that "perfection" cannot be improved upon, and John understood that it can be. So Charles tended to yearn for something John felt is unattainable. John wrote to Charles, "There is no such perfection here [in this life] as you describe," and adds, "Therefore I still think that to set perfection so high is effectually to renounce it" (p. 167).

Even so, there was so much overlapping of the two brothers' views that John includes "no fewer than 56 stanzas of the hymns of Charles . . . in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* to support and to apply his meaning" (p. 170). It might be observed that Charles's "error" was of a more desirable variety than it would have been to expect so little of entire sanctification that the teaching would have skirted the antinomianism position, which both the brothers felt they needed to oppose vigorously. Mitchell writes about all this: "The hunger for absolutely perfect love and total likeness to Christ, and for a heart and mind and habit like His—this was the ever-supreme desire and quest of his life" (p. 171).

Lest it be concluded that Charles did not actually believe in Christian perfection, entire sanctification, what he said in 1762 in the preface to a book of his hymns should be noted. He there wrote, "Several of the hymns are intended to prove, and several to guard, the doctrine of Christian Perfection" (p. 173).

As to the difference of view between John Wesley and John Fletcher on whether the 120 were justified at Pentecost as John Wesley clearly taught, or sanctified wholly as Fletcher believed (along with Joseph Benson and Hester Ann Rogers), Mitchell's treatment of Charles indicates at times what Ken Bible's article on this in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1982, pp. 79-87) shows with scholarly care, that Charles agreed with John Fletcher (see pp. 140 ff.). Charles writes:

*To make an end of sin, . . .*

*The Holy Ghost to man is given.*

*The cleansing blood t'apply, . . .*

*And wholly sanctify, . . .*

*The Holy Ghost to man is given.*

(p. 141).

It is a fact that when John edited a book of hymns on entire sanctification, he only chose for it 1 of Charles's 63 collected Pentecost hymns. Then John edited out of it its association of Pentecost and entire sanctification. It is also a fact that John Fletcher wrote to Charles, saying he saw that Charles agreed with him on this and told Charles that John's teaching would be strengthened if he were to teach as they did.


More often than not, we read about John Wesley, with Charles as a tag-along. Here, the brothers are treated from the standpoint of Charles and not John. We are often reminded that Charles as a preacher was the more eloquent, the more fiery, of the two. Also, we see that, of the two, Charles is often favored otherwise: as in hymn writing, of course, but also in marriage and homelife, and as the one who had already started the Holy Club at Oxford, the group dubbed the "Methodists" because of their disciplines. Of the Holy Club, Mitchell gives considerable detail, but not

nearly as much detail as Heitzenrater does in *Mirror and Memory*—whose discoveries on such matters as who the first Methodist was and just who composed the club give us more detail than many of us wish to know or need to know.

In any lengthy book of theology—and this whole book is that—almost any reader might disagree with the author at times. I find too much identity between Christ and the Holy Spirit when Mitchell writes, "The Holy Spirit is Christ's other Self; the Spirit in us is Christ in us" (p. 210). I do not see the identification of the Two in the lines he quotes as support from Charles. At the same time, I know that others, as Rattenbury, whom he quotes, see in Charles what Mitchell calls "this near-identity." Rattenbury says that the Two only "seem to be indistinguishable." Mitchell goes on to say that this is the New Testament teaching, that "the Holy Spirit *is* the other Self of Christ" (p. 210).

On a less significant vein, I would fault the book for its regular use of male language. Mitchell says that Charles had a "ready tongue to share the Good News with all men" (p. 151). Other examples are: "the salvation of all men" (p. 153); "to move sinful men" (p. 213); "to draw men to Jesus" (p. 236); and "service to men" (p. 223).

About halfway through the book, I began to question the appropriateness of his so-frequent use of the title words, "man with the dancing heart." Later I came to feel that this frequency is altogether justified. This is, in great part, because I can see that engagement with Charles gives our author a dancing heart. I confess that Charles, and Mitchell's appraisal of him, does that for me also, as a reader of this biography that sings.

This book might be one of the 10 or 12 most significant of the hundreds of books that Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City has issued in the past several decades. It is important for all who are interested in the brothers Wesley and the 18th-century revival, precursor to the American Holiness Movement. 

# Called Upon to Pray

by Mary E. Egidio

Pastor's wife, Greenville, Pa.

**W**ould you please pray?" As a pastor's wife, I am often called upon to pray. Sometimes I wonder where it states that the pastor's wife shall be called on to pray at all church functions involving women. But never before had I been called on to pray with so much insistence. For this time, I was not at a fellowship dinner or missionary meeting, but at home, doing laundry.

This time it seemed like the person asking me to pray was the Lord himself: "I want you to pray."

As I pulled clothes out of the dryer, I was overwhelmed with the urgency of the request. I tried to delay, but I felt as if Someone had His thumb in my back, pushing me. So I hurried down the hall to my bedroom.

Once there, I knelt beside my bed and looked at the clock. In less than two hours, an evening revival service would begin at our church. Maybe there was someone who should be at

the service who was just then making the critical decision whether to attend. I bowed my head and began to pray, only guessing the need.

"Dear God, bind Satan's power and remove all fear about tonight's service. Let Your Holy Spirit take control and Your peace rule in the hearts of those who will attend." I continued for several minutes, repeating these same words, until the feelings of urgency passed. I remained on my knees, reveling in God's powerful presence in that room.

Feeling assured that God had answered prayer, I continued preparations for the evening ahead, looking forward to learning the outcome of my prayer.

As the service began that night, I glanced around the small congregation from my spot on the front row. All I could see were the "regulars"—people who had been faithful to the church and the Lord, and who had been in the services all week. I couldn't imagine that anyone I saw needed the kind of desperate prayer that was demanded of me, but I still felt convinced that God had answered.

The evangelist delivered an inspiring and challenging message, followed by an invitation for special prayer. One young woman responded to the altar call and received definite spiritual help. But when I described my experience to her after the service, she could not recall any spiritual struggle at the time of my unusual encounter. Puzzled, I walked toward the door, wondering if my prayer had really been answered. Were

those strange feelings actually from the Lord?

At the door I met our evangelist and began to walk with her to the parsonage. As we walked, I began to share with her the pressing request that I felt God had laid on my heart earlier that evening. Gasping, she stopped in her tracks and took my arm. "Why honey, that was for me!" Then this veteran of 30 years in evangelism went on to explain.

"When I was in my motel room tonight at that same time, I suddenly became overwhelmed with fear. All I could think was, 'What do I have to tell those people?' It lasted several minutes. But then I felt a peace come over me, and I soon felt the Lord's assurance that everything was all right. Yes, that was definitely for me." We hugged and rejoiced together at God's protection and faithfulness.

Looking back on that experience, I believe I learned a valuable lesson about obedience. I had a choice as I stood by my dryer that day. I could have chosen to ignore the Lord's prodding. Would God have found someone else who would have been obedient to pray? I hope so. Perhaps there were several others praying for that evangelist at that exact same moment. But what if I were the only one? Would the evangelist's fears have continued, rendering her ineffective for the Lord? I don't know. I only know that I would have surely missed the blessing of knowing God's presence. Learning how God had answered prayer that day was an added blessing, but God expects obedience whether or not we ever see the outcome.

I asked God's forgiveness for the other times He has tried to use me that I haven't been willing to obey and have surely missed His blessings in the process. The next time I am called upon to pray, I promise to respond with a willing heart.



# Essentials for an Ethic of Evangelism

by Clint Walker III

Freelance writer, Temple, Tex.

Conquering Roman armies often drove the vanquished hordes through rivers and proclaimed them “baptized in the name of Jesus and for the glory of God.” This form of Kingdom building may violate one or two rules of evangelism ethics. From our historically enlightened vantage point, we see that a failed method of “evangelism” can compromise the intended result. Coerced immersion (conversion) does not make even the most barbaric of us more Christian.

While our vision is clear on millennia-old abuses of church growth techniques, we need to examine our own methods of evangelism. We need to look behind our methods of evangelism to the philosophical and theological sources for evangelism. Why do we do what we do? If result-oriented approaches (train wreck stories and “turn or burn” sermons) lack integrity and ultimately compromise our legitimate goal of growing the Kingdom, then we must rethink our task. If our evangelistic methods are to have integrity, they must proceed from a holistic vision of the Christian life.

As Wesleyans, we have a rich theological tradition from which to construct an ethic of evangelism. What follows below is a provisional construct for an ethic of evangelism in a Wesleyan mode. There may be debate about the actual forms that evangelism in a Wesleyan context should take. Thankfully, debate, discussion, dialogue, and even divergence and diversity are at home in the Wesleyan tradition. Wesley was rejected and scorned within his own Anglican tradition and from his counterparts in the Calvinist tradition. He responded to charges of heresy with an invitation to acknowledge a mutual kinship

in Christ and then to “light the candle and talk all night.” If this is a Wesleyan response to those outside our immediate context, then those of us within the Wesleyan circle have room to develop evangelism strategies that may be unique and diverse while being faithful to the Wesleyan spirit.

What do we mean by a Wesleyan context? First, doing any kind of theological work in a Wesleyan context or mode means that we operate with a severely restricted field of absolute categories. When pressed to list the essentials of the Christian faith, Wesley offered from three to seven cardinal Christian affirmations. Only three of these beliefs were consistently a part of Wesley’s conception of Christianity: God as Creator, Jesus as Lord, and the Scripture as authoritative. As the *sine qua non* of the Christian faith, these three form a strikingly sparse, but amazingly adequate, definition of the Wesleyan mode of theological reflection. Any attempt to create an absolutist theology that strays far from these cardinal affirmations does so at the peril of remaining Wesleyan.

Second, Wesleyan thought is not contained in a theological summa such as other Western Christian traditions. The Calvinists have Calvin’s *Institutes*; Catholics have the Thomistic writings; Lutherans have Melancthon’s writings. Wesleyanism is found not in systematically coherent theologies but in a spirit that transcends and informs any attempt at systematizing. Beyond “God, Jesus, and the Word” there are no canons of Wesleyan doctrine—only the “spirit of Wesleyanism.”

If Wesleyanism is best characterized by a spirit, divine grace is the embodiment of that spirit. The Wes-

leyan hermeneutic, the very means by which we think about God, involved not only Scripture (as per the Lutherans and Calvinists) and the traditions of the church (as per the Catholic tradition) but also reason and Christian experience. The latter of these, experience, operated as a final check against the first three. “If it [your theology] can’t be lived, it isn’t good theology,” Wesley liked to say. Grace is the category that is determinative of whether a theology can be lived and thereby the judge of its goodness or rightness—its very integrity.

Third, and finally, doing theological reflection in a Wesleyan context requires a self-reflexive spirit. There is an honesty, a transparency, an openness that comes from doing theology from the vantage point of divine grace. Self-examination and even doubt are necessary tools in the Wesleyan mode. The Wesleyan spirit recognizes that faith that is liveliest is faith that takes seriously its own doubts. There is no honest faith without doubt—only lifeless religion.

With this outline of the Wesleyan mode of theological thinking as a necessary context, we can offer the following four principles as a starting point for constructing an evangelism ethic for our day. An ethic of evangelism in a Wesleyan mode would rely on the principles of **Compassion, Integrity, Personal Freedom, and Covenant Relationship**.

*The principle of compassion is a direct extension of the notion of divine grace.* If we are the recipients of grace, we must also be the communicators of that same grace. Compassion expresses itself in our evangelistic efforts in at least two related ways. First, the recognition of the grace that

we have received creates an immediate identification with, even empathy for, the non-Christian. We have an understanding of the universal struggle to become fully human in this life. This is consistent with Wesley's doctrine of progressive sanctification and especially with his understanding of final sanctification or glorification. This identification with our audience, corporate or personal, moves us in the direction of evangelistic methods that minister to the felt needs of that audience. As Christians we know what those needs are, for they are our needs both historically and presently.

The principle of compassion causes us to reject the well-worn shibboleth of "love the sinner but hate the sin," and moves us toward "love the person and have compassion for their personal struggle and their perceived failure." With the apostle Paul, we can affirm our inability to be and to do all we want to be and to become, and we can have compassion on those to whom we witness as they attempt to transform their lives by the grace of God through Jesus.

Finally, the principle of compassion relieves us of the pressure to effect the full transformation of the person. We recognize that we are Kingdom pilgrims together with those whom we bring to the Kingdom. We are joint heirs with those whom we invite. As ministers of a gospel of grace, we are not purveyors of right doctrine or proper theology. We provide a context of grace in which the fresh seeds of the gospel germinate and take hold. The sterile ground of doctrinal instruction has deprived too many converts of the soft rains of grace that are the only nourishment that leads to the full flowing of the Christian soul. Let God do the divine work of transformation as we encourage one another in love through shared worship and mutual struggle and common celebration.

As the principle of compassion proceeds from grace, so also *the principle of integrity extends the principle of compassion*. It is not enough that our evangelistic work is compassionate. Our efforts must be overtly hon-

est and transparent. This means that we must make our witness conform to the reality of our Christian experience. We cannot present the gospel as an answer to all of life's ills—the panacea for a panoply of personal problems. The alcoholic will still be an alcoholic; the depressed person will still struggle with depression. We are the bearers of grace, not easy answers. As Christians, we share the message that there is mercy in the middle of the struggle. According to Scripture, we are to share not the "certainty" but the "hope" that we possess. We are not standing in glory offering an "E Ticket" ride to a utopian life. We have the hope of glory, not physical possession of it. We have real lives—just like theirs—which are fraught with pain and suffering, hardship and struggle. We offer them a life in Christ with all the pain life provides but also with Christ's joy and peace, grace and mercy. "Take up your cross and follow Me . . . in joy!"

Our evangelism must clearly communicate the reality of the journey toward the heart of a gracious God. What a motivation for evangelism! What a joy to beckon others to become fellow travelers on the Christian journey! What a privilege to share the journey with those whom we have introduced to a God of grace!

*The principle of personal freedom is assumed in the principles of compassion and integrity.* However, this principle needs to be stated clearly and kept before us as we select methods of witness and preaching, worship, doctrine, etc. A recognition of and respect for the personal freedom of the individuals to whom we witness is informed by our relationship to God. He creates each of us uniquely; therefore, we cannot experience Him in the same ways. He calls all of us to live uniquely different and special lives of experience and witness. He commands us in different ways.


As evangelists (and we all are!—Acts 1:8), we are not selling a packaged religious experience—not an absolutely definable expression of Christianity. We are not making

Protestants, Wesleyans, or Nazarenes. If Protestantism, Wesleyanism, or Nazaredom is to survive and flourish, it will be because we make vital and alive children of the Kingdom—it will be because we make Christians.

*The principle of covenant relationship may have the most radical impact upon the way we choose and design strategies for effective evangelism.* Covenant relationship calls us to do evangelism holistically. We are interested not only in getting people into the Kingdom but also in being part of the ongoing transformation of the Kingdom process. We are interested in the process of salvation as much as crises. We care more about reconciliation and regeneration than about justification, more about sanctification as a dynamic process than about sanctification as a static act.

In the Hans Christian Andersen fable, the ugly duckling—a misplaced swan chick—has an identity crisis that only the genetic force of nature can transcend. The little swan recovered from the confusion caused by faulty imprinting just in time to head north for the winter. If we use evangelistic methods that provide a false definition of the life of faith, our converts may not recover as the swan child did. Or, our converts may wake up one day and head north (or south) or just somewhere else.

The methods we use to bring people into a Kingdom experience will greatly impact the kind of Kingdom people they will become. Our evangelistic methods must reveal a God of grace through the gospel of Jesus and expressed in a Kingdom of transformed and becoming persons. If we develop evangelistic methods that create cookie-cutter Christians, then we do damage to the Kingdom as we seek to increase.

Evangelism methods that value *compassion, integrity, personal freedom, and covenant relationship* will provide results worthy of a gospel of grace. A Wesleyan ethic of evangelism creates opportunities to grow the Kingdom after the manner of the Kingdom. If "you are what you eat," let us take care over the fare we offer. 

## The Wrong Business in the Father's House

by Carl M. Leth

Pastor, Raleigh, N.C.

**I**t is one of the most dramatic and troubling scenes in the Gospels. Jesus angrily clears the Temple. The whip of cords whistles through the air, and tables crash to the floor. Animals bleat, low, coo, and flap their wings as coins dance across the floor and money changers cry out in distress. Through the sounds of pandemonium, we hear the indignant voice of Jesus proclaiming, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations' . . . But you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:17). So intense is the response of Christ that His disciples are reminded of the description in Ps. 69:9 of being consumed with zeal (John 2:17). It is clear that what Jesus encountered struck close to His heart and moved Him in a remarkable way.

This extraordinary event offers us a special opportunity to look into the heart of Jesus. Understanding what prompted such a response from Him will draw back the curtain for us to see more clearly what lies closest to His heart. What moved Him so strongly? Usually our interpretation of this event focuses on the economic abuses practiced by the money changers and devolves into a lesson about economic justice and the poor, or a lesson about commerce in the church. But this event was certainly not Jesus' first or most striking experience of economic injustice. Neither does it seem likely that His concern for the sanctity of sacred space is adequate to explain His extreme response.

The answer, given indirectly, is in the words of Jesus' rebuke. In it, Jesus makes two biblical allusions that provide context and meaning for understanding His actions. The first is His citation of Isa. 56:7 as a description of

the proper use of God's house. That is, it should be "a house of prayer for all nations." At first glance, this seems to propose simply a dedication to prayerful worship of God. A further look at the context in verses 1-8, however, brings a fuller dimension to this vision. The express inclusion of the outsider and outcast is the concern and focus of that passage. To the foreigner, who has no heritage, and the eunuch, who is without hope of posterity, God extends a welcome and promise of blessing. The foreigner standing outside the covenant is now invited in, to share in its blessing. The eunuch whose deformity excludes him from the covenantal community is now given a blessing and a rich inheritance within it. The inclusion of these two groups, along with the gathered exiles, culminates in the declaration of God's restored house as "a house of prayer for all nations."

The second allusion, set in contrast to the vision of Isaiah 56, is the accusation from Jer. 7:11 that they have made God's house "a den of robbers." Once again, at first glance the condemnation seems to focus on their robbery. A further look at Jeremiah 7, however, provides a more searching indictment. Verses 1-11 contain a call to reform. The people are guilty of dealing unjustly with one another, the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. They increase their crime by daring to commit these sins while presuming upon the protection and blessing of God. They claim God's house as a place of self-serving safety while they exclude and oppress others. It is like a robbers' hideout, where those who have broken the law may find shelter from punishment and enjoy their spoils. This presumption prompts this question: "Has this house, which

bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you?" The indictment of Jeremiah is that the people are presuming upon God to condone and protect them in their personal and social sin.

The contrast between these two rich Old Testament images brings powerful meaning to the scene in the Temple. God's vision for the restored Temple of the returned exile nation includes welcome for the outsider and the rejected. The promise of the Temple is to be extended to all nations and all peoples, expressly including the poor, broken, excluded, and unvalued peoples. But the promise of Isaiah's vision of the Temple has yet to find realization in the Temple that Jesus encounters. The Pharisees and other "righteous" persons celebrate the safety of the covenant in a self-congratulatory exercise of worship. Their burdensome legalism combines with the economic hardships imposed by the money changers and merchants in the Temple courts. Both serve to inhibit or preclude the access of the "foreigners" and "eunuchs" whom God desires to invite to His house. Instead, the exercise of religious worship at the Temple has become a self-serving enterprise for the religious class. This contrast of intended vision and corrupted reality prompts Jesus' indignation and judgment.

The lesson to be drawn by this look into the heart of Jesus goes beyond economic injustice or commerce in the church. It goes to the heart of the church and its mission. We are the inheritors of the inclusive vision of God's covenant in Isaiah. It is entrusted to us to include the "foreigner" and the "eunuch." We are called to make the Kingdom accessible to those who have no heritage. Out-

# Reverie at My Son's Ordination

siders and strangers should actively be made welcome among us. The broken and rejected should be comforted and accepted. It is not enough for the church to offer assurance, comfort, and safety to those within it. Perhaps it would be good to consider the prices that we require of those who would come to "sacrifice." What are the terms we set for access to the gospel and Kingdom? In our language, attitudes, forms of worship, and church life, are we inviting the foreigners and eunuchs, or enjoying the comfort and security of the "den of robbers"?

The scene in the Temple graphically demonstrates the importance that Jesus attaches to this issue. It makes disturbingly clear the seriousness of the challenge and the judgment. It leaves the unavoidable conclusion that we do not want to be doing the wrong business in the Father's house.



by **Robert Warren Jackson**  
*Pastor, Church of the Nazarene,  
Maynard, Mass.*

**I** stand amazed in the ineffable presence of the Lord Jehovah, listening to the charge being given to the new ordinands. I am awestruck that an omnipotent God can call one so humble into a vocation so conciliatory; into a sacred calling to stand between God and man, inviting man to be reconciled to God, and beseeching God to pardon one so needy as one created in the very likeness of himself, yet deeply stained by sin. I listened as the one in whom the church has placed authority to ordain instructs to keep life pure, spotless. I hear his admonition to remain in harmony with the teachings of the body that has placed hands upon him, and confidently instructed him to preach the Word of God, to administer the sacraments, to care for the flock as a good shepherd.

My mind hears the words, and my heart says, "Amen,"

as I hear once again the words I heard many years ago, as I, too, knelt at an altar:

"Take thou authority."

My inner self whispers softly—

"Authority"—you are in charge, yet I do nothing but what He bids me do.

"Preach"—sermonize, but remain true to the Word of God, for preaching means responsibility.

The eternal destiny of those entrusted into my care will be those for whom I answer.

"Care for the flock"—

Questions inundate my spirit. Have I been careful to attend those who trusted me to shepherd?

Will God find me faithful, now and in eternity?

I renew my vows and pledge to be a better shepherd in the days

remaining in my ministry, as I renew my marriage vows each time I ask a couple to "repeat after me."

As I stand with the host of elders, laying hands on a young man, hearing the words being uttered, my mind travels across the reaches of time.

I am once again on my knees, hands are placed on my head, and the charge is not being given to a stranger.

God is speaking to my heart, calling me afresh and renewed to the charge I must keep.

# How Do We Include People Who Can't Take Up Their Mats and Walk?

by Donald J. Schlough

Chaplain, Lincoln Developmental Center, Lincoln, Ill.

I'm afraid I stared as I watched the minister eat his noon meal with his feet. I know that it was wrong of me to do so, but I, as a helping professional, had never witnessed this form of overcoming before. I have seen many individuals with handicapping conditions during my ministry—especially during the past five years as chaplain at Lincoln Developmental Center, Lincoln, Ill. But the vitality, humor, and grace of Rev. Harold Wilke, United Church of Christ minister who was born armless, overwhelmed me.

I listened intently as he described his ministry, which played such a large part in bringing into being the Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law by then President George Bush, July 26, 1990. Harold Wilke's ministry aimed at making accessible the places of worship of our Creator God. Full incorporation of individuals with disabilities is to be the goal of every local house of worship.

Unfortunately, the Americans with Disabilities Act does not cover (usually) houses of worship. As Rev. Wilke writes, "We ourselves must respond to the higher mandate: God requires access to congregational worship for all children of the Divine." We ourselves must provide access to the Promised Land of public worship to those who have been heretofore restricted by barriers of architecture, prejudice, discomfort, insensitivity, discrimination, insecurity, fear, intolerance, ignorance, misconception, and stereotypical thinking. These are admittedly emotionally laden words. They are words that we as

God's people must think through and work through if we are truly going to serve all our community. Nearly 49 million Americans have some condition—physical, sensory, mental, or emotional—that makes corporate worship a severe challenge, at best, and many times plainly impossible. This suggests that nearly 17 percent of the people in any given community need some special accommodation if they are to be adequately part of "the church." As Ginny Thornburgh, director of the religion and disability program of the National Organization on Disability, shared with me, "The most frequently needed accommodation is acceptance and friendship."

We need only to look at the life and ministry of Jesus to see that we do not adequately mirror His attitude toward those effectively shut out by the "church" of His day. The man with

leprosy is not only cleansed but also returned to the full privilege of community worship (Luke 17:12 ff.). Jesus' healing touch or word meant inclusion in the community of those who worshiped. If we take time to look at the variety of healings our Lord performed, all were to the end that those so touched or spoken to by Him should become part of the believing community. Chaplain Fred G. Wenger was candid enough to say, "If someone shows up, I'm sure we will do what it takes to meet his needs to participate in our services. But with the budget so tight, we cannot justify going to the expense of preparing for people who may never show up. Yet God's Word is clear on this issue." Wenger continues to quote Luke 14:12-14, where Jesus says that we who hold a banquet are to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and [we] will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." **It may not be in the budget, but it is in the Bible.** The holiness tradition needs desperately to work at developing a biblical theology of disability.

The language of the church must be the language of inclusion. Our call is that all may worship, not just the able in mind and body. We do not speak of people as "deaf and dumb," or as "crips" or "retards." These are individuals with conditions of hearing loss, speech difficulty, mobility loss, and slowness. We must put their individuality before their condition. To use their condition as a modifier of their personhood negates



that personhood. To make personhood primary makes us more Christ-like. In the church, there can be no "we-them" bifurcation. It is all "we," or the church is not adequately His.

Look about your building, and imagine yourself to be challenged at the point of mobility, vision, hearing, perhaps suffering from a chronic illness, mental illness, or developmental disability. How does your building and your congregation reach out and say, "Welcome"? As Richard Steele suggests, **we can eliminate the stairs, but can we eliminate the stares?** We can provide ramps and wheelchair-accessible rest rooms, but are we ready to extend our hospitality, our real heart to those whose needs we have neglected for so long? Many of our buildings still are veritable mountains for the not-so-abled to climb. Yet most of us forget that we are ourselves but temporarily abled, and someday, through accident, stroke, or one of many other factors, we shall no longer be able to worship with God's people because we can no longer make it up the mountain.

We need help! We need help with our attitudes, our prejudices, our fears, our insecurities. We also need the help of our building committees, architects, and pastors to carefully and prayerfully plan to facilitate the worship of those who are now effectively shut out of our churches. "A ramp is not enough," Thornburgh and Wilke often say in their workshops. Can we pray that somehow God

would give us the grace to care enough to do something positive to reach out to those who want so much to be included in the family of God?

Day by day, I lead men and women in worship in a state-run facility for individuals with severe and profound developmental disabilities. More often than not, we sing, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God." Their sense of family, of the community of believers, is limited as much by the downtown church with its inhospitality as by their wheelchairs, braces, and slowness. What will you do to make us a part of your fellowship?

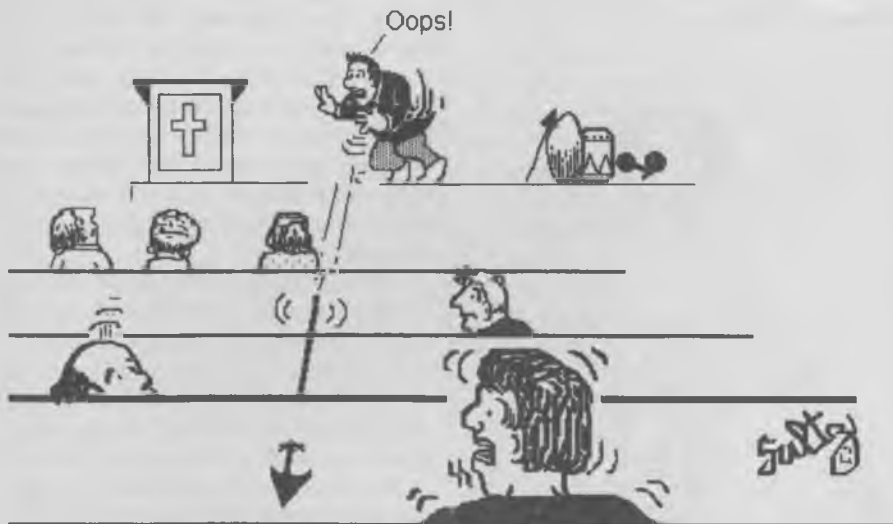
An excellent 56-page resource book, *That All May Worship*, is available from the National Organization on Disability (NOD), 910 16th St. N.W., Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006, at the cost of \$10 U.S. each. Lower prices are available for bulk orders. Other organizations ready to offer help are Joni and Friends, 28720 Canwood St., P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91301; Healing Community, 521 Harrison Ave., Claremont, CA 91711; and National Christian Resource Center, Bethesda Lutheran Home, 700 Hoffman Dr., Watertown, WI 53094. **Bill Rolfe, Department of Church Schools, Church of the Nazarene**, 6401 The Paseo, Kansas City, MO 64131, serves the denomination as a resource person in this area. There are many other national agencies in place to help all of us do a more credible job of ministering to individuals with disabilities. ✠

# Between Two Places



by John Hay Jr.  
Indianapolis, Ind.

If I should go, O Lord, go with me.  
If I should stay, O Lord, stay with me.  
If to go, there may Your hand guide me.  
If to stay, here may Your hand keep me.  
If I should go, it is not to run away from Your discipline.  
If I should stay, I will not shrink back from near frontiers.  
Going, I lean forward into the unknown, assured of Your embrace.  
Staying, I lean back into Your reassuring, renewing arms.  
Going, I fear not the unfamiliar taking shape in dawning light.  
Staying, I reframe the familiar through eyes You shall focus.  
If I should go, I will be breaking into what is already established.  
If I should stay, there must be an in-breaking upon my present.  
There, I start over in a new setting.  
Here, I begin again in the same place.  
There, the new will become old, but we will expand with it.  
Here, the wineskins are set—does aging increase the quality?  
To stay or go; I do not know . . .  
Either way, I am called forward. ✠



Missionary Smith grabs instant attention by losing his grip on the tribal spear!



## Getting the Word Out

### The Dos and Don'ts of Church Publicity

by Maurcia DeLean Houck

Freelance writer, Abington, Pa.

**Y**ou're planning a spectacular event and want to invite the community. Don't head for the neighborhood newspaper office yet. First, learn the basics of dealing with that editor so you can get the word out in the fastest, easiest way.

Getting publicity for your church is easier than you think. Publishers depend on your press releases to fill their pages—both in the religious and the secular press.

There are several ways churches usually share news with their neighbors. Investing in expensive advertising; distributing personal invitations door-to-door; and sending short descriptions of their events, usually in flyer form, to the local newspaper's religion editor.

Each of these methods is useful in bringing in a few extra people, but the way to yield even greater results is to establish a comprehensive publicity plan.

This consists of:

Knowing your target audience.

Deciding what form of publicity to use (brochures, press releases, media alerts, invitations, etc.).

Knowing when to notify the media.

A typical publicity plan for a Vacation Bible School program might contain a list of dates on which to contact the local media for preregistration publicity, before-the-event notices, and follow-up features; hanging notices on community bulletin boards; establishing an advertising schedule; and maybe even setting up a few radio interviews for some of your speakers to solicit interest in the event.

When it comes to publicity, there are two main routes to follow: newspaper and radio. Both are equally ef-

fective and should be utilized jointly.

The rules of dealing with both radio and newspapers are similar, with one exception. Radio must present your information in as brief a time as possible. While the local newspaper may be interested in running a full-length feature regarding your event, chances are the local radio station will need to give their listeners the same information in a 5- to 15-second blurb.

Here are some things to strive for when dealing with both media types:

**Accuracy.** There are three rules of journalism: accuracy, accuracy, and accuracy. Double-check all releases for spelling of names, and for dates, times, and addresses.

**Professionalism.** Use only one person from your congregation to contact media outlets. Nothing is more frustrating for editors than to hear from three different people on three different days about the same event. Especially when one has already promised to cover the event!

**Respect—especially for deadlines.** It doesn't matter if you're submitting a release to a secular newspaper or to a Christian radio station via mail or fax, if they require two weeks notice, they do mean two weeks. No less!

**Common courtesy.** Avoid using the fax machine for full-length releases unless invited to do so. It is the policy of many newspaper offices to simply throw out unsolicited fax material.

Print and broadcast media outlets are your best source of publicity. They are also the best source of publicity for every other church, club, and organization in your community. How can you make sure your release

makes it from the mailbag to the editor's desk?

Submit every release in standard press release form (see figure 1-1). Type it—double-spaced—on white 8½" x 11" paper only (U.S. and Canada). Clearly highlight your church's contact person and a day-evening phone number, at the top right. Leave ample margins for notations by the editor. Number every page.

Most newspaper editors and radio announcers prefer releases written in an inverted pyramid style, which gives the most important information first.

Within the first paragraph, you should briefly answer these important questions.

**Who is sponsoring the event?**

**What is the event?**

**Where is it being held?**

**When will it be held?**

**Why is it being held (to raise money, public awareness, etc.)?**

Background information should come last. Use simple English when writing your release. Never submit more than two pages unless asked to do so by the editor.

Media alerts and photo opportunity alerts should be restricted to one page (see figure 1-2).

Today's computers can do amazing things—such as take a bland-looking press release and give it flavor using unusual fonts, descriptive graphics, and flashy banners. If your church computer can do these things, **don't use them!**

Your job is to make your release as editor-friendly as possible. All of those fancy-looking computer highlights only make more work for the editor, since they all have to be taken out to prepare the text for the typesetter.

To get the most publicity you can from any single source may require contacting several separate departments in a single newspaper office. For instance, a month or so before your scheduled event, contact the religion editor for preevent publicity and registration information.

Two weeks before the event, send a release (and a ticket for free admittance) to the features editor, highlighting why non-Christian members of the community may be interested in attending.

Then, if you think your event merits a photograph, send a photo alert (see figure 1-3) to the photo editor about one week prior to the date, inviting him to send a photographer.

Do the same with local radio stations. Many non-Christian stations offer bulletin boards featuring upcoming activities, regardless of religious affiliation, if the event is of interest to the general listening audience.

Above all else, don't be intimidated by your lack of knowledge in the publishing/public relations fields. If you're unsure about submission requirements, deadlines, or even the style of a particular publication, call and ask.

Most editors (and editorial assistants) are more than willing to take a few minutes—but only a few—to answer your questions.

If you're courteous and quick, you'll be surprised at how many say yes when asked to spare a few inches of editorial space to present your church's events. †

**SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE**  
**FIGURE 1-1**

(Organization's Letterhead)

Contact Name  
Address  
Phone (day/evening)  
Date

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Title  
(city, month, date)—begin release here . . .

**SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT**  
**FIGURE 1-2**

(Organization's Letterhead)

Contact Name  
Address  
Phone (day/evening)  
Date

**MEDIA ALERT**  
Title

**What:**  
**Where:**  
**When:**  
**Who:**  
**Background Information:** one to four sentences briefly featuring information on church, speakers, or anything of special interest.

**PHOTO OPPORTUNITY ALERT**  
**FIGURE 1-3**

(Organization's Letterhead)

Contact Name  
Address  
Phone (day/evening)  
Date

**PHOTO ALERT**  
Title

**Photo Opportunity:** one to three short sentences aimed at grabbing the photo editor's attention regarding your event.

**What:**  
**Where:**  
**When:**  
**Who:**  
**Background Information:**

**TERMS TO KNOW**

*Press Release*—a brief 1-3 pages announcing an event, organization, person, etc., aimed at soliciting publicity. Usually written in a standard, inverted pyramid newswriting style.

*Media Alert*—also called a news advisory or tip sheet. Provides a brief summary (limited to one page) of basic facts regarding a special event. Should be written in a who, what, where, when, why format.

*Photo Opportunity Alert*—similar to the media alert, the photo op is customized to attract TV or photo coverage.

*Press Kit*—an organized comprehensive package of information about your church and its upcoming activities. Used generally for large-scale events or programs. May include a short history of the church; press release highlighting events; brief bios of special speakers; fact sheet; media alert; background information; and/or pictures.



## Ministers and Their Dual Tax Status (For U.S. Pastors)

by Julie L. Bloss

*Attorney for the Annuity Board  
of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dallas*

Some ministers do not think of themselves as “employees” because they are called by God to the ministry and by their congregations to serve individual churches. But the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) classifies all taxpayers who get paid for performing services, even ministers, as either employees or self-employed. Unfortunately, many ministers are confused about whether they are employees or self-employed in the eyes of the IRS. This article will explain the dual tax status of ministers.

The IRS is in the process of auditing hundreds of ministers to determine if they are properly filing their tax returns. Ministers who do not understand their dual tax status run a serious risk of penalties after an audit. United Methodist ministers have generally filed as self-employed for income tax purposes. An important court decision is expected in the future to determine whether this position is acceptable.

### DUAL TAX STATUS

Ministers are always self-employed for purposes of Social Security, at least for money they earn from their ministry. That means they always pay SECA; their churches cannot pay FICA for them. But most ministers are employees for income tax purposes. That's why ministers, unlike most other taxpayers, have a dual tax status.

Consider the example of Rev. Doe, an ordained Southern Baptist minister. As senior pastor of First Baptist Church, he is an employee for income tax purposes. But he is self-em-

ployed for purposes of Social Security. Because he is self-employed for Social Security purposes, he must pay SECA; his church cannot pay FICA for him. First Baptist Church should issue him a Form W-2, not a 1099. If Rev. Doe earns income from other sources, such as preaching at revivals for other churches, he reports that income as self-employment income for income tax purposes (and for Social Security purposes).

Ministers and church treasurers need to understand the dual tax status of ministers. This isn't just a theoretical concern for accountants and tax attorneys; the issue has some very concrete consequences for ministers and churches. Employees and self-employed persons complete their tax returns differently. Churches have different payroll reporting obligations for employees and for self-employed persons. And self-employed persons are more likely to be audited by the IRS.

Employees report their income on Form 1040. If they can't itemize their deductions, they may report their unreimbursed business expenses on Schedule A, but only to the extent those business expenses exceed 2 percent of their adjusted gross income. Self-employed persons, on the other hand, report both their income and business expenses on Schedule C. They can deduct their unreimbursed business expenses even if they do not itemize. That means they can deduct *all* of their unreimbursed business expenses, not just those that exceed 2 percent of their adjusted gross income.

When ministers are classified as employees for income tax purposes, they may exclude from their income up to \$50,000 in employer-paid group life insurance. Employees can also exclude from income the cost of employer-paid medical insurance.

The IRS is more likely to audit self-employed taxpayers than taxpayers who report as employees. That's because IRS data shows that employees are more likely to report their income correctly than self-employed persons. IRS statistics show that 70 percent of taxpayers who should be treated as employees, but who consider themselves self-employed, do not file tax returns. The IRS reclassified 90,000 self-employed workers as employees in 1992.

As discussed later in this article, taxpayers with income from only one source are likely to be classified as employees, not self-employed. That's why if a minister receives only one Form 1099-MISC a year, the IRS is likely to consider the minister an employee. The IRS can reclassify taxpayers who report as self-employed persons if the IRS determines they really were employees. This can result in back taxes and penalties for ministers who get reclassified. Remember that employees can deduct their business expenses only if they can itemize and only to the extent those expenses exceed 2 percent of their adjusted gross income. Ministers who get reclassified as employees may lose some deductions and wind up paying back taxes and penalties.

Churches need to understand the dual tax status of ministers. Churches

should never pay FICA for their ministerial employees; the law requires these ministers to pay SECA. Also, churches need to know whether to issue their employees 1099s or W-2s. In most cases, churches should issue their ministers a W-2 because that's the form required for employees. Churches that pay a self-employed minister at least \$600 a year should issue the minister a Form 1099-MISC. For example, Second Presbyterian Church should issue a Form W-2 to each minister on its staff. But if the same church pays an evangelist \$650 for preaching at some special services during the year, it should issue the evangelist a Form 1099-MISC.

By law, churches are not required to withhold income taxes from their minister's paychecks, even if the minister is an employee for income tax purposes. On the other hand, churches are legally required to withhold income taxes from most nonministerial employees. Many ministers voluntarily elect for their churches to withhold income taxes from their paychecks.

Most paid church workers are employees for income tax purposes, regardless of whether they are ministers or lay employees. That means their churches should issue most workers a Form W-2, not a 1099. Churches should never classify a paid worker as an independent contractor (another name for self-employed) to avoid paying FICA or payroll reporting requirements.

#### THE IRS CRITERIA

The IRS uses a list of 20 factors to evaluate whether a worker is an employee or self-employed. So just because a church calls a worker, say a janitor, an independent contractor does not mean the IRS will accept that classification. Similarly, the IRS may not accept a minister's decision to file as a self-employed person if these 20 factors suggest that person is really an employee.

The IRS criteria are only general guidelines. The IRS may emphasize some factors more than others in different cases. Here are the 20 factors:

1. *Instructions*—Employees usually

have to comply with instructions about when, where, and how to work.

2. *Training*—Employees often get training, sometimes by attending meetings, or perhaps from experienced employees.

3. *Integration*—Integration of workers' services (when the success of the business depends on the workers' performance) indicates that workers are employees.

4. *Services rendered personally*—Employees are likely to render services personally.

5. *Hiring, supervising, and paying assistants*—Workers are usually employees when the employer also hires, supervises, and pays their assistants.

6. *Continuing relationship*—An employer-employee relationship usually exists when there is a continuing relationship between the worker and the organization.

7. *Set hours of work*—Employees generally have their work times set by their employers.

8. *Full time required*—An employee usually works full-time for one employer, but an independent contractor may work for different people at the same time.

9. *Doing work on employer's premises*—Independent contractors can usually decide when and where to work, but employees generally work on employer's premises.

10. *Order or sequence set*—Workers who have to perform work in the order or sequence set by the employer are usually employees.

11. *Oral or written reports*—Workers who submit oral or written reports to employers are usually employees.

12. *Payment by the hour, week, month*—Although self-employed persons are often paid by the job, employees are generally paid by the hour, week, or month.

13. *Payment of business and/or traveling expenses*—Employers usual-

ly pay business and travel expenses for employees, but not for self-employed persons.

14. *Furnishing of tools and materials*—Employers often furnish tools and materials for employees, but not for independent contractors.

15. *Significant investment*—Employers usually provide facilities for employees, but independent contractors usually invest in their own facilities.

16. *Realization of profit or loss*—Employees do not have the risk of profit or loss, but independent contractors have this risk.

17. *Working for more than one firm at a time*—Employees tend to work for only one employer at a time, while independent contractors often work for more than one organization at a time.

18. *Making services available to general public*—Independent contractors often make their services available to the general public, but employees do not.

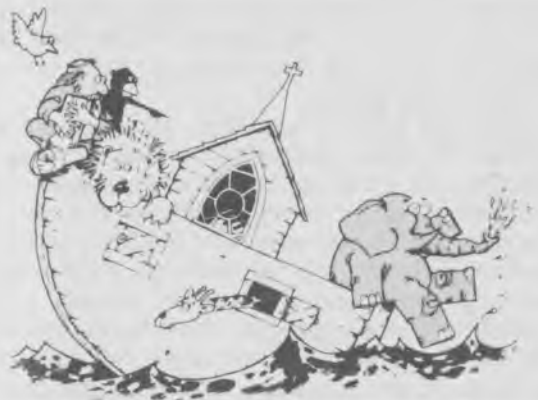
19. *Right to discharge*—Independent contractors can usually be terminated only if they do not meet the terms of their agreement, but employers can terminate employees' employment at will.

20. *Right to terminate*—Independent contractors usually have to complete the job they contracted to do, but employees can usually quit at any time.

#### SUMMARY

In summary, ministers need to know whether they are employees or self-employed for income tax purposes. But they need to remember that they are always self-employed for Social Security purposes and must therefore pay SECA. Churches need to understand the dual tax status of their clergy. Churches also need to be sure that they properly classify their paid workers as employees and fulfill all of their payroll reporting requirements.

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## Whatever Happened to Entire Sanctification?

I was invited to speak to the faculty of a holiness seminary recently and was assigned the topic, "How Holiness Preaching Has Changed." Not trusting my own experience and impressions, I shoveled the topic to a random selection of my friends—ministerial and lay. I was surprised by how closely their reflections paralleled my own. While the scope and rate of change varies sharply in differing congregations and contexts, some broad patterns are clearly discernible. Whether the changes described are good or bad will be left to the reader's judgment.

### I. CHANGES IN SERMONIC CONTENT

Garrison Keillor, creator of mythical Lake Wobegon, spins a story titled "Prophet" in which he muses:

God made mistakes in revealing the truth to man . . . made a mistake with the 10 commandments, when he put it on stone; people read it, and got tired of it. God made a mistake when he put out the Bible. Made too many copies. You spread the truth around, and it becomes common: people get used to it and then ignore it. You can read a Bible in America today by just checking into a hotel. It's too easy.

That, in part, explains the precipitous decline in two staples of the sermonic diet among churches in the Wesleyan tradition: evangelistic and holiness sermons. After decades of hearing "Ye must be born again—and again, and again," after hearing the doctrine of second blessing holiness proclaimed, praised, advocated, described, defined, explained, parsed, dissected, and analyzed down to a

gnat's eyebrow for the umpteenth time, we got used to it. We preachers got tired of preaching it, and people got tired of hearing it. They got tired of being fleeced of their faith in the pew only to have it returned to them at the altar—again, and again, and again.

And then—as if responding to some sort of inaudible signal—we simply quit talking about it. We stopped talking about sin in any accusative sort of way. We stopped preaching on hell, repentance, the wrath of God, the Rapture, the coming Judgment—anything likely to create conviction or provoke a white-knuckled, pulse-pounding, gut-wrenching decision. Likewise "entire sanctification" quietly dropped from our vocabulary, along with such classic holiness phrases as "carnal nature," "old man," "inbred sin," "eradication," "crucifixion of the self," "dying out," and especially "Christian perfection." To the contrary, we've been putting as much distance as possible between ourselves and anything that might smack of "perfectionism"! We shudder when anyone describes us as "holiness people": "We are Wesleyans, thank you."

The irony is that while we flock to Billy Graham Crusades and get tingles up and down our spine when seekers and counselors stream forward by the thousands, one has to travel long and far to hear an evangelistic sermon in anybody's church that preaches for a verdict, that divides the house, that separates goats from the sheep. Such invitations as we do give casts the net broadly enough to include everyone, avoiding the risk of anyone being labeled a "sinner," "backslider," or "not Spirit-filled."

As topical, crisis-provoking preach-

ing has diminished, expositional, process-oriented preaching has increased. We've made the happy discovery that the Bible is a big book, that God's truth ranges far beyond "Salvation One and Two," and that there is a lot of living before, between, and beyond the two crisis experiences. The rage among us now is "spiritual formation." No longer do we divide the world into the "lost" and "saved"—with the latter group subdivided into "saved" and "sanctified"; rather, we are all "sinners saved by grace," all on a spiritual journey—just at different stages along the way. This has arisen, in part, because of "sea changes" in our basic presuppositions regarding God and man. We have moved away from the God of wrath to a God of love, from the Old Testament to the New, from inherited depravity to prevenient grace. Correspondingly, our anthropological baseline has moved from Genesis 3, "man the sinner," to Genesis 1, "man created in the image of God." It is not surprising, then, that such changes in the content of preaching have precipitated . . .

### II. CHANGES IN SERMONIC STYLE

Our flag word has become—both in theology and praxis—"relationship." Preachers are working hard at bridging the gap between the pulpit and pew. Distance is abhorred; intimacy is embraced. The prophet has become priest; preaching has given way to teaching; proclamation to sharing; exhortation to encouragement; confrontation to commendation; guilt-producing conviction to guilt-alleviating affirmation. "Thus saith the Lord" has softened to "Let us

together see what we can discover from God's Word." The altar call has moved from the end of the service to the middle.

We can describe this as a shift in metaphors from "preacher as sower" to "pastor as servant." I came of age when preachers saw their task as one of listening deeply to the Word, mining its treasures through careful exegesis, and then scattering the seed about with little or no thought about the receptivity of the soil. That has changed. Now preachers listen deeply to the hurts and hopes of their people, and then go to the Word to find something relevant to their needs. The focus has shifted from "What does the Bible say?" to "What do people need to hear?" Even pastors committed to expositional series that systematically work through biblical books and themes are less concerned with what was on the mind of the author than what is on the mind of their hearers.

Correspondingly, oratory is out and conversational style is in; formal is out and casual is in; fervency is out and friendliness is in; "cold pricklies" are out and "warm fuzzies" are in. The most visible sign of this move to close the gap between preacher and parishioner is the demise of the most distinguishing piece of sanctuary furniture in a Protestant church: the pulpit. Not only are preachers more prone to move away from it, but many have removed it altogether, replacing it with a lectern or nothing at all. What has precipitated such marked—and in some cases—radical change in preaching content and style?

### III. CULTURAL SHIFTS THAT SHAPE PREACHING TODAY

First is the shift toward **Secularism**. The pervasiveness of the secular spirit is immediately apparent as we look at the church sanctuaries we are building—which bear far more resemblance to corporate headquarters than a cathedral. Sanctuaries, or "sanctinaniums," may or may not have a pulpit, Communion table, altar rail, open Bible, or cross. There will be, however, a platform littered with microphones, black cords, overhead projectors, music stands, electric guitars, drum sets,

keyboards, speaker boxes, and gigantic screens. The prayer chapel may once have been the nerve center of the church; now it is the lights and sound control board.

The invasiveness of the secular spirit has profoundly affected preaching. There has been a decided shift in focus from the next life to this, from "flee from the wrath of God" to "embrace the Kingdom," from expecting miracles to explaining principles, from the purposes of God to possibilities for man, from theology to psychology. Preaching aims not so much at transformation as at therapy.

Second is the shift toward **Education**. The rising level of intellectual sophistication has markedly affected preaching. Pastors not only are better educated than ever but also have more resources toward the development of sermons. Their sermons are more carefully organized, better prepared, and shorter. The other side of the education revolution is that congregations no longer swallow whole what the preacher says. The "Lord's anointed" no longer enjoys ex cathedra status. People think about the sermon, reflect upon it, question it, and may well take sharp issue with it in confrontational ways.

Third is the massive shift toward **Entertainment**. Preachers may eschew it, abhor it, and cry out against it, but their survival depends upon how nimbly they can catch its flow and ride its tide. As Albert Camus observes in his novel *The Plague*, "There is something cogent about the facts: sooner or later they destroy all illusions." The fact is that people come to church with minds numbed and emotions shorted out by having watched nearly 40 hours of television, computer screens, and interactive CD-ROMS already that week! Never has the competition for the listener's attention been so fierce.

To meet the challenge, preachers are intentionally moving from cognitive to visual and affective ways of communicating. Philip Yancey asks, "Why is only about ten percent of the Bible—the Epistles—written in a straight didactic form while all the rest uses the more indirect forms of history, poetry, parable, and prophet-

ic visions? Why are ninety percent of the sermons in evangelical churches based on the didactic ten percent?" (*I Was Just Wondering*, p. 153). Good question.

Happily, preachers are discovering that the multiplicity of literary forms in which the biblical message is cast is amazingly user-friendly for the entertainment mentality. They are learning that their parishioners do not live by propositional statement, carefully reasoned argument, and laboriously exegeted Scripture alone, but by pictures, poetry, parables, proverbs, narrative, fables, story, music, and drama—all of which are found ready-made in the Bible. Likewise, preachers understand that they have about two minutes to set the hook and tease the listener to hear what they want to say in their introduction, or many in the congregation will simply switch channels. Preachers are also becoming more skilled at adapting to the seven-minute attention span of the listener by loading up their sermons with humor, history, current events, social commentary, intriguing facts, striking statistics, illustrations, anecdotes, and human interest stories. Innovative pastors are experimenting with incorporating musical numbers, dramatic skits, visual aids, and even dialogue with the congregation as part of their sermons. Anything to awaken the sleeper and raise the dead!

If they are so disposed, pastors no longer need to crack a Bible or commentary; they have any number of publications and services at their fingertips, providing them with all sorts of time-saving and media-friendly resources, including ready-made sermons for every Sunday, audiotapes and floppy disks included. Twice I have sat in church and listened to my sermons preached in full; the only difference was that my personal illustrations were changed to third person. After which a friend remarked, on one of the occasions, "I didn't care for that sermon the first time I heard it."

Preachers attuned to the times have learned the wisdom of Camus's description of one character in *The Stranger*: "Having nothing more to say, he said nothing more." ❧

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# WORSHIP

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# PREACHING

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# HELPS

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*Daniel Tweedy*

**September/October/November 1995**

Prepared by Daniel Tweedy

## **INTRODUCTION**

I have served over 20 years in the pastoral ministry. I still find the work of bringing contemporary meaning to ancient truth unique and rewarding. The first Bible study class I took was on the Book of Revelation. The understanding of all its secrets shall not occur in this life. However, it is engaging. To me, it is the encore of Christ. After His ascension, He once again stepped upon the global scene to share some last words. Jesus died and lived to tell about it! Through the veils and shadows of this book, some truths are clear and vital. May God bless the encore of His Son to the salvation of men and women!



# JESUS, THE PRINCE OF PURPOSE

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 1:1-3

Sept. 3, 1995

## INTRO:

From the first three verses of Revelation, consider the "Book," the "Blessing," and the "Because."

## I. THE BOOK OF REVELATION TAKES ITS NAME FROM THE SECOND WORD

A. First, Revelation involves the idea of unveiling something hidden. This gives light and knowledge to those who see it. That the Gentiles could participate in the privileges of the new covenant was made known by revelation (Eph. 3:3).

B. Second, Revelation dealt with Christian insight into spiritual truth. Paul asks for the spirit of revelation for Christians (Eph. 1:17).

C. Third, Revelation referred to the second coming of the Lord (1 Pet. 1:7, 13). In this event, three things will occur: Jesus' glory will be revealed (1 Pet. 4:13), Jesus' righteous judgment will be made known (Rom. 2:5), and Jesus' children will be revealed in full majesty (Rom. 8:19).

Truly there is much mystery in this book. But across the landscape of things as yet unclear stand some majestic mountain peaks of truth that brilliantly expose the heart and mind of Jesus.

## II. A SPECIAL BLESSING IS PRONOUNCED (v. 3)

Two significant activities draw this blessing from God.

A. The first is that of reading the words of this prophecy. The words imply an official, public reading in a worship assembly. God's Word must have a place of prominence in our corporate worship. This is the only book in the Bible of which a special blessing is pronounced on him who reads it. The content of this book is not merely prediction of things to come; it is moral counsel for immediate use.

**ILLUS.** A young boy loved to read but occasionally stumbled over hard words. He would go to his father for the meaning of a word. His father would always answer the same: "Look it up in the dictionary, son."

On one occasion he was reading a difficult book and asked his father several times about a number of words. Every time he got the same reply. The boy became frustrated and threw the book in the corner.

His dad immediately got up, picked up the book, and handed it back to him. He said: "Son, a book is the difference between a man and an ape. Now go look up that word and treat this book with more respect."

This book (Revelation) in the Book (Bible) clearly shows us how to avoid beastliness and embrace blessing. Read the Book!

B. God significantly blesses those who "take to heart what is written." This phrase is not passive but indicates active and strenuous care. We must begin to

square our lives with the truth in its pages. To treat lightly the message of its pages is enormous folly.

## III. THIS GREAT SCRIPT HAS A GIANT BECAUSE

Two reasons for its message are shared.

A. First, God intended "to show his servants what must soon take place" (v. 1). Consider this contrast. The Bible's first book presents man in innocence and bliss. Man fell into sin through Satan's cunning. Man was doomed to death and exclusion from paradise and the tree of life and delightful rivers. The last book of the Bible presents this in reverse order: first man sinning and dying, then conquering sin and death through the blood of the Lamb. The first Adam and Eve are represented by the Second Adam (Christ) and the Church, His Bride in paradise. Access to the tree of life is enjoyed. Crystal waters of life are flowing from the throne of God. Gen. 3:15 foretold the bruising of the serpent's (Satan's) head by the woman's Seed (Jesus).

Revelation declares the accomplishment of that prophecy (chaps. 19—20). Jesus desired that His Church know the powerful triumph of His kingdom and work.

**ILLUS.** Pastor Zimmerman remembers when his church burned to the ground. The church board was determined to rebuild. They secured pledges from the congregation and then looked for a bank loan. The first bank refused. They said that a church of only 50 members was no longer viable in the modern world. A second bank did give them a 20-year mortgage. It was paid off in 8.

At the celebration the pastor reminded the congregation of those facts. The church that the first bank determined to be dead was alive. Yet the bank that had made the assessment was gone, bought up by a larger bank, and afterward closed. The bank was dead; the church was alive. That story has been repeated through the ages and is threading its way to climactic fulfillment. This book is the story.

B. Christ also desired that His Church have an awareness that "the time is near" (v. 3). The series of events is about to commence. God's clock and ours do not always mesh perfectly. We must submit that to God as He calls us to a sense of urgency and attention. As we walk with God, there must be a sense of immediacy and reality. We dare not become distant and inattentive.

Peter declares, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:8-9). God's timing, or seeming lack of it, is a statement of His mercy. He allows us space to establish our

allegiance to Him and to develop a consistent walk with Him.

C. This message also has bearing for our immediate future in Kingdom work. It is preparational; it is equipping. We are not given an indefinite forever to do our work in witnessing for Christ. Jesus says to us: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:7-8).

D. Note also that our God is a God of sequential and progressively unfolding purpose. The Christian walk is not a dead-end street. It is a journey where boredom bows out. It is an odyssey infused with glad surprises. In our Christian quest, the end and the means to the end are both a blessing. The phrase "to show his servants what must soon take place" (v. 1) involves, in the original Greek language, the idea of need or necessity. These events have need or necessity of taking place.

We struggle with the shape and direction of our lives. We are puzzled with the way of the world, its destiny and ours. But I say to you today, God is a God of purpose. What we stare at through the dark evening twilight He sees in the brightness of a cloudless morn.

**IIIUS.** According to an old Hebrew legend, a man traveled on a mule through a wild and desolate area. His companion was a rooster. His shrill crowing awoke the man to his devotion time.

One night he came to a small town, looking for shelter. The inhabitants turned him away but kept his rooster and mule. Outside of the village he found a cave in which to sleep. He lit his lamp before going to bed, but a gust of wind blew out his light.

Early the next morning he returned to the town to see if he could buy some food. There he found no one alive. A band of robbers had plundered the settlement while he slept. They slew all the inhabitants.

The man began to understand his troubles. If the townspeople had received him, he would have joined them in death. If his animals had not been killed, their noise and the light from his lamp would have revealed his hiding place. He concluded that God had been good to him.

There is no way that we can explain every event. We cannot know all the forces of good and evil present in a given situation. The influences and results of evil have not been tallied and judged at this point. What we do know is that God has a purpose. We are not being haphazardly slapped around by life's events. I am reminded: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). It is our part to love Him. It is His part to form and develop His purpose. Do you love Him just now? Or have events pushed you to become dis-

tant and lethargic in your relationship to Him? He calls us to love Him and have faith in His purpose.

**ILLUS.** Near the end of the 16th century, a Christian fisherman was standing atop a cliff on one of the Orkney Islands north of Scotland. He was a spectator that day. He watched a storm batter his little house, his boat, and his fishing tackle. He was a believer, but his faith drooped as he watched the savage destruction of all he owned.

How could he know that this very same storm had sunk part of the Spanish Armada, which was headed toward England to bring with it the terror of a Spanish Inquisition? It may also have permitted the development of literary greatness, which allowed men like Shakespeare, Francis Bacon, and John Webster to do their work. And of course the monumental literary achievement of 1611 was the King James Version of the Bible.

God's purposes are grand and driven by His love. The intricate details we do not understand most of the time. You may have heard it said, "If God would give me His power, I would change a lot of things in this world; but then, if He would give me His wisdom, I would leave them just as they are."

If you do not love Jesus today, I invite you to open your heart and ask Him to warm your heart with His love. Tell Jesus that you will love Him, follow Him, and believe in His purpose for you and all mankind. Take this truth to heart, and you will be blessed! His purpose is to reveal himself to you, bless you, and involve you in His purpose!

#### **SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

Welcome and Announcements  
Textual Reading Rev. 1:1-3  
Recognizing God's Purpose Through Song  
    "Open My Eyes That I May See"  
    "Take My Life and Let It Be"  
    "All for Jesus"  
    "Surely Goodness and Mercy"  
    "Lord, Be Glorified"  
Prayer for His Purpose to Be Accomplished  
Monetary Gifts for the Purpose of God  
Special Music  
Lord's Day Message "JESUS, THE PRINCE OF  
PURPOSE"  
Open Altar Invitation—Seeking His Purpose  
Benediction

#### **Creative Worship Ideas**

##### **Pastoral Prayer**

Develop a church prayer calendar. Assign a few names to each day. Pray specifically for the people whose names appear on that particular Sunday.

##### **Worship**

Ministry spotlight: Interview a layman in a particular ministry (share obstacles, results).

# JESUS, COMPANION OF SAINTS

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 1:9

Sept. 10, 1995

## INTRO:

John declares himself to be our "brother and companion." The meaning of these words indicates a unity brought by the bond of affection. He is a fellow believer, a joint participator, and a partner. The person of Christ is the cohesive that unites all believers. First Pet. 2:17 urges, "Love the brotherhood of believers."

John wishes to dissipate any fear or suspicion about himself. His message has eternal importance. It must be heard. There must be some credibility about his person for his message to be heard. His words carry a personal challenge. We must be more ready to foster brotherhood and companionship in the Body of Christ than to arouse suspicion and distrust. Upon this basis, John introduces three areas of Christian living that we share with Jesus.

## I. WE ARE COMPANIONS TOGETHER IN SUFFERING

In the original Greek language this word carries the idea of pressure or a pressing together. This may be brought about by oppression, tribulation, affliction, or distress. John was placed on this rocky island as a result of his preaching Christ. Separated from his people and his ministry, John experienced forced seclusion and lonely meditation. The sea, the sky, the small island were his companions. The series of visions could have occupied the apostle for some weeks. It is true that the strange times of life can be the great times of life.

A. This companionship requires a certain humility. There had been a time in John's life when he desired that he and his brother would be permitted to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus in His coming kingdom. But this Kingdom is not built on pride and arrogance. Our companionship is in the sufferings of Christ. The American Standard Version has the words "partaker with you" instead of "companion." We participate with Jesus and our brothers in suffering. Jesus suffered the ignominious Cross. He knows all about suffering. He testified to all of us: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

ILLUS. The United Nations Building had just been erected on the banks of the East River in New York City. Evangelist Billy Graham went on a tour of the building with a friend who was an ambassador from another country. The friend showed Rev. Graham an empty room and declared, "This is the prayer room." But the room was absolutely empty. There was no symbol, nothing to indicate that there was any God at all. When the United Nations was founded, it was agreed that the word "God" should be left out of its charter. The world has left God out of its planning and suffers still in godless agony. In our own personal lives, we must humble ourselves before Jesus so that we may enjoy His companionship.

B. The suffering fulfills a purpose.

How is it that many of the people of Heb. 11:33-38 were triumphant in this world, but many were not? Why did some suffer? Listen to verses 39 and 40: "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." We join as companions with the suffering saints of old. God is bringing us all to His perfection. God's timing and our association with one another are critical. Five key words stand out: "God had planned something better."

Augustine, the Early Church father, said, "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist."\* In this world we shall never know all the "whys" of suffering. But please know that our great Companion in suffering knows the "why," and He says, "It's worth the hurt." So, friend, take courage; hold on!

## II. WE ARE ALSO COMPANIONS TOGETHER IN STANDING

We share the Kingdom with Christ. We enjoy a high position. We know the King of Kings on a first-name basis. In the midst of pressure and suffering, it is imperative that we remember who we are. God's kingdom is a present energy. John's attitude rejoices that eternal life is already present. Jesus says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). Again Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, he who believes [on me, KJV] has everlasting life" (6:47). Between the two words "suffering" and "endurance," this word, "kingdom," sparkles. It is a kingdom in the middle of sorrow and struggle.

A. This word, "kingdom," is a reminder of triumph and power in the very center of trial.

ILLUS. Once I read of a tribe of Indians in southwest Mexico called the Mazatecs. It was written that these people seldom wish anyone well. Not only that, they rarely teach one another or share anything good.

There is a reason. They believe in what the author calls "limited good." They believe that there is only so much good, a certain amount of knowledge, a certain amount of love to go around. To teach someone else means you drain yourself of knowledge. To love a second child means you have to love the first child less. Even if you tell someone, "Have a good day," those words will give away some of your own happiness—and you can't get it back. There is only so much to go around.

Sometimes that spiritual mentality creeps into the Christian's mind-set. When trials and suffering ensue, we are tempted to recede and wane in our spiritual fervor. We are tempted to take a dim view of Jesus' enterprise. But His work is not a two-bit revolution in a small country. It is a full-blown kingdom. His power and dominion and supply are endless. "And God is able to make all grace abound

to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

B. In regard to this Kingdom, we rule ourselves when we submit our will to His keeping. A man who rules his own spirit is a true king (Prov. 16:32, KJV). If you rule your own life, you are at the mercy of your passions. Your conscience is a ghost in the day and a nightmare at night. I can enjoy reasonable peace as a citizen of my country because I have submitted my life to its laws. God's kingdom offers a much higher form of peace that exceeds all earthly turbulence. Have you, my friend, joined His great kingdom? Don't wait for heaven; His kingdom is shared even now!

### III. WE ARE ALSO COMPANIONS IN STEADFASTNESS

The phrase "patient endurance" carries several ideas.

A. The ideas of constancy, endurance, and steadfastness are found here. Do not waffle or waver. Build on the solid Rock.

B. This phrase is characteristic of a man who is unswerving in his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith by even the greatest trials and sufferings. Suffering has a way of keeping a sharp focus on what is truly valuable in life. Keep the faith; do not waver!

C. This phrase involves the idea of patience and expectancy, a "waiting for." God does not call us to hold on, close our eyes, grit our teeth, and wait till this is over. There needs to be a "leaning forward" in our patience. We are not called to passive endurance. The Bible says, "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Heb. 12:1).

**ILLUS.** Nelson was a high school swimmer. He dreamed of making it to the Olympics one day. He worked as a lifeguard at his high school pool. On a particular day, no one was around. He got bored. He thought it would be pretty cool if he would jump into the pool from high up on the spectators' balcony. But as he started his dive, he slipped and fell short of the pool. He shattered both hands and wrists on the surrounding deck. Now he had pins holding his hands and wrists together. Doctors told him he would probably never swim again.

He was devastated. But Nelson had a coach named Chris. Chris refused to give up on his potential as a swimmer. He made him get back into the water as soon as the casts were off, even though he couldn't swim a bit. He pushed Nelson to work his legs and then his arms back into condition. Late one afternoon Nelson told his coach that he was too tired to go on. Chris said nothing. He went around and pulled all the ladders out of the pool, turned off the lights, and left.

He left Nelson all alone in the pool. The only way he could get out of the water without using his fragile wrists was to hook his elbows through the rungs of the ladder, and now the ladders were gone. In order to stay afloat, Nelson had to keep kicking. Twenty minutes later Chris returned and replaced the ladders. He had proved that Nelson could do more than he thought he could. A few weeks later, Nelson was swimming.

An interesting note is that Nelson Diebold won the gold medal at Barcelona in 1992. Later on, Nelson learned that while he was thrashing helplessly in the water, ladders gone and lights turned off, his coach had been watching him from the spectators' balcony. With all of his fear, he wasn't alone.

At times our feelings testify to us that this is what God has done to us. He's taken our ladders and turned out our lights. But he looks on from the balcony—the point from which we may have failed. He knows our point of view. Speaking of Jesus, the writer of Hebrews said, "We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (4:15). I say to you with joy, Jesus is our Companion in suffering and also in patient endurance. Are you in His kingdom today?

\*Billy Graham, *Till Armageddon* (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1981), 55.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and Announcements	
Chorus	"Bind Us Together"
Unified Prayer	
Responsive Scripture Reading	Eph. 4:1-6
Worship in Song	"I Love to Walk with Jesus"
	"Jesus Will Walk with Me"
	"Oh, How He Loves You and Me"
	"There's Something About That Name"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Worship with Special Music	
Lord's Day Message	"JESUS, COMPANION OF SAINTS"
Unified Prayer	
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Pastoral Prayer*

Begin and end your worship service with prayer while gathered at the altar.

##### *Read Responsively*

Read responsively: men-women, youth-aged, pulpit-pew, geographically (one-half sanctuary with other half).

# JESUS, LORD OF LIGHT

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 1:10-20

Sept. 17, 1995

## INTRO:

The last child had left home for college. Valerie's husband was resting next to her on the couch. His head was nestled in her lap. She carefully removed his glasses. In a sweet voice she said, "You know, honey, without your glasses you look like the same handsome young man I married."

With a grin he replied, "Honey, without my glasses, you still look pretty good too!"

Most of us would like to see some things a little better than they now appear. The apostle John got the chance. John "turned around to see" (v. 12). As he did, he saw the Lord of Light as he had never seem Him previously. The brilliance of that occasion was stunning. In a time of persecution, John began to understand that the piercing light of Christ was determined to triumph over the darkness in the world.

## I. NOTICE THE MENTION OF THE LESSER LUMINARIES

"In his [Jesus'] right hand he held seven stars" (v. 16). He explains in verse 20 that these are the "angels" of the seven churches mentioned in verse 11. It is widely believed that these are the ministers whom God used as messengers to the churches. God has ordained that there would be men who would be called and equipped to carry the light of the gospel to the saving of people. These are the stars in the sky of the Church. Consider the men of ministry as the stars of God.

A. Stars are guides in the night, and so are the Lord's true ministers. Their work guides people to an eternal safe haven.

The work of ministers gives meaning and hope to life. It reflects the Light of the World into the dark corners of everyday life. It shares the good news of God's purpose for every man and woman.

B. Stars are the comfort and solace of the night, and so are the Lord's true ministers. Isaiah says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news" (52:7). Many times I myself have received spiritual blessing from other ministers of the gospel.

C. These stars were honorably placed. The right hand of Jesus represents a place of dignity. Many people focus on fallen ministers. Reportedly, one minister per day falls morally in the United States. But why focus on that? Multiplied thousands of ministers today faithfully do God's will. God takes men and women and makes them ministers of Christ and gives them light to share.

D. Notice also that, as with the stars, the hand of Christ sustains the ministers. This office and its success has its perils. Let a person immerse himself in following his Leader in this calling, and he will become the target of Satan's arrows. Christ alone sustains sufficiently. Expe-

rience, abilities, and knowledge alone will not deliver. The hand of Christ protects us as the only safe haven. May God save us from the smoking embers of dying ministries!

## II. NOTICE THE LESSONS OF THE SEVEN GOLDEN LAMPSTANDS

These lampstands represent the seven churches of Asia Minor mentioned earlier. But the application of truth presented spans all time and geography. This truth reaches to us today. Our church is represented by a lampstand.

A. The church should function as a conveyor of light. The lampstands could send out no light unless they had received both oil and fire from another source. In Scripture both these items symbolize the Holy Spirit. Many church attenders have no understanding of the person or work of the Holy Spirit. To be an instrument of light, the church must submit to and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

B. The gold in the description symbolizes great value. Jesus gave His very life for the Church. It is His Bride, His love. The Church remains His occupation and pre-occupation.

C. The Church, as does gold, speaks of duration. For all its peril, the Church has never been in danger of extinction. Neither time nor trial tarnishes its brilliance.

## III. THIS PASSAGE HAS AN AMAZING DESCRIPTION OF OUR GREAT LORD OF LIGHT

Christ's identity with the human race in the Incarnation is reinforced in the description of His human features. He has feet, hands, eyes, and a voice. Even in His glorified eternal form, Jesus still remains "a son of man" (v. 13).

A. Though now with the Father, Jesus still infuses His energy into our eternal welfare. He still has a message for us. He longs to interact with us. He desires to be reflected through us, His people. Are you absorbing His light today?

**ILLUS.** Malcolm Wells has said: "Last year, somewhere on the leaves of a forgotten sugarcane plant, a bit of sunlight ended its eight-minute dash to earth. Somehow, the plant turned that sunlight into sugar. Somehow that sugar got into my morning tea. I sipped last year's sunshine at breakfast. Now it starts to feed these old muscles. It's dark now, and I start for home on my bicycle. The muscled sunlight suddenly becomes pedal-power, then chain-pull, wheel-spin, generator-whine, filament-heat, and finally—from the headlamp—light again!"\* And I also add that the light of Christ is on a journey. If it has been poured into you, it should come out of you in your attitudes, reactions, and disposition, in the spirit you carry.

B. Note that this vision is spiritual. It completely outstrips human imagination. How could you see eyes of fire within a face shining like the sun? How can we imagine a voice that sounds like a great waterfall or the waves of the ocean? How could we wash His feet while they burn in a furnace? We may learn lessons from these descriptions. His appearance here races beyond our mind and emotions to touch our eternal spirits. The Lord of the Church is the Lord of Light. Notice the references to light. He has eyes of fire, glowing feet, stars in His hand, and a face shining like the sun as He walks among the lampstands.

1. His light is the light of omniscience. He has eyes of fire. He sees everything. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows all evil and wrong. He also knows our lives with their highs and lows.

2. His feet were glowing. This is a fitting description of the One who has brought to us the triumphant gospel. Paul writes, quoting Isaiah: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom. 10:15). We are reminded of the beauty of the gospel. That Christ died for my sins—that shall always be above fairy tale and fantasy! It's the most beautiful message ever heard. Take it to your heart, and believe that His salvation is yours today! These feet remind us of the triumph of His gospel. Several times the Scriptures speak of the idea that God has put everything under the feet of Jesus (Ps. 8:6; 110:1; Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Cor. 15:25, 27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 1:13; 2:7-8; 10:13). This is a picture of ultimate, beautiful triumph!

3. His face shone like the sun. Rev. 21:23 indicates that Christ is the Lamp of heaven. Matthew's Gospel says that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (13:43). Whatever shone upon Christ that day will shine upon all believers one day!

4. His presence deals with the darkness of fear. "Do not be afraid" were His words (v. 17). In the presence of Jesus, tormenting fear must take a backseat!

Many of us come to our Christ, and come to this book, and sense uneasiness, fear, even terror. Many times the cause of fear springs from a misconception of our Lord. Jesus is the Champion of courage. He calls us to gaze upon His light and dismiss our fears. Will you refuse to be fearful any longer, my Christian friend?

5. His presence deals with the darkness of uncertainty and confusion. He declares, "I am the First and the Last" (v. 17). Strange trials come upon us, and we wonder about this Christian faith. The One who has no beginning or end has given us a sense of beginning and end. He is the First, the Initiator of all things as we know them, and He is the Last. He knows how to create, and He knows how to conclude. There is a boundary and definition to this process of life, and our Lord controls it all.

6. His presence deals with the darkness of death. Jesus died but now refers to himself as "the Living One" (v. 18). He is now "alive for ever and ever!" He has pierced this darkness and shone His light on the other

side of the mortal divide. We now see Him holding "the keys of death." That which was dark and foreboding has now lost its gloomy grip. Our Lord is the Locksmith who has made the keys that unlock the passage of our eternal destiny. His presence lights the pathway!

**ILLUS.** Mr. Clyde Chestnut boarded a jet in Los Angeles. He became very ill and collapsed. In his fall, he bloodied his face. A young woman passenger quickly stepped forward to help. She wiped the blood from his nose, made sure he was breathing, cradled him in her arms, and offered quiet assurance.

When the paramedics arrived, she briefed them on what had happened. That was January 29, 1992.

Mr. Chestnut recovered and went home to Austin, Tex. He had received a new pacemaker in his chest. He wrote a letter of gratitude to the young woman. Her name was Caroline Sapp. He was very grateful for her tender loving care. However, he admits that he almost passed out a second time on that day when he awakened to discover himself cradled in the arms of Miss America! Friends, that is the stuff of rare fantasy.

But I say to you on the authority of Scripture that one day all believers shall awaken in the immediate presence of Christ.

### CONCLUSION:

And so we see that stars shine, and so do lamps. Overseeing all of this is the face of the Son of God, as bright as the sun. His light is repeated and reflected in many ways so that all people may leave the darkness of sin and come to His light of salvation. He may give you His light through a minister. He may give you His light through the church. He may give you His light personally. But His light will shine upon you! Will you walk in that light today?

\*Malcolm Wells, *Reader's Digest*, August 1991, 99.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and Announcements	
Worshiping the Light	"The Light of the World" "All Hail King Jesus"
Scripture Reading	1 John 1:7 "Shine, Jesus, Shine" "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"
Praying for His Light	
Special Music	
Receiving the Tithes and Offerings	
Lord's Day Message	"JESUS, LORD OF LIGHT"
Altar Invitation	
Choral Response	"Sunshine in My Soul"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Pastoral Prayer

Lead your people in the Lord's Prayer. Teach them this prayer from two or more translations to revive its meaning.

##### Worship Idea

Invite a layperson to share a recent positive visitation report or prayer group report.

# EPHESUS—LIVELY LABOR, LEFT LOVE

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 2:1-7,

Sept. 24, 1995

## INTRO:

Ephesus, a place of magic arts and mystery cults, was also a place where the apostle Paul labored for three years. The noted saints Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos ministered there. Pastor Timothy worked there. Even the apostle John preached there in his old age. This church was touched by some of the finest Christian influence of that era. Yet something has now changed.

## I. NOTICE CHRIST AND HIS COMPLIMENTS

He initially reinforces what is positive in the church. He initiates the message saying, "I know." Christ has complete clearness of mental vision, which photographs all facts of life while they are passing. Everything stands open and naked before Him.

A. Jesus compliments their actions and efforts. They serve as people of deeds and hard work. Not just hearers, they were doers of the Word. The average person works about 90,000 hours during a lifetime. The Ephesian Christians were pulling their share of the 90 grand. They were busily involved in building the kingdom of Christ.

B. Jesus compliments their attitudes.

1. The Christians exemplify tenacious perseverance. They remained steadfast.

**ILLUS.** I grew up in the auto racing capital of the world, Indianapolis. The name Mickey Thompson used to be one of the most recognized names in auto racing. His team could build the fastest cars on the track. They could fly! It's interesting, though, that not one of those cars ever brought Thompson the checkered flag. His cars took the lead in the first 29 races they entered, but they never won a race. They never finished! Thompson could build the fastest cars, but not cars that would last. Engines blew. Gearboxes broke. Carburetors failed. The cars began as good starters and quick runners, but were not good for the distance!

The original Greek text of verse 2 indicates suffering, weariness, and exhausting labor. The phrase "hard work" properly means a "beating." It indicates excessive labor that produces even grief or sadness. These believers had no intention of midcourse failure.

2. This church can bear any ferocious storm except that of impostors in her membership. It is thought that the Nicolaitans (v. 6) were part of the Gnostic sect and taught the most impure doctrines. They followed the most impure practices. The very word, Nicolaitan, means to conquer or overthrow the people, or laity. To them, sexual vice was not vice. They taught the foolish notion that for a person to master sensuality, he must know the whole range of it by experience. Thus, he should abandon himself without reserve to the lusts of the body. According to them, these desires concerned only the body. They had nothing to do

with the spirit of a person. The basic maxim was that all evil resides in matter. The Bible teaches that sin resides in the heart of man. The Nicolaitans could freely eat the meat offered to idols. I understand that they would mix pagan rites with Christian ceremonies. These heretics were rejected and expelled by the Ephesian church, zealous for the truth!

## II. NOTICE CHRIST AND HIS CALL

A. Jesus beckons His people to return to Him. He does this by frankly declaring to them that they had forsaken their first love. The word "forsaken" (v. 4) means, in the original Greek text, to no longer keep, to give up. They had not accidentally lost their first love; it was voluntarily given up. Perhaps they had become unlovely in wrestling with the Nicolaitan controversy.

The enemies of the church are mainly those within itself. Outside evil and temptation are readily defeated when the internal spirit of the church is healthy. Without it, the church slides into inconsistency, inefficiency, and the influence of false teaching. Jesus delivers us from such mischief. He calls us to himself.

What was this "first love"? It has to be premier devotion to Jesus Christ. Jesus said to a serving but frazzled Martha, "Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better" (Luke 10:42). Mary had been sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to what He said. God calls us to unadulterated devotion to the person, work, and message of Jesus Christ.

B. Jesus calls them and us to remember. It is so easy for our memories to grow dim. The blessedness of yesterday seems lost in today's schedule. Jesus says, "Remember the height from which you have fallen!" (v. 5). If you can look back to a day when you knew God more closely than you do today, then this message is for you! A failed memory is costly.

**ILLUS.** Jorge Muniz is a pop singer. Once, in Mexico City, he tried to sing the "Himno Nacional de Mexico" before a boxing match. Mexico is very protective of its beloved song. That day Jorge forgot some of the words and got others wrong while singing this anthem. It turned out that he was fined 1 million pesos—about \$400—because it was disrespect of a national symbol.

I believe that there is benefit in the occasional glance over the shoulder. A vibrant memory keeps us in perspective. We must remember the high points of our Christian walk, lest we embarrass ourselves and disrespect our Lord in that final day.

C. Jesus calls them to repent. They are called to change their attitude and conduct before it is too late. The Christians hated wickedness more than they loved Christ. You can mix impure passion with moral correctness and, as a result, fall from Christian love. Rare indeed is the church where someone does not need

the message of repentance. If your love for Jesus has waned, if controversy and conflict have drained your spirit of tender love, my friend, you need to repent. You must turn to Jesus in sorrow and ask His forgiveness. It seems a simple thing to do. To those who have wallowed long in spiritual apathy, it is a Herculean thing to do.

D. Jesus cautions them about removal. If no repentance was evident, then Jesus said, "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (v. 5). He would "unchurch" them. There would be meaningless ministry, if any. They would suffer a famine of the Word. Jesus' presence would be absent. A void of darkness would exist where once shone the light of their lampstand. We have no evidence that this church ever did repent. More than that, the warning was fulfilled. The church there became utterly extinct. For ages, there was not one professing Christian in Ephesus.

### III. NOTICE CHRIST AND HIS CHARGE

A. They must begin to listen to the Spirit of God. God's perspectives and directives must become theirs. And they must become ours.

**ILLUS.** An announcement came across the intercom of a passenger jet. The pilot announced that the warning light for the thermal expander valve on the number two engine was on. He would not fly until it was replaced. He asked the passengers to return to the terminal waiting room. In 10 minutes, they were told to reboard. A passenger from Hartland, Minn., asked a flight attendant if they had received the thermal expander valve already. She replied, "My land, no! There's not one of those things within a thousand miles. They got us a new pilot."

When the voice of the Spirit speaks, there are options! We can do other things! But the highest blessings, the most noble living, and eternal comfort come through following the God who made us.

B. Jesus challenges them to be overcomers. The sin and degradation and ungodliness of this world must be laid aside. Through His grace we can triumph.

**ILLUS.** The emperor Timur (Tamerlane) had an army that was defeated and scattered in all directions. The emperor had to go into hiding. He found himself hiding in an old barn. While there, he observed an ant trying to carry off a kernel of corn. This kernel was larger than the ant, and the ant needed to push it over a wall in order to get it out of the barn. Tamerlane watched the ant struggle with that kernel of corn, pushing it up the wall. The ant almost reached the top, but it fell, and so did the corn. The ant didn't quit. It pushed the kernel of corn back up that wall. Sixty-nine times this event was repeated. At last, on the 70th try, the ant was successful. The kernel went

over the wall. Watching that, Tamerlane made a commitment. He said, "If an ant can do it, so can I." He went out, reorganized his army, and came back to defeat the enemy.

C. Jesus invites them to anticipate paradise. The word "paradise" indicates a garden of pleasure. Our finite minds are really bankrupt when we attempt to calculate God's pleasure for us. Jesus says, "I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" (v. 7). The first promise given in these letters is also the last and highest accomplishment. Three times in the last chapter (22) the tree of life is mentioned. It implies living with God eternally. We are told that this tree bears fruit every month. His blessings will be constant and fresh always. The love life of the Ephesians had waned. Now Jesus offers life ever abundant and new.

A condition is given: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life" (22:14). The Ephesians had suffered a tainted or stained discipleship. It was not crisp and clean and attractive. Maybe God wants to rinse away some debris, some misconceptions, some misplaced affections, and release you from the earthliness of sin that you may truly know Jesus Christ.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Phil. 3:7-10, 13b-14
Invocation	
Worship in Song	Hymn, "And Can It Be?" Hymn, "My Savior's Love" Chorus, "Where the Spirit of the Lord Is" Chorus, "Thy Loving-kindness"
Pastoral Prayer	
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	
Lord's Day Message	"EPHESUS—LIVELY LABOR, LEFT LOVE"
Altar Invitation	
Choral Benediction	"Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Pastoral Prayer

Utilize a triple invocation. Invite three people to pray for God's special work in three areas of worship—song, giving, sermon etc. In Pastoral Prayer time, affirm the prayers of laypeople.

##### Worship Idea

Arrange for teens or others to introduce the sermon with a skit.



# SMYRNA

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 2:8-11

Oct. 1, 1995

## INTRO:

Jesus told the church at Smyrna that He died but came to life again. Jesus died and lived to tell about it.

**ILLUS.** An article in *Newsweek* magazine some time back contained a letter from the Greenville County, South Carolina, Department of Social Services. The letter was written to a dead person. It read like this: "Your food stamps will be stopped effective immediately, because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances."\*

There was a change in Jesus' circumstances! He returned alive and well. It's never been recorded that Jesus died again, just that He rose again. Jesus now enjoys His last life and the last laugh on death.

## I. OUR RESURRECTED CHRIST CONFRONTS FRUSTRATIONS WITH HIS CHURCH

A. Jesus enables His own to deal with affliction. The meaning of this word (v. 9) is crushing beneath a weight. This church at Smyrna was under pressure. The root meaning for the word "Smyrna" is "bitterness." It also indicates "myrrh," the ointment associated with death. The Christians there faced several components of bitter pressure.

Much of the time we feel distressed with things that nibble at our nerves. But these Christians faced deep "soul squeeze." The pressure ahead would touch the nerve of their eternal destiny. Flaky commitment would not endure. In the crucible of testing, we really find out who we are, and we tune our direction in life.

**ILLUS.** Julio Iglesias had hoped to become a soccer player. A serious car accident destroyed his hopes. As he lay injured in a Madrid hospital, he learned to play the guitar. He also learned to sing. Five years later he won an international singing contest. He moved on to sell more record albums than any other vocalist on the planet. He attributes his success to lessons he learned while facing his crisis.

Crisis events in our lives, those moments or even years of pressure, cause us to define our direction and purpose in life. If you find yourself "pressurized" this day, please know that our resurrected Lord has come to stand by you! From first to last, He has an enormous grasp of your Smyrna!

B. Jesus enables His own to deal with poverty. The world views poverty as lack of provision. In the New Testament, poverty and Christianity are often closely connected. Jesus even said, "Blessed are you who are poor" (Luke 6:20). Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that he was "poor, yet making many rich" (2 Cor. 6:10). James talks of God choosing "the poor of this world to be rich in faith" (James 2:5, NASB).

Most of the Christians belonged to the lower classes

of society. The gap between the top and bottom of the social scale was very wide. There were times when heathen mobs would suddenly attack the Christians and wreck their homes. Followers of Jesus may be called upon to endure poverty.

C. Jesus enables His Church to deal with imprisonment and persecution (v. 10). In our day, imprisonment may seem a good deal better than the death penalty. But in that day, imprisonment was merely the prelude to death. A person was only a prisoner until he was led out to die.

The good news in persecution was that it would last "ten days," meaning that it would have a limit. God puts a timetable on the issue of suffering for His people.

## II. OUR RESURRECTED CHRIST CONQUERS FEAR WITHIN HIS CHURCH

For all that this church was facing, it was instructed not to fear. Fear can be debilitating.

**ILLUS.** The legendary football coach, Knute Rockne, knew the power of fear. His Notre Dame team faced a critical game against a vastly superior Southern California team. Rockne recruited every well-built student he could find at his school and suited up about 100 "hulks" in the school uniform. On game day, the USC team ran onto the field and awaited the Fighting Irish. Then out of the dressing room came an army of green giants who kept on coming and coming. It caused panic. The USC coach reminded his team that only 11 could play at a time. The damage, however, was already done. USC lost, beaten by fear.

Our Lord knows that if we are ridden by fear and dread, we cannot live victoriously in Jesus. It's hard to hear the voice of the Spirit. It's hard to overcome with such useless baggage! Let His courage fill you.

A. Suffering is admitted, but it is not an excuse to fear. Jesus' life is our example. It is a saga drenched in fearful events. Even when Jesus was born, He was an intended murder victim. But in His spirit, you find no quaking or quivering! There is poise and peace. He wasn't doing His own work. The Father was in control. To dismiss this fear, release your Smyrna experience into the Father's hands.

B. Fear is forbidden in totality. The phrase "Do not be afraid" (v. 10) literally means "fear nothing" (Amp.). There are 366 "fear not" phrases in the Bible. God means it.

## III. OUR RESURRECTED CHRIST CALLS TO FAITHFULNESS WITHOUT LIMITS

Jesus said, "Be faithful" (v. 10). It literally means, "keep on becoming faithful." There must be a progressive attitude among all disciples of Jesus. We will never "know it all" in this great journey.

A. This faithfulness is even unto death.

**ILLUS.** Chuck McIlhenny pastors a church in San Francisco. He discovered that his organist was a homosexual, so he asked him to step down from his position in the church. He firmly believed that practicing homosexuals should not be leading a church service. Militant homosexual activists threatened to kill Chuck and burn down his church. Then one night a ball of fire raced through his bedroom window, set to consume anything or anyone that got in its way. Thankfully, Chuck and his family survived. They have endured endless graffiti on the church and relentless phone threats of death and perversion.

Whatever comes our way, we must hold to the truth of Christ in the spirit of Christ!

B. This faithfulness is to keep the truth entrusted to us. Some there hypocritically dabbled with the truth and slandered the true Christians (v. 9).

**ILLUS.** Danny was about 12. His teacher was an evolutionist who scoffed at the idea of God and ridiculed him. Danny was a Christian but did not argue with the teacher. However, he would set his Bible on top of his other books. This irritated the teacher, so he began to single Danny out and ask him questions, to which he would reply, "I don't know." This badgering kept up until almost the end of the year. The teacher came in one morning, opened his desk drawer, and took out an egg. He said, "We are going to prove this God business. Danny, I want you to pray that when I drop this egg, it will hit the floor and bounce back up into my hand. You may pray silently."

Danny said, "I will pray out loud." He prayed, "Lord, I pray that when my teacher drops this egg, it will break into a thousand pieces, and at the same moment, my teacher will fall over dead."

The teacher looked at Danny, looked at the egg, put the egg back in the drawer, closed the drawer, and said, "Class dismissed."

Sometimes even "eggnostics" doubt their doubts. They have a little belief. They dare not doubt too much. But even if Satan succeeds at making us appear as fools, we must remain faithful at all costs.

#### IV. OUR RESURRECTED CHRIST CONFESSES THE FUTURE OF HIS CHURCH

A. To the faithful, Jesus promises the crown of life. The word "of" means "that consists of." The meaning is that the faithful will receive the crown "that consists of life." This word is associated with joy and victory. It is not a royal crown that is being offered but a crown of victory and joy. Such a crown the athletes of old would wear when victorious. It was common for people of that day to wear crowns that were wreaths of flowers at banquets. This crown of God speaks of festivity, joy, celebration.

B. To the faithful, Jesus promises no injury by the second death. This is quite a promise because death is the most fearful thing of which we have any knowledge.

As death cuts off from life, so the second death cuts off from eternal life. Jesus says that cannot happen to the overcomers. No one in the Bible has ever been promised freedom from the first death. All of us have opportunity to remain unscathed by the second death.

**ILLUS.** In 1847 a young doctor in Edinburgh publicly introduced chloroform as an anesthetic. He had discovered a way to take the pain out of surgery. When people receive chloroform, they go to sleep for a while.

It is reported that he was once lecturing at the University of Edinburgh. A student asked him what he considered his most important discovery. His reply was that his most valuable discovery was finding the love of God! There seems to be some proof.

Sir James Simpson and his wife had a little girl. They loved her dearly. One day she was taken sick. All the medicines in her father's black bag couldn't make her well again. She went to heaven. They buried her body in an Edinburgh cemetery. A stone was raised over her grave. And there her name was carved in marble with the dates that spanned her short life. One more word appeared. Twelve letters. It was simply the word "Nevertheless"! Can you imagine what went on in the minds of those parents! The grave, the stone, the tears, the pain, the unanswered questions—ah, but nevertheless . . . The man who could take the pain out of surgery met the Man who could take the pain out of death. He could say, "Nevertheless."

\*Duncan King, "Taking the Risk out of Dy(e)ing," *Dynamic Preaching*, April 1993, 13.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Pastoral Welcome	
Call to Worship	Sanctuary Choir
Congregational Worship	Hymn, "Come, Thou Fount"
	Chorus, "The Battle Belongs to the Lord"
	Chorus, "To Every Generation"
	Chorus, "Behold, What Manner of Love"
	Chorus, "Our God Reigns"
Stewardship Report	
Celebrating God's Goodness with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	
Sanctuary Choir	
Worship in Prayer	
Lord's Day Message	"SMYRNA"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Pastoral Prayer*

Invite several people to stand and state a prayer request. Invite the congregation to gather in groups around petitioners and pray for those needs. Pastor leads in concluding prayer.

##### *Worship Idea—Stewardship Report*

Have the chairman of a church board committee give a report to the congregation with a view to encouraging stewardship.

# THYATIRA—A CALL FOR INTOLERANCE

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 2:18-29

Oct. 8, 1995

## INTRO:

Our Lord is introduced as One who has "eyes . . . like blazing fire" (v. 18). This matches the statement "I am he who searches hearts and minds" (v. 23). His eyes penetrate all the recesses of our hearts and minds. Nothing about us is hidden from Him. Jesus knows your birth date, your death date, everything in between and beyond. At times we may feel that we are out of the mainstream of God's thinking, but His eyes are upon us.

**ILLUS.** I saw the cartoon of Dennis the Menace who is in the office of the eye doctor. His mother's eyes are being tested, and Dennis says to the doctor, "I hope you're not gonna give her eyeglasses. She sees too much already."

The knowledge that is resident with Christ may seem fearful to some. But to those who are reaching toward Him, it is a great comfort.

## I. JESUS TOOK NOTE OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF HIS CHURCH

A. Perseverance was born within. They persevered in love and faith.

B. Perseverance was evidenced without. Their lives were filled with deeds, service, and "doing."

C. They were growing in perseverance. Jesus said to them, "You are now doing more than you did at first" (v. 19).

**ILLUS.** The explorer tried for years to get an audience with Queen Isabella. She was rather preoccupied with the war against the Moors. Columbus's crazy idea of sailing west to get to the East didn't interest her much. Finally he got his hearing, and the queen referred the matter to a committee. Five years later this committee recommended the queen not supply money or ships because this man's plan was not feasible.

Columbus did not give up. A second committee considered his proposal for one year. They accepted his idea but said it was too expensive.

But Columbus persisted until the queen gave him what he wanted just to get rid of him!

A vision within, a plan of action, and a growing sense of commitment brings the applause of heaven.

## II. JESUS CALLED FOR PERSPECTIVE WITHIN HIS CHURCH

A congregation may be large and full of energy but refuse to confront issues of sin within. Thus it takes on the form of a Christian social club instead of a church.

A. There was a toleration for Jezebel. This was probably not actually the lady's name. It is a characterization of the real Jezebel, who was the daughter of the king of Tyre and Sidon. She lived 918 years before Jesus. She was an idolater and had vast influence over her weak husband. A genius conniver, she was persuasive in in-

ducing the worship of idols instead of the worship of the true God. Being highly gifted and artful, she held resolute in her ambitions and unscrupulous designs. As was the Old Testament Jezebel, this New Testament woman was sexually liberated, a woman of great talent, seducing the people by sensual doctrines and leading them in the most wicked practices. Her name means "chaste," but she was the perverse reverse. Very probably this woman had a fine manner and persuasive speech, but . . .

1. She was an evil influence. Her ways were immoral sexually. There is a unique treachery to this kind of temptation.

**ILLUS.** The actress Lauren Bacall told how she became romantically involved with actor Humphrey Bogart. He was married at the time, but his marriage was not going well. His wife was an alcoholic. Bacall and Bogart were constantly thrown into close contact while filming a movie. She said, "From the start of the movie, as Bogie and I got to know each other better—as the joking got more so, as we had more fun together—so the scenes changed little by little, **our relationship strengthened on screen and involved us without our even knowing it.**"

Our romantic and sexual feelings have a capacity to build so slowly, silently, and strongly, that we should flee certain situations!

It seems clear that this Jezebel was urging on the church a spiritual infidelity that would easily issue in physical fornication. Had her view prevailed, the church would have become a pleasant paganism. The Bible reminds us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

She also encouraged the eating of meat offered to idols. This was an attempt to short-circuit true discipleship to Christ. The prohibition nearly cut off a Christian from all social connection with non-Christians. Most of the pagan world was involved in eating meat sacrificed to idols. It also meant that a Christian would not join a trade guild. The guilds had a common meal as a central part of their practice. These most likely would be held in a heathen temple and would consist of meat offered to idols. To abstain from guild membership could mean commercial suicide. Jezebel urged the Christians that there was no need to separate themselves from society or the guilds. Commercial success spoke more loudly than the claims of Christ.

2. She was unwilling to repent.

B. Judgment will fall on the unrepentant.

1. An adulterous spirit brings suffering. Whether adultery is spiritual or physical, it involves the violation of a covenant agreement. God does not take violation of trust lightly. The idea of being faithful to

God and to our spouses is even wrapped up in the Ten Commandments. Our generation looks upon sexual relations as a recreational free-for-all. The suffering has already begun. One in five Americans now suffers from a sexual disease. You would not ride in an airplane that had one in five chances of crashing. Our Lord is faithful to warn us of temporal and eternal suffering for embracing a spirit of infidelity.

2. Our sin brings repercussions upon our children. Jesus says, "I will strike her children dead" (v. 23). No generation has ever sinned and left its offspring unaffected. In the United States, sexually transmitted diseases infect 3 million of our teenagers every year. The repercussions of sin are "transgenerational."

### III. JESUS OFFERS A PROMISE TO BE FAITHFUL

A. The qualifications for the promise are threefold:

1. The Christian must maintain his walk with Jesus. He instructs us to "hold on to what you have until I come" (v. 25).
2. The Christian must overcome.
3. The Christian must do the will of Jesus to the end.

**ILLUS.** A newly licensed pilot was flying his private plane on a cloudy day. He was not very experienced in instrument landing. When the control tower prepared to bring him in for a landing, he began to think of the towers, hills, and buildings in the area. He began to get panicky. But the command came in a calm, stern voice from the tower, "You just obey instructions; we'll take care of the obstructions."

There is much to distract and disorient us, but in obedience we can enjoy a restful spirit.

B. Jesus promises us "authority over the nations" (v. 26). This is to say that we will partake in the final triumph and glory of the Savior. Our authority is by association with Jesus. Many Christians in their journey upon this earth have been pushed into the shadows and byways because of their testimonies for Christ. But our Lord is preparing to exalt His people to places of responsibility and activity. An eternal abode of doing nothing would be a torment. Sorrow and sighing will be gone, but wonderful, responsible, fulfilling activity will be ours.

C. Jesus promises us "the morning star" (v. 28). This is none other than Jesus himself. The planet Venus is the morning star. At some seasons of the year, Venus appears so beautifully in the east. It leads on the morning and introduces the day. It is a pledge that darkness is past.

**ILLUS.** When Jack Jones was a boy, he once found himself in a mine shaft when something went wrong. The men with him were obliged to find another way out. They struggled through a maze of old workings and a stagnant pond.

Jack's father was one of the best miners and a devoted parent. He put Jack on his back and led the men over dangerous ground. In the nasty air, the flames of their lamps began to grow dim. As they reached the dark water, Jack's dad told him to hold on around his neck. The water was almost up to his chest as he traced his way through the murky water. After crossing the water, they started up a steep incline. They were getting nearer.

When they had climbed for a time, his dad stopped, knelt down, and pointed. He said, "Look, son." There, on top of what seemed to be a distant mountain, was a bright disk about the size of a half dollar. He said, "That's what we've been looking for, son—the light of the world. Come on!" And the light grew in size as they climbed their way to the surface of the world.

We do acknowledge that this world is steeped in the blackness and murkiness of sin. But we have a hope and a promise. Our Morning Star shall soon appear and herald the dawning of God's eternal day! Rejoice!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Celebration

"I Love You with  
the Love of the Lord"  
"Father, I Adore You"

Invocation

Kids' Korner

Welcome to Guests/Announcements

Receiving God's Tithes and Offerings

Special Music

Hymn

"I Want to Be like Jesus"

Lord's Day Message

"THYATIRA—A CALL FOR  
INTOLERANCE"

Invitation

Pastoral Prayer

Benediction

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Pastoral Prayer

The pastor may pray for his people regarding the delicate and difficult area of sexual impropriety. This prayer may also deal with spiritual adultery.

##### Worship Idea

Invite a "seasoned saint" to the pulpit to read the Scripture text.

# SARDIS—A CALL TO LIFE

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 3:1-6

Oct. 15, 1995

## INTRO:

The wealth of this town called Sardis was legendary. Gold-bearing waters flowed through this place. The seeds of softness and degeneracy were being sown. The church had been infiltrated by the spirit of this world. Jesus is introduced as "him who holds the seven spirits of God [the sevenfold Spirit, margin]." He comes to this lifeless church to once again infuse the Spirit of the living God. He has the exact supply for the need of each church. This church needed a spiritual resurrection.

## I. JESUS DEALS WITH THE *HYPOCRISY* OF THE CHURCH

A. The church members were lacking sufficient good deeds (v. 2).

B. The church members had a lively reputation (v. 1). However, their reputation was a facade. People did not see their true state of grace.

**ILLUS.** Chancellor Otto von Bismarck said, "With a gentleman, I am always a gentleman and a half; and with a fraud, I try to be a fraud and a half." One does not successfully live in a dual climate of truth and error, or death and life.

C. The church members were dead in reality. Deadness and lifelessness slip rapidly into death. The New Testament likens sin to death. The prodigal son was dead but became alive again (Luke 15:24). Roman Christians had been "brought from death to life" (6:13). Converts in their pre-Christian days were "dead through . . . trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1, 5, NRSV).

1. The church had a form of godliness but denied its power (2 Tim. 3:5). Moffatt translates the verse like this: "Though they keep up a form of religion, they will have nothing to do with it as a force." Notice the Phillips translation: "They will maintain a facade of 'religion' but their life denies its truth." Communion with Christ had ceased. Their lives had not the beauty of self-sacrifice for the sake of Jesus.

A vehicle will coast some distance even after the engine has died. Some life forms exhibit muscular movement after life is extinct. It gives cause for pause: Is the Christian activity about me true spiritual life, or the ghastly twitching of a corpse?

2. A vital church always faces some opposition. Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). An unopposed church may be dead in its witness for Jesus. Why should the world trouble itself about a dead church? A dead church is really a bit of the world under a different name.

## II. JESUS DEALS WITH THE *HOPE* FOR THE CHURCH

A. Jesus instructs them to awaken! If they refuse, He will come on them like a thief. The idea given is not that of a

violent robber, but to convey the unexpected and stealthy coming of the Lord. Twice in Sardis's history the city had fallen to military foes because no guard was watching. They lost the city because they were too lazy to watch. No person knows the hour or day when eternity will invade his space of time. Augustine said, "The last day is a secret, so that every day may be watched."

The surest sign of spiritual death is unconsciousness or unrecognized paralysis. Mortification sets in, but is not sensed. Frostbite is painless. The tingling begins only when life is coming back. When a man says, "I am asleep," he is really somewhat awake. May God awaken us spiritually! May we sense, discern, feel, and be aware of God's great movements in our lives!

B. The church must also strengthen that which remains. We rightly emphasize the strength and help we receive from God. However, He looks for our love, loyalty, and service. The saying is true: "Fate is what we must do; destiny is what we are meant to do." The Christian rejects the idea of an inescapable fate. Yet he does believe in a destiny that he can refuse or accept. From each of us Christ looks for something. For all Christians have something to do.

C. The church must remember, obey, and repent. How quickly and easily we forget the truth of God.

**ILLUS.** A somewhat wealthy executive decided to buy his own plane. He took flying lessons and was soon comfortable with his new method of transportation. A few years later he decided to purchase a pontoon plane so he could fly back and forth from his beautiful summer home on the lake.

On his first flight in his new plane, he forgetfully started to head for the airport landing strip. He had always done it that way. His wife was with him that day, and when she saw what he was doing, she said, "Pull up, George, pull up! You can't land on a runway. You have pontoons! You don't have wheels!"

George quickly and humbly hit the throttle and veered off toward the lake. He landed safely in the still, blue water. He shook his head ruefully and said, "I don't know where my mind was; I was just thinking. That's one of the dumbest things I've ever done." After that he opened the door of the plane and stepped out into the lake.

In our spiritual lives when we get forgetful, disobedient, and unrepentant, it usually develops a series of wrong events in our lives. Our Lord calls us to correction before it leads to our destruction.

## III. JESUS ISSUES A PROMISE FOR THE *HOLY* IN THE CHURCH

God always does large works through small means, though few in number. They are described as being worthy, of worth to the Father. Their worthiness was derived from their association with Jesus Christ.

A. Some had not soiled their clothes. Clothes in the Bible speak of character. These people were vitally interested in living the life of holiness.

**ILLUS.** The ermine lives in northern Europe. His fur is pure white and is quite valuable. In some countries the robes of judges are lined with ermine fur as a symbol of honor and purity.

The ermine has great concern for his pure white coat. He will protect it from anything that might soil and spot it. Hunters take advantage of this trait. They do not set a trap or snare. The hunter will find the ermine's home in a hollow log, a cleft in a rock, or an opening in a tree and will smear slime and filth around the edge of the entrance. The dogs are then turned loose. The ermine runs for its little home. But when he finds it soiled, he will not enter. He turns to face the dogs. He will preserve the purity of his fur at the price of his life! It is better for him to be stained by blood than spoiled by the uncleanness!

B. The holy one would have the privilege of walking with Jesus in a whole new dimension. Many times our spiritual journey consists of running ahead of or lagging behind our Lord. A new harmony will be enjoyed! The old story of Enoch says, "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24, KJV). They walked together on earth and continued in heavenly places. The person who walks closely with God on earth will enter a nearer companionship with Him at the end of this earthly life.

C. The holy ones would be dressed in white. Jesus says that "the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43).

1. In the Old World, white robes stood for victory. When celebrating a Roman triumph, all the citizens wore white. The city of Sardis was called "the city in white." These robes may stand for the reward of those who have won the victory.

2. White is a universally accepted color of purity. God rewards purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matt. 5:8). Those who walk with Jesus in purity will perceive the personality of God in new dimensions!

D. The holy ones would not be blotted out of God's book of life. Those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire (20:15). Those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter into blessedness (21:27).

In the ancient world, a king would keep a register of his citizens. When a man would commit a crime against the state, or when he died, his name would be erased from that register. To have your name written in the book of life is to be numbered among the faithful citizens of the kingdom of God.

E. The holy ones would be acknowledged before the Father and His angels (Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1).

## CONCLUSION:

Our Christian faith must be authentic and distinctly living. Laying aside those virtues, you lay aside the reality of the Bible's message.

**ILLUS.** A certain rabbi maintained a weekly ritual throughout his life. Each week he would go to a special place in the forest. There he would light a fire and pray a prayer that told the story of God's salvation.

The rabbi's students were deeply influenced by this old man. They continued his ritual for many years after his death. But little by little they changed the tradition. First, they lost the place in the forest. After a time, they failed to light the fire. Then, they forgot the prayer. Eventually all they could do was tell the story. May our lives be a display of our resurrected Lord, not simply a tale that is told!

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Rev. 3:1-6 (sermon text)
Invocation	
Welcome to Guests/Special Announcements	
Worship in Song	"I Love to Walk with Jesus" "The Church's One Foundation" "We Have Come into His House"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choral Prayer Response	"I Will Praise Him"
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	
Lord's Day Message	"SARDIS—A CALL TO LIFE"
Invitation to Prayer/Commitment	
Benediction	

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Pastoral Prayer

Arrange for two laypersons to come to the platform to pray. The first person could pray for the pastor and staff and families. The second could pray for the salvation of the lost and spiritual renewal. Then the pastor prays for spiritual and other needs of the church family.



# PHILADELPHIA—A CALL TO ENCOURAGEMENT

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 3:7-13

Oct. 22, 1995

## INTRO:

Mr. William Wilberforce had worked for years in Britain's Parliament for the abolition of slavery. He was discouraged, about to give up. An elderly friend, John Wesley, heard of it and from his deathbed called for paper and pen. As his hand trembled, Wesley wrote: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh be not weary of well-doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it."

Mr. Wesley died six days later. But Mr. Wilberforce fought for over 40 more years. In 1833, three days before his own death, Great Britain abolished slavery in the British Empire. Great people involved in great quests need great encouragement.

Jesus comes with resounding words of encouragement for His church.

## I. NOTICE THE AUTHORITATIVE REDEEMER

A. Jesus is described as "holy" (v. 7). This is the first descriptive word about Christ in this message. All that He is going to say will be holy. It is all in perfect harmony with the character and will of God the Father. This will be a "holiness" message.

B. Jesus is described as "true." Two different words in the Greek language conveyed our word for true. The first described true in a true statement as opposed to a false statement. The second word meant real as opposed to that which was unreal. This second word is used here of Jesus. In Jesus is reality. He does not live as a shadow of truth but is truth itself.

C. Jesus "holds the key of David." A key symbolizes authority. Final authority in all things rests in Jesus. Hezekiah had a faithful steward named Eliakim. He moved over all Hezekiah's house, and he alone could admit people to the presence of the king. Isaiah heard God say of this faithful Eliakim: "I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open" (Isa. 22:22). This idea glows in John's mind. Jesus alone has authority to admit to the New Jerusalem, which is the new city of David. Christ is the new and living way into the presence of God.

## II. NOTICE THE ACTIVE REMNANT

A. Before them stands "an open door that no one can shut" (v. 8). A shut door is not mentioned. The redemptive scheme continually progresses toward conformity to Christ. His kingdom constantly unfolds to our spiritual grasp and understanding.

Another idea may be included. The city of Philadelphia was not founded as a military outpost. Its found-

ing served as a center of Greek language and culture to its area. For three centuries Philadelphia had engaged in this successful venture. Now the risen Christ gives His church a missionary assignment. They must walk through the open door of opportunity to share His message.

Paul says: "A great door for effective work has opened to me" (1 Cor. 16:9). Paul added: "I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me" (2 Cor. 2:12). Again Paul requested: "Pray for us . . . that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3). In Acts 14:27 Paul reported in Antioch how God "had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." God specializes in opening doors for His message.

B. The church had a "little strength." This was not a great church, but it was a good church. It was not powerful, but it was faithful.

**ILLUS.** While touring in Italy, a man visited a cathedral that had been completed on the outside only. Once inside, the tourist found an artist kneeling before an enormous wall upon which he had just begun to create a mosaic. Thousands of pieces of colored ceramic covered tables nearby. The visitor asked the artist how he would ever finish such a large project.

The artist said that he knew how much he could accomplish in one day. Each morning, he marked off an area to be completed that day and didn't worry about what was outside that space. That was the best he could do. If he did his best, one day the mosaic would be finished.

The Kingdom tasks are gargantuan! But God calls us to fulfill His will one faithful day at a time. It is God's work to put the big picture together.

C. The church had kept Christ's Word and not denied His name.

D. The church did "endure patiently" (v. 10).

**ILLUS.** Rev. Sir George Macleod undertook cleaning out toilets during the community work period. Someone asked him why he chose such an undesirable task. He replied, "It's to prevent me from preaching sermons on the dignity of work."

Not every moment in the Christian life is exhilarating, uplifting, and satisfying. Some moments call for gritty endurance. Some moments call for the divine grace of patience. Sometimes toilets have to be cleaned. This church at Philadelphia had proved exemplary in these kinds of moments. May we too be found faithful.

E. The church is told to "hold on" (v. 11). As a result no one will be able to take their crowns. Many people in the Bible lost their places to someone else because

they were not fit to hold them. Saul lost his place to David (1 Sam. 16:1, 13). Reuben lost his place to Judah (Gen. 49:4, 8). Esau lost his place to Jacob (Gen. 25:34; 27:36).

### III. NOTICE THE ANNOUNCED REWARDS

A. Jesus will keep them "from the hour of trial" (v. 10). We Christians are never immune from temptation, but His strength is powerfully with us in trial and conflict.

B. Jesus is "coming soon" (v. 11). This statement warns the heedless and comforts the oppressed.

C. The overcomer will be made "a pillar in the temple of . . . God" (v. 12). A pillar serves as support or strength. There is no temple in heaven because God is the temple (Rev. 21). It's uncanny that we will be of some support to Jehovah God. We bring something to the divine economy that was not there before we came to be.

D. Jesus says, "Never again will he leave it."

Philadelphia was notorious for earthquakes. Shaking or tremors came as an everyday experience. Cracks appeared in walls of houses. One part of the city would be in ruins, then another. Most of the people lived outside the city in huts, fearing to go on the city streets lest they should be killed by falling masonry. Those who dared to continue living in the city were considered crazy. They spent their time shoring up shaking buildings. Every now and then they would flee to the open spaces for safety. Jesus said, "Never again will he leave it." To these people that was a tremendous statement of security and well-being. Fear and uncertainty will be absent.

E. The overcomer will be inscribed with His "new name."

1. From the tone of Scripture, it seems that this new name would be related to our heavenly ventures and occupations. The 365 names of Jesus in the Scriptures are not just letters thrown together. His names relate to His work.

**ILLUS.** In the cartoon "Herman," a man is sitting in an office being interviewed for a job. Beside him is a set of golf clubs, and over his shoulder is a fishing pole. The caption reads, "I hear you're looking for someone who can work without supervision."

The world's idea of a good life and a good heaven is abundance of recreation. God's idea consists of purposeful, fulfilling engagement.

2. When God writes something down, it lasts forever. The 66 books of the Bible comprise an eternal document. Your new "nickname" will stick. Twice in the history of Philadelphia, its name as a city had been changed. Both times it was named in honor of men. But the honor of men fades. God's name, His

honor, and His rewards last forever.

3. This name denotes ownership and relationship. As a man writes his name in his own book, as a rancher brands his own cattle, God's name upon His redeemed denotes His ownership and relationship.

### CONCLUSION:

The redeemed have a bright future, a reason to hope.

**ILLUS.** In the writings of Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, he tells of convicts in the prison that he calls "goners." These individuals had given up hope and were already dead on their feet. They would shuffle along listlessly in line and stare vacantly a few more weeks, but it was all over with them. The reason? They had given up. Evidence is mounting that we cannot live without hope. Doctors understand that telling some patients that they are terminal is in itself a death sentence.

Sir Winston Churchill was asked by a reporter about which was the greatest weapon his country possessed against the Nazi regime of Hitler. He did not pause for even a moment. He said: "It was what England's greatest weapon has always been—hope."

Jesus came to this church to stare down within them a vibrant sense of eternal hope. He stamps a distinct outline of final triumph amid the smoke and mirrors of Satan's murky efforts. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (v. 13).

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Welcome and Announcements	
Call to Worship	Rev. 3:7-13
Invocation	
Worship in Song	"The Greatest Thing in All My Life Is Loving You"
	"Cause Me to Come to Thy River, O Lord"
	"Open Our Eyes, Lord, We Want to See Jesus"
Prayer for Encouragement	
Encouragement Through Giving	
Encouragement by Personal Testimony	
Encouragement by Special Music	
Lord's Day Message	"PHILADELPHIA—A CALL TO ENCOURAGEMENT"
Part I	The Authoritative Redeemer
Choral Response	"The Church's One Foundation"
Part II	The Active Remnant
Choral Response	"We'll Work Till Jesus Comes"
Part III	The Announced Rewards
Choral Response	"We Shall See the King Someday"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Pastoral Prayer

Invite people to come to the altar who would benefit from special prayer for encouragement.



# LAODICEA—A CALL TO FERVOR

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 3:14-22

Oct. 29, 1995

## INTRO:

Our Lord introduces himself as the "Amen." This word placed at the end of a solemn statement guarantees its truth. Jesus verifies God's eternal plan. His promises hold true beyond all doubt.

Called "the faithful and true witness," Jesus will tell it like it is and leave no mysteries about God's heart when it touches the church.

Jesus is called "the ruler of God's creation." The Bible states, "By him all things were created" (Col. 1:16). The next verse says, "In him all things hold together" (v. 17). Jesus participated in the powerful work of creation. The sheer massiveness of His physical and spiritual creations bring to us a sense of awe. Sin and wrong seem so overwhelming, but above it all Jesus rules as Sovereign in dominion.

To an anemic church, our Lord presents himself with truth, power, and spiritual bearing.

## I. JESUS DEALS WITH THE ACTUALITY OF THE CHURCH'S SPIRITUAL STATE

This church has the sad distinction of being the only one of the seven to whom the Lord had nothing good to say.

A. The people regarded themselves as "rich" and "in need of nothing" (v. 17, Amp.). This city was one of the wealthiest in the world. In A.D. 61, it was devastated by an earthquake. However, being so rich and independent minded, the people refused any help from the Roman government. Out of their own resources, they rebuilt their own city. This mind-set had infected the church as well. The city considered itself rich, and the people felt they did not need God. The church didn't seem to need Him much either.

B. Jesus addressed the church people with six descriptive words: "lukewarm . . . wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (vv. 16-17).

Significantly this city built itself as a great center for manufacturing clothing. Their sheep were famous for their soft, violet-black, glossy wool. Workers mass-produced cheap outer garments. In this garment-making society, they failed to realize their spiritual nakedness.

Laodicea featured also a significant medical center. Its medical school was famous for two things throughout the world—ointment for ears and ointment for eyes. In an area so skilled in care for the eyes, the church had difficulty in realizing its spiritual blindness. The call of our Lord arises from the prosperity and the skill in which Laodicea took so much pride. The citizenry and the church did not sense their deep need for God.

This area had a very large Jewish population. In few areas were the Jews wealthier and more influential. With this kind of social posture, Jesus' words shocked

the readers. In His view, there was not a more poverty-stricken community.

Their spirit and attitude toward Christ nauseated Him. He would rather have them cold (v. 15). This word can mean "cold to the point of freezing." Or, He would rather that they be hot. This word means "hot to the boiling point." Food or drink being hot or cold have their appeal, but tepidity is unappealing. Jesus radically condemns the attitude of indifference.

**ILLUS.** Stanley Rogers draws a parallel for us. He says that when a ship rolls in a heavy wind, the passengers become nervous and begin to regret their past sins. Yet, when the same ship gropes its way slowly through a thick fog, the passengers go to bed and sleep soundly. It's a paradox. The greatest peril at sea is the fog, causing more disasters than all the storms that ever blew.

In our spirit, quiet sedation and sleepy indifference spell condemnation for us. I challenge you to be stirred, shaken, and vigorous in following Jesus Christ today.

## II. NOTICE JESUS' ARTICULATION OF SPIRITUAL SALVATION

This church is unsparingly condemned. Within, it has no redeeming feature. A slight modification does not suffice. Jesus calls for spiritual revolution!

A. Jesus counsels them to "buy . . . gold refined in the fire" (v. 18). A man who can buy gold can buy anything. He has no need, no want. If they can acquire this gold from Christ, they shall never need anything else. They must learn to become rich in heaven's eyes. They must acquire that which is valuable, that which will endure the fires of all of life's crucibles. If the only resource you have with which to meet life is material wealth, you are poor indeed. The Lord himself must become your primary resource for life.

**ILLUS.** An elderly lady walked slowly into a life insurance office in Minneapolis. It was during the worst part of the economic Great Depression in America. She wanted to know if she could stop paying the premiums on her husband's life insurance policy. She said, "He's been dead sometime now, and I don't believe I can afford making the payments anymore."

The desk clerk looked up her husband's policy and found that it was worth several hundred thousands of dollars. This poor woman had wealth, but she had no idea of it. Nobody had ever explained to her how life insurance works.

If our church could envision the spiritual plenty that awaits us in Christ, we would scorn the hypnotic attractions of worldly pursuits. Jesus explains to us that we must "buy" from Him. He offers His grace free to all. He asks only that we collect our attention and focus it on Him.

B. Jesus counsels them to buy "white clothes" from

Him. In that time, to be stripped naked was the worst humiliation. David's servants were once so humiliated (2 Sam. 10:4). Ezekiel warned Israel that her enemies would strip her of her clothes (16:37-39; 23:26-29). Through Nahum God warned disobedient people: "I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame" (3:5).

To be clothed in fine raiment was the greatest honor. Pharaoh honored Joseph by clothing him in fine linen (Gen. 41:42). Belshazzar clothed Daniel in purple (Dan. 5:29). The prodigal son returned home, and the best robe was put upon him (Luke 15:22).

Isaiah says: "I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness" (61:10). Jesus desires this clothing for His church.

The color of white signifies purity. God's purity must become theirs.

C. The church must buy God's "salve" for their eyes. Then they would have proper spiritual vision. History records that Archippus served as the first bishop of the Church in Laodicea. In the Colossian letter, the apostle Paul says sternly: "Tell Archippus: 'See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord'" (4:17). There is a hint of something incomplete in his labor. This problem was mentioned 30 years before Revelation was written. Perhaps the seeds of spiritual sloth were sown long before. An unsatisfactory ministry may have helped lead to spiritual degeneration.

### III. CONSIDER THE ATTITUDE OF THE SOVEREIGN SAVIOR

Though Jesus is the Ruler of God's creation, He limits himself at the door of man's will.

A. Notice that "rebuke and discipline" signify "love" (v. 19). His rebuke does not so much punish as illumine. God's final punishment leaves a man alone. Through Hosea, God said, "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!" (4:17). But here God still attempts to show the good way of salvation!

B. Jesus is not far off: "Here I am!" (v. 20).

C. The hearing and opening belong to us, His people.

D. Jesus' entrance and communion result. Jesus said, "I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (v. 20). The Greeks had three meals in that day. The first was basically a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. The second was a midday meal not eaten at home. It was simply a picnic-type snack eaten by the side of the pavement or in the city square, or in some colonnade. The third was the evening meal. This was the main meal of the day. People lingered over this meal because the day's work was done. This third meal Jesus would share with the person who would answer the knock. It is not to be hurried but to involve special moments of lingering fellowship. If a person opens the door of his

heart, Jesus will come in and linger long with him. Will you be that person today?

Jesus knocks on every heart's door. The response is totally our choice. We may refuse or we may answer. Our Lord never breaks in. He must be invited. Holman Hunt painted the famous picture called *The Light of the World*. There Jesus stands at the door of the human heart. Holman had it right when he painted the door, showing no handle on the outside. It can only be opened from within. Will you respond to His call today?

### CONCLUSION:

Jesus models His message. He calls us to overcome the spiritual death grip "just as I overcame" (v. 21).

**ILLUS.** I read about the origin of firemen. Firemen, or firefighters in our day, put out fires. Originally, firemen worked in coal mines. It was their dangerous job to be the first to enter a mine each morning.

These men would wrap themselves in wet rags to make themselves as fireproof as possible. They would grab a long, flaming stick, go in, and ignite any explosive methane gas that had seeped into the mine overnight. By burning off this dangerous gas, the workplace was made safe for others.

In this day when Satan still stealthily spreads his chloroform of spiritual lukewarmness, our God enables us to let His torch of truth blaze brightly. We shall enjoy safety in Him as well as provide salvation's bright light for others. Let us overcome as Jesus overcame! Let us be the church!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Invocation	
Call to Worship	Ps. 27:1-2, 4, 8-9
Worship in Song	"The Song of the Soul Set Free" "The Church's One Foundation"
Welcome to Guests and Announcements	
Kids' Korner	
Special Music	
Lord's Day Message	"LAODICEA—A CALL TO FERVOR"
Choral Response	"Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God" "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"
Prayer Response	
Offering Response	
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Pastoral Prayer

"Pray through" the highlights of your sermon before or after delivery. Personalize it for you and your people.

##### Worship Idea

Ask children's ministries director to prepare a "Kids' Korner sermon" for Sunday morning. Object-lesson style and a small gift for each child to make an impact (3-5 minutes).

# PERGAMUM—A CALL TO ALLEGIANCE

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 2:12-17

Nov. 5, 1995

## INTRO:

The message today comes from Jesus. He appears bearing a sharp, two-edged sword. In this letter, He calls His church to full allegiance. Some things need to be cut away from the life of the church if it is to remain in the favor of Christ. He calls His church to listen to the Spirit of God and remain true to the name of Jesus.

## I. NOTICE THAT OUR LORD HAS AN ACUTE SENSE OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF HIS CHURCH

A. Jesus states, "I know where you live" (v. 13). The word for "live" here means "stay" or "have a permanent residence in a place." It is an unusual word to use of the Christians in the world. Peter writes to the "sojourners" of Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11, ASV). But the Christians of this city have their permanent earthly residence in Pergamum. This place is where Satan rules the strongest.

God did not design the Christian life for escape, but for victory. We may be tempted to think we could be a better Christian with different circumstances or location, but our first duty is to witness for Jesus where He has placed us.

**ILLUS.** On September 14, 1992, reporter Paul Harvey said that he had heard from Patricia Christy. After Hurricane Andrew, Patricia was waiting for food in south Florida. She vowed then that she would get out of that state. She wanted to take the first plane out. She wished to get as far away from the horror of hurricane damage as possible and have a restful vacation. Paul heard from Patricia. Now she was standing in line for fresh water on one of the Hawaiian Islands. She had gone through Hurricane Aniki.

Many times we squirm for a new set of circumstances, but God wants to give us victory where we live.

B. At this place Satan had his throne. Pergamum became a center of Caesar worship. Once each year, everyone in the empire was required to appear before the magistrates, burn a pinch of incense to the god-head of Caesar, and say, "Caesar is Lord." A person could worship other gods of his choice, but he had to acknowledge the emperor's divinity. However, a true Christian cannot acknowledge any dominion over his life, save Christ. It would be a satanic act to take the name of the Lord and give it to Caesar.

**ILLUS.** In Haiti some time ago, a man owned a home. His neighbor wanted to buy it, but it was not for sale. The neighbor cajoled and urged him to sell, until finally he said that he would sell—on one condition. The neighbor could buy and occupy the home except for one solitary nail that was in the doorjamb of the entrance. The nail would forever be the possession of and in the control of the first owner. The money was paid. The new owner moved in.

Some time later the first owner found a dead dog. He

came to the home and hung the carcass on the nail. The buyer came out and asked him what he was doing.

He said, "I am the owner of this nail, with full right and authority over it. Do not move this article."

In a few weeks the stench was so bad that the buyer moved out. The first owner repossessed the house and retained the money.

There could be some uncommitted nail in your life that is a handle for a lot of unwelcome stench to enter your life. Give your whole self to Jesus. Only by His complete Lordship can you enjoy His complete blessings.

## II. OUR LORD HAS AN ACCURATE SENSE OF HIS GOALS FOR HIS CHURCH

A. Jesus required that the church come to grips with the teaching of Balaam. He charged them: "You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality" (v. 14). Balaam the prophet tried to follow good and evil at the same time. Balak was the king of Moab who wanted Balaam to curse the people of Israel. God would not allow Balaam to curse His people. So he told Balak how he could bring Israel to ruin—by flirting with idolatry and immoral sexual relations. Balaam knew that those acts would bring God's displeasure upon His people. Balak offered money to Balaam to bring Israel down.

The Bible says that Balaam "loved the wages of wickedness" (2 Pet. 2:15). God called his path a "reckless one" (Num. 22:32). Numbers 24 and Joshua 13 indicate that there were times when Balaam resorted to sorcery and divination. Balaam was a spiritual schizophrenic. He needed a life-shaking master decision that would define his whole biography. Such a choice would cast him as a follower of God or an avid idolater. It never came, and the people of Israel put him to death.

**ILLUS.** I read of a two-headed turtle that was found down south. It had a complicated situation because each head controlled two legs. This freakish arrangement caused constant trouble for the turtle. One head would want to go in one direction. The other head would want to go in another direction. The poor turtle's plight was troublesome.

It is torment for a person to follow Jesus and another authority at the same time. "Balaamism" does not work. I challenge you to give God full allegiance this day.

B. The idea of eating food sacrificed to idols received rebuke. A part of an animal would be consumed as an offering to an idol. The priests would eat the rest of the animal, give it to the poor, or sell it again in the markets. Sacrifice and feast were identified together. Much of their worship was sexually vulgar. This kind of

activity required a Christian to excuse himself from a part of the social life of his time.

And with us, there are places we should not go, television programs we should not watch, and entertainments we should leave alone. The health of our spiritual life depends upon it. Allow God to speak to you about your lifestyle.

C. Jesus' chief goal in this letter is genuine repentance.

If there is no repentance, then Jesus comes, not as a friend, but as a warrior. He said, "I will soon come . . . and will fight" (v. 16).

He calls bluntly and directly. He says, "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come." To have God's blessings, we must walk in His way. If there are things in your life for which you sense condemnation, I ask you, on the authority of God's Word, to turn from them and ask God for His perfect forgiveness.

### III. OUR LORD ALSO HAS AN AWESOME SENSE OF HIS GIFTS

He calls us to hear the Spirit's voice. If we listen to Him, if we overcome, special rewards await.

A. We shall receive the gift of "the hidden manna" (v. 17). When the Hebrews had no food to eat in the desert, God gave them manna to eat (Exod. 16:11-15). Food actually fell from heaven. They have never forgotten. They placed a pot of manna in the ark of the covenant and brought it to the holy of holies in the Temple (Exod. 16:33-34; Heb. 9:4). Solomon's Temple was destroyed in the sixth century B.C. The rabbis had a legend that, at that time, Jeremiah hid the pot of manna in a cleft in Mount Sinai, and that when Messiah came, the pot of manna would be discovered again.

Walking with Jesus, we are nourished spiritually as He reveals himself to us day by day.

This "manna" idea means that overcomers will enjoy timeless sustenance from the hand of God! The onslaughts of Satan's destruction will not prevail. Plainly this idea says to us that God will give absolute satisfaction of all the hunger of spirit within a man.

B. We shall also receive the gift of the "white stone," with a new, secret name. In our day we have charm bracelets. In that day people commonly wore a charm, often nothing more than a pebble. A sacred name would be put on the pebble. To know the name of a god gave a certain power over him. You could summon his help and have mastery over demons. People thought that the amulet was doubly effective if no one but the owner knew the name on the charm. It seems that Jesus is saying, "Your non-Christian friends carry charms with superstitious writings on them, and they think they will be kept safe. You don't need that. You are safe in life and death because you know the name of the only true God."

### CONCLUSION:

Our sword-bearing Savior is our ultimate and only Pro-

tection and Hope. He calls us to listen to the voice of the Spirit and remain true to the name of Jesus. Spiritual peril may lie all around, but the cadence of His ranks one can hear forming around the world. He knows our geography! He gives grace to help us come to His goals. We must prepare to receive His gifts!

**ILLUS.** Jeb was a good ole boy from the backwoods. Wolves were killing the ranchers' livestock at an alarming rate. The state chose to offer a bounty of \$5,000 for every wolf killed. Jeb and his friend, Ernie, went into the wolf-hunting business. They hunted wolves all one particular day and on into the night. They made camp up in the mountains near a beautiful stream. About four in the morning, Jeb awakened to see their camp surrounded by 30 or 40 wolves. In the light of the now dim campfire, he could see the bloodlust in their eyes and the white of their exposed, razor-sharp teeth. He could also tell that they were about ready to spring. He called out in a whisper to his friend, "Hey, Ernie, wake up! We're rich!" I like his triumphant attitude in the moment of peril.

I believe a similar attitude should belong to the Christian. In a day when we are surrounded by the spirit of Balaam and idolatry, Jesus calls us to overcome dual allegiance and prepare for His rewards! If He calls us, He will enable us. Wake up, my friend! You are rich. Will you ask Jesus for His great work in you today? Will you listen to His Spirit and recenter yourself in Christ?

#### ORDER OF WORSHIP

Call to Worship	Pss. 34:3; 116:5, 12, 17a; 86:12
Invocation	
Testimony of Praise	
Worship in Song	Hymn, "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power"
	Hymn, "Fairest Lord Jesus"
Choir	"There's Something About That Name"
Special Music	
Choral Prayer Preparation	"My Faith Looks Up to Thee"
Worship in Prayer	
Worship with Tithes and Offerings	
Lord's Day Message	"PERGAMUM—A CALL TO ALLEGIANCE"
Choral/Prayer Response	"Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Pastoral Prayer*

The pastor may go to different ones who have prayer needs. Demonstrate how God comes to us in our needs.

##### *Worship Idea*

Introduce the sermon with an instrumental song. It could be a few measures from a well-known secular song that will pique interest around the theme.

# THE SPIRIT OF HEAVEN

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 4:1-11

Nov. 12, 1995

## INTRO:

Jesus said, "I will show you what must take place after this" (v. 1). After the scenes of ministry in the seven churches, we view the open door in heaven. A door speaks of availability and access. Heaven is available to all. A door speaks of shutting in and shutting out. May we prepare while the door of heaven's opportunity is open to us. The purpose of this chapter connects our present identity with our future destiny. It introduces us to heaven.

**ILLUS.** In the cartoon, Dennis the Menace is asked by a friend, "I wonder what heaven is like?" He replies, "Well, it probably looks like a toy shop . . . sounds like a carousel . . . and smells like a deli."

Our concepts of heaven are often stunted. Our Lord opens new vistas of our eternal home.

## I. OUR LORD DRAWS US FIRST TO THE ATTRACTION OF HEAVEN

A. The first item of mention is the throne. A throne represents a seat of authority and dominion. This throne stands for the majesty of God. The One who sat in the regal position is not described except that He "had the appearance of jasper and carnelian" (v. 3). The jasper of the ancient world seems to have been a translucent rock crystal. Light would come through this rock with almost unbearable scintillation. Some think that here it means a diamond. "From the throne came flashes of lightning" (v. 5). God is described in the flashing of gemlike colors. The Bible shows God in terms of light. Paul says that God "lives in unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). The psalmist says that God "wraps himself in light as with a garment" (104:2).

B. Around the throne was "a rainbow, resembling an emerald" (v. 3). Immediately we think of Noah and the rainbow. The rainbow speaks of the mercy and integrity of God.

C. Lightning and thunder are present. These are often connected with the manifestation of God (Ezek. 1:13; Ps. 77:18; Job 37:4; Exod. 19:16).

D. "Before the throne" is "a sea of glass, clear as crystal" (v. 6).

1. This symbolizes preciousness. In the Old World glass was usually semiopaque and dull. Glass that was clear as crystal was as precious as gold. In Job 28:17 (ASV), "gold and glass" are mentioned together as an example of precious things. A sea of glass would be of unspeakable value.

2. This speaks of dazzling purity. The brilliant light from the glassy sea would be too much for the eyes to look upon, like the purity of God.

3. This speaks of immense distance. The throne of God stood in the immense distance, as if it were at

the other side of a great sea. Even at the door of heaven a vast distance intervened between the entrance and the throne of God. This writer shares with us ethereal reverence, viewing God in terms of light and distance. Our God is the central attraction of heaven.

## II. NOTICE THE ATMOSPHERE OF HEAVEN

A. There is the presence of "twenty-four elders" (v. 4). These symbolize representatives of the faithful people of God. The white robes were promised to the faithful (3:4). The crowns were promised to those who were "faithful unto death" (2:10, KJV). The thrones were a promise from Jesus to those who forsook all and followed Him (Matt. 19:27-29).

B. There is the presence of the "four living creatures . . . around the throne" (v. 6). These stand for everything noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in nature. The lion, ox, eagle, and man are supreme in their respective domains. These creatures represent all the greatness, strength, and beauty of nature. Here nature praises God. The constant activity of nature under the hand of God sings as a ceaseless tribute of praise to the Creator. Anything that fulfills the purpose for which it was created praises God. The humblest and most unseen activity in the world can be true worship of God. The Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge" (Ps. 19:1-2). The Bible says, "Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion" (103:22). Man and nature are called to praise God: "All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you" (145:10).

Heaven's atmosphere is one of praise. The challenge for us is to prepare an atmosphere of praise for God within us. Our work, words, and ways should produce an exaltation of our great Creator. Prepare for heaven!

C. The holiness of God is declared. God has no wrong, defilement, pollution, or duplicity in any regard. Three times comes the announcement that He is holy.

**ILLUS.** R. C. Sproul has commented on the idea of repetition in Scripture. Genesis 14 tells the story of the battle of the kings in the Valley of Siddim. It mentions men who fell in the great "tar pits" of the area (v. 10). Some translators call them "asphalt pits" (NKJV), or "bitumen pits" (Amp.), or great pits. The Hebrew text is a bit unclear. It gives the word for pit, then simply repeats it. The story talks literally of "pit pits." If you fall into a pit, you are in trouble; but if you fall into a "pit pit," you really need some "help help." Repetition in Scripture is used for emphasis. It elevates a characteristic in degree. The Bible never does say that God is love, love, love or mercy, mercy, mercy. It does say, however, that He is holy, holy, holy.

We sometimes hear God referred to in wretched terms

as "the Man upstairs." We need a fresh understanding that God is holy and worthy of intense reverence. May we stand in awe of Him!

D. The almightiness of God is declared. The people to whom this is written suffered under the threat of the Roman Empire. No person or nation had ever successfully withstood this power. Yet they are assured that the Lord God powerfully overshadows even the Roman Empire. They stand ultimately secure in life and death.

E. The very being of God is declared. He "was, and is, and is to come" (v. 8). Empires and organizations ebb and flow, and come and go, but God lasts forever!

### III. NOTICE THE ACCLAMATIONS WITHIN HEAVEN (vv. 10-11)

A. The elders acknowledge that God is "worthy . . . to receive glory and honor and power" (v. 11).

B. His power in creation is noted.

1. He created all things.
2. All things were created by His will.
3. All things are sustained by His will. We have our being by the attention and purpose of God. He does not wind us up and then release us to the whims of fate.

**ILLUS.** You may know of the epic poem in Greek mythology called the *Odyssey*. It dealt with Odysseus traveling around the world. While he was gone, his wife was pursued by many suitors. She indicated that when she finished weaving a particular garment, she would then decide on a suitor. These men did not know that each night Penelope undid the stitches that she had put in during the daytime and in this way remained faithful to Odysseus until he returned. Her faithfulness was that of a lifetime.

God's faithfulness to us is for life, earthly and eternal. He keeps designing ways that His care and wisdom intersect our journey. Constantly we are cared for and sustained by the Father.

C. There is submission of all achievements to God. The elders "lay their crowns before the throne" (v. 10). It was a sign of complete submission. In the Old World when one king surrendered to another, he cast his crown at the victor's feet. Sometimes the Romans carried with them an image of their emperor. When they had battled a monarch to submission, there was a ceremony in which the vanquished one had to cast his crown before the emperor's image. A crown represents achievements and authority. It speaks of conquest and possession. All of our achievements we lay at the feet of our Lord. We acknowledge that all that we have or have achieved is a gift from God and rightly belongs to Him. We realize His immense grace.

**ILLUS.** About the year 1912, a group of Englishmen waited for death in an ice hut in the wild Antarctic. One of them, Dr. Edward Wilson, wrote a note home to his wife. This is what he said:

Don't be unhappy. . . . We are playing a good part in a great scheme arranged by God Himself, and all is well. . . . we will all meet after death, and death has no terrors. . . . All is for the best to those who love God, and . . . we have both loved Him with all our lives. . . . Life itself is a small thing to me now, but my love for you is for ever and part of our love for God. All the things I had hoped to do with you after this Expedition are as nothing now, but there are greater things for us in the world to come. . . . All is well.\*

### CONCLUSION:

Are you, my friend, prepared for heaven's purpose? Have you been attracted by the Attraction of heaven? Do you cultivate the atmosphere of heaven within your spirit? Are the acclamations of heaven yours as well? Come, prepare your spirit for your everlasting home. If there is unforgiven sin in your life, I invite you to confess it to Jesus, turn from it completely, and cast your soul upon the mercy of Christ. He died for you! I challenge you, prepare for heaven!

\*W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of Sermon Construction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 66-67.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Rev. 4:1-11
Vocal Response	"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12).
Choral Response	"All Hail King Jesus" "All Because of God's Amazing Grace" "Be Exalted, O God" "Holy Ground"
Prayer Response	
Welcome to Guests/Announcements	
Offering Opportunity	
Special Music	
Lord's Day Message	"THE SPIRIT OF HEAVEN"
Prayer Invitation	"My Faith Looks Up to Thee"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Pastoral Prayer*

Pray especially for people who pray in your church. Affirm and encourage them by lifting them to God.

# OUR LORD, THE LION, THE LAMB

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 5:1-14

Nov. 19, 1995

## INTRO:

John views a scene in heaven. A search is on. God is looking for someone worthy to dispense judgment upon a wayward world and to reach into the secrets of God. Our Lord Jesus stands as the Central Figure in this chapter. Unparalleled terms exalt Him. In His massive work, He brings together sinful men with their offended Creator, God the Father. This chapter celebrates the Son of God!

## I. JESUS EMBODIES THE BALANCE OF JUDGMENT AND MERCY (v. 5)

A. Jesus has preeminence above all men. He is worthy. His exalted character justifies Him in approaching the very seat of the holy God and in taking the scroll from His hands. His rank is so high and His attributes are so exalted that He alone is authorized to do such a thing.

B. Jesus' worth is based on His triumph on the Cross (vv. 6-8). With His blood, Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of all mankind. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

**ILLUS.** In the days before auto seat belts and air bags, young Jeffrey Ebert recalls being in a head-on collision with a drunk driver. He felt fear and confusion as he saw himself literally covered with blood from head to toe. Then he discovered that it was not his blood. It was his mother's. In the moment before impact, she had pulled him close to herself and curled her body around his. Her body slammed against the dash. Her head shattered the windshield. She received the damage; his life was spared. His mother eventually recovered from her injuries.

In a higher, more extensive way, Jesus took the impact for our sin upon himself. His blood now covers the sins of those who have repented and believed on Him for salvation.

C. Jesus triumphed as "the Lion, . . . the Root of David." The lion is the king of beasts, the monarch of the forest, and so becomes the emblem of our Lord in His authority and power. He has broken the power of sin and its effects by Resurrection power. Sin and death have crumbled before Him.

D. Jesus has the authority and ability to deal with the wrongness and needed righteousness of mankind. What He purchased on the Cross He dispenses to those who hear His call and choose His way!

E. Jesus has authority to deal with the dispensing of judgment. As the seals are opened (chap. 6), we see release of the repercussions of evil. The wrath of God and His Son are displayed. He has offered to man the highest ministry of mercy. He also retains the authority of judgment. At the end of this life, He will perfectly

and without error dispense judgment and mercy to whom they are due. May all of us be found trusting in the shed blood of Christ for our sins!

## II. JESUS DISPLAYS A BALANCE OF OWNERSHIP AND RELATIONSHIP (vv. 7-8)

A. Jesus received a sealed scroll from Him who sat on the throne. Paul says, "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13-14). There is a possession to be redeemed! This is described by Paul: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:22-23).

When Adam and Eve fell, they lost the inheritance of the earth and eternal life. Whatever else the scroll represents, it seems to include the title deed to mankind's lost inheritance. Jesus paid the price of redemption and now has authority to legally repossess what was lost (1 Pet. 1:18-20). He holds the title deed to the souls of mankind and the earth's dominion (see v. 9).

**ILLUS.** In Old Testament times, a property could not be alienated from the original owner or his or her heirs for a longer period than 50 years. At this time, it would revert to the original owner. If for some reason the owner was forced to sell it, it could be redeemed by the next of kin on the payment of the proportionate amount of its value until the following Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-17, 25). With His blood, Jesus has purchased legal ownership of our souls!

B. Jesus' dominion and work are closely related to the four creatures and the 24 elders. They came to a posture of worship (vv. 9-10).

They began to sing a new song, containing the theme of redemption. For man in Eden's garden to defy the oracles of God was a new thing in creation. Had Jesus not died, this unique song would have been unheard. This facet of God's character would not have been revealed had it not been for Jesus' redemptive work. It is a powerful testimony of the love of God. This powerful demonstration of His love can never be an old, forgotten refrain. It carries an eternal echo. It is new even today!

This is a book of new things. There is a new name (2:17; 3:12), a New Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2), a new song (5:9; 14:3), a new heaven and a new earth (21:1), and the promise that God makes all things new (21:5).

C. "The prayers of the saints" color the atmosphere of heaven. They are valued and treasured, being held in

golden bowls. They produce an aroma. They are identified with music and song. They are retained, stored, and reside in the presence of Christ. He has purchased us with His blood and desires that we be found in prayerful relationship with Him!

**ILLUS.** In the Los Angeles Crusade that launched the career and name of Billy Graham, 10,000 known prayer meetings took place. All of the beautiful and redemptive work that has flowed through this ministry, all the joy and forgiveness, all the exaltation of Christ, has flowed from a foundation laden with prayer. Are we enjoying a consistent relationship with Jesus?

### III. JESUS EMBODIES THE BALANCE OF HUMILITY AND DOMINION

A. "Worthy is the **Lamb**, who was slain" (v. 12). A lamb is one of the few animals on earth that has no defense mechanism. A turtle has a shell, a dog has a bark and a bite, but the lamb must depend only upon the shepherd for protection. In thoughtful purpose, Jesus exposed himself to the viciousness of sin and was slain. He became the least and at the same time the greatest. He descended into greatness! In Revelation, He is referred to as a lamb no less than 29 times.

B. The angels declare seven pronouncements regarding Jesus' excellence and stature (v. 12). He ministers with divine power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise. In the Gospels, four names are given to Jesus. He is called the Son of David and thus has title to the throne of David. He is called the Son of Abraham and thus holds title to the land of Israel and all that was promised to Abraham. He is called the Son of Man and thus has title to all man's earthly dominion. He is called the Son of God and thus holds title to and is Heir of all things.

This Lamb has "seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (v. 6). God's Spirit ministers in varied ways and means for the redemption of His world. He addresses all of mankind's diverse weaknesses, miseries, sins, and cravings. According to the rabbinic fable of the Old Testament manna, the taste of the food was exactly what each man chose it to be. As water assumes the shape of the container, so the Spirit of God assumes the form that is needed by our weaknesses and needs.

C. All creation joins in singing the anthem of Jesus' praise, honor, glory, and power. This Lamb is described as having seven horns. In the Old Testament, a horn stood for power (Deut. 33:17; 1 Kings 22:11), and for honor (Pss. 89:17; 112:9; 148:14). Seven signifies the number of perfection. Jesus is perfect in all that He is.

**ILLUS.** John Quincy Adams served as the sixth president of the United States. After his term, he took a seat in the House of Representatives. This was unusual—to go from

being president to being a mere congressman. But he had dreams for America. He introduced resolutions that dealt with abolishing slavery in this country. The slave trade was prospering. The gag rule of the House was introduced simply to stop Adams. For years he was vilified, hounded, voted down, and betrayed. It took years of turning his cheek to such treatment, but eventually he secured open debate about racial injustice. He helped further the cause of freedom for the slaves. He willingly served as president, as congressman, as a friend of the enslaved. So Jesus has served as the exalted Son of God, and as the Lamb of God, to minister to us at our point of need!

D. Exaltation of Jesus shall endure without end. He shall be praised for ever and ever. Four classes are represented as praising Him. They include the 4 creatures (all of nature), the 24 (all followers of God), the angels, and every created creature in every part of the universe.

### CONCLUSION:

Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Do you enjoy a working relationship with Jesus? Is your worship of our Lord authentic, flowing from every part of your existence?

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Ps. 9:1-2
Congregational Response	Ps. 9:9-10
Lord's Day Message	"OUR LORD, THE LION, THE LAMB"

#### Part I

Celebrating the Lord's Table (Communion)

#### Parts II and III

Prayer Introduction

Worship in Prayer

Worship in Song

"I Will Call Upon the Lord"

"He Has Made Me Glad"

"God and God Alone"

"King of Kings"

"Give Thanks"

#### Special Music

Worship with Tithes and Offerings

Benedictory Prayer of Thanksgiving

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Pastoral Prayer

Introduce prayer time with a short drama of a person, dressed in the attire of history, reciting one of the famous prayers of church history. Then pray for contemporary application of the timeless cries of the human spirit.

#### Offertory

Invite a layman to give a church board report with a view to encourage stewardship.



# OUR ETERNAL HOME

by Daniel Tweedy

Rev. 21:2-3, 8, 21-23, 25, 27; 22:3, 5

Nov. 26, 1995

## INTRO:

John's great vision included the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. Even when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, the Jews never lost confidence that God would restore their beloved city. They did express their hopes in terms of material things, but this city points to the certainty of eternal bliss for the faithful people of God.

## I. HEAVEN IS A HOLY PLACE (21:2, 8, 27)

A. No impurity shall ever enter this place.

B. The very nature of God is holy, and those who practice evil must reside elsewhere—a fiery lake of burning sulfur (21:8). Heaven is in the form of a perfect cube (vv. 15-17). In Solomon's temple, the holy of holies was a perfect cube (1 Kings 6:20). The whole of the holy city is the holy of holies, the dwelling place of God. Our hearts long for the holy presence of God.

**ILLUS.** The spring of 1992 brought a vicious riot to the city of Los Angeles. In four days, 46 were killed, 2,116 were injured, 9,413 were arrested, and 5,273 buildings were destroyed or heavily damaged. It was the worst riot in America in 75 years. A force of 7,000 police, soldiers, and Marines was brought into that one city. Shortly after, Roy Pettitt preached a moving sermon to his church in Los Angeles. His congregation gave vocal approval, but it was loudest when he said: "Jesus is going to take me away from here. I will be so glad when the day comes that the Lord cracks open the sky and takes me up and away."

To a world freighted by sin, heaven is looking more attractive all the time!

## II. HEAVEN IS A PLACE OF SERVICE (22:3)

A. The word "serve" in this verse carries the idea "shall keep on serving." There is a work that is not exhausting.

B. This service will be unto God. We will serve Him throughout eternity. Our present service prepares us for a higher rank of service.

**ILLUS.** On a television interview, Diane Sawyer asked the actress Julia Roberts, "If you were designing heaven, what would you put in it?"

Julia replied, "It would have music, dancing, and everyone could have wings in whatever color they wished." She indicated that her choice of color would be green.

I would not take away from the joy of heaven. But it is a source of joy to know that heaven is more than a festive atmosphere. It is a place of service and purpose. God will use us to continue to unfold His will.

## III. HEAVEN IS A PLACE OF LIGHT (21:23, 25; 22:5)

A. We presently see eternal things in a dim manner. How can we describe light through a prism to one who is blind? How can we convey a live performance

of the *Messiah* to one who is deaf? We are presently stunted in our ability to perceive God's heaven.

B. Heaven will bring much light and clarity to our understanding. The city itself shines with an immense glorious brilliance (21:11). The Bible says, "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end" (Isa. 60:19-20). Even in our present world of space and time, where God is, "the night is as bright as the day" (Ps. 139:12).

**ILLUS.** Going to heaven is a bit like a baby being born. The baby rests in the womb, warm and comfortable. Food is provided. There are no worries. Someone could say to the baby, "It's better out there; there's more to do, diversified activities." But the baby doesn't know what "better" is. He really wouldn't understand. Heaven isn't totally understood by us here. But it will be good! It's a gift from the heart of God.

## IV. HEAVEN IS A PLACE OF JOY (21:3)

A. There will be no more tears or the things that cause tears. There will be a pronounced absence of death.

**ILLUS.** The little boy's mother had died. His father tried to be both mom and dad. He scheduled a picnic for the two of them. The little fellow had never been on a picnic. He was excited, so excited that he could not sleep. Soon there was the patter of small feet down the hall to where his father was sleeping. He shook his dad, who would have responded rather gruffly. But he saw the expression on his little son's face. "What's the matter, Son?"

The little guy said, "Oh, Daddy, tomorrow's going to be so wonderful. I just can't sleep, I'm so excited."

It made the father laugh. He said, "Son, it won't be wonderful if we don't get some sleep. Now you go back to your bedroom and try to sleep."

A bit later the routine was repeated. Dad was already sound asleep. There was an excited hand on his shoulder. He questioned his son, "What do you want now?"

The boy said, "Daddy, I just want to thank you for tomorrow."

That is our childlike hope! The joy of the Father's promise! The gladness of an eternal tomorrow!

B. There will be a pronounced absence of mourning.

C. There will be a pronounced absence of pain. Isaiah says, "The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away" (35:10). We shall enjoy release from all things that have eroded our joy. God's Word declares, "I will rejoice over Jerusalem and

take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more" (65:19). "He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces" (25:8).

## V. HEAVEN IS A PLACE OF ACCESS TO GOD (21:3, 22)

"God himself will be with them" (v. 3). "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (v. 22). The highest prize of heaven is the intimate fellowship with God who has made us.

**ILLUS.** Former Prime Minister Lloyd George spoke once about the celestial realm. He said that when he was a boy, the thought of heaven used to frighten him more than the thought of hell. He saw heaven as a place where time would be perpetual Sundays. There would be perpetual services from which there would be no break. To him it was a horrible nightmare. He said that it made him an atheist for 10 years.

The very presence of God is not a depressing idea. It is the highest enjoyment we can know. If the presence of God has no attraction for you, I pray that God will awaken your spiritual sensibilities and give you a hunger for himself!

## VI. HEAVEN IS AN EXCLUSIVE PLACE (21:27)

A. Those who do shameful and deceitful things cannot enter.

**ILLUS.** In the summer of 1994, I was in the city of Muncie, Ind. I saw a bumper sticker on the back of a beat-up brown Ford pickup. It read, "Heaven doesn't want me, and hell is afraid I'll take over."

The idea was to invoke a smile. Then I thought: "Hell has no such fear, and heaven **does** want that man, and every person." The sticker was wrong on both ideas. It is not that we have to be good enough to go to heaven. But we must accept the gift of God.

B. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life may enter this eternal place. To have your name placed in this book, you must make a conscious

choice to turn from sin in your life. Then you must trust your life to the Lamb and begin to follow Him. Listen to Peter:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God (*1 Pet. 1:18-21*).

Your only entrance to heaven is by Jesus Christ, our Lord. Will you reach out to the Lamb this day? May God grant you a safe entrance into His glorious city!

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	
	Read Responsively 1 Cor. 15:39-47, 51-53
Singing in Anticipation	"In the New Jerusalem"
	"We Shall See the King Someday"
	"My Savior First of All"
Prayer in Anticipation	
Choral Response	"Sweet By-and-by"
Welcome and Announcements	
Giving in Anticipation	
Listening in Anticipation	"Our Eternal Home"
Responding in Anticipation	Open Altar
Choral Benediction	"Come, Let Us Worship and Bow Down"
	"In His Presence"

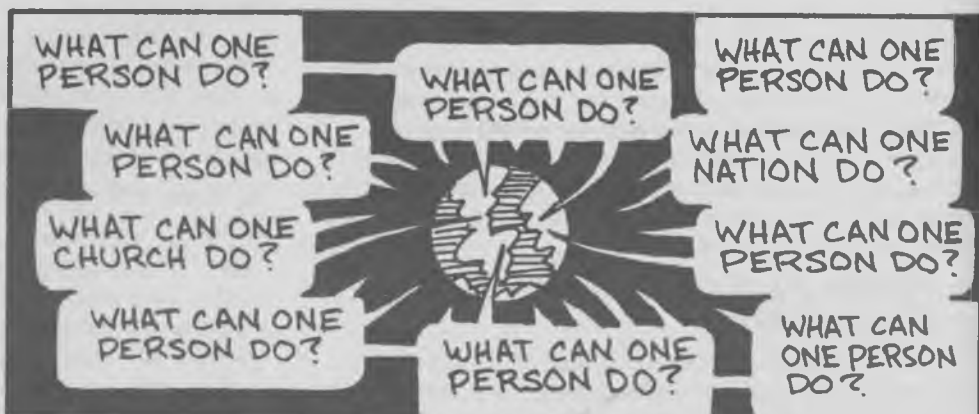
### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Worship Idea

Develop a November Thanksgiving calendar to give to your people based on Psalm 103 and using other scriptures. On each day, state a benefit (v. 2) of the Lord with the verse reference. On Sunday, refer to that day's particular benefit during worship time.

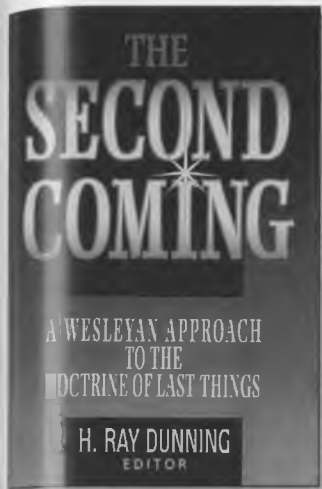


## Pontius' Puddle

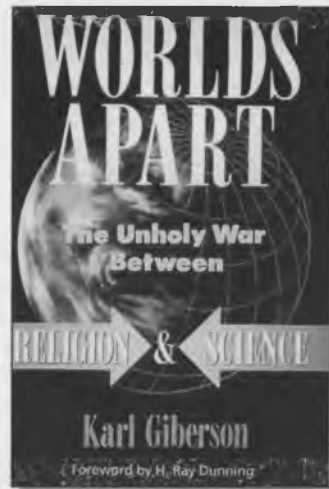


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# In a World of Conflicting Ideas, What YOU Believe Matters

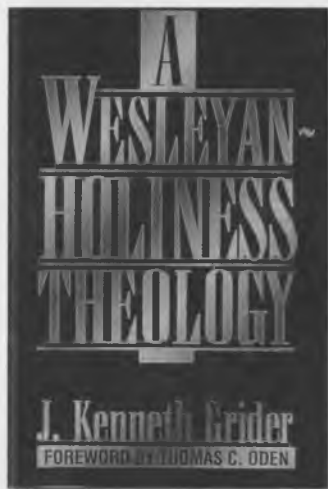


Ten noted Wesleyan scholars probe both the historical and the contemporary influences that have shaped the prevailing Evangelical view of end-time events. You will be challenged to take a more thoughtful and discerning look at what is widely held today in the study of "last things," while keeping a strong focus on what Scripture clearly presents as undebatable: Christ will come again.  
*Edited by H. Ray Dunning.*  
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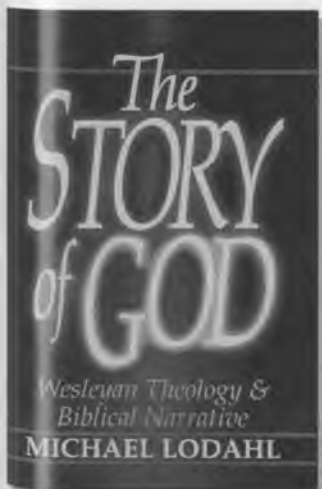
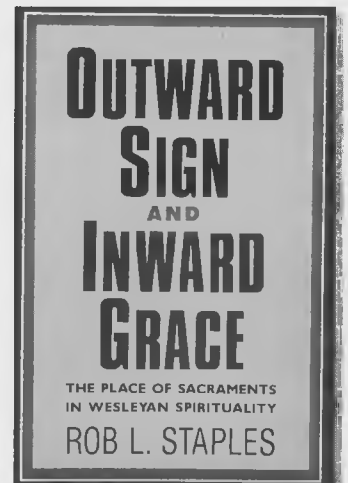


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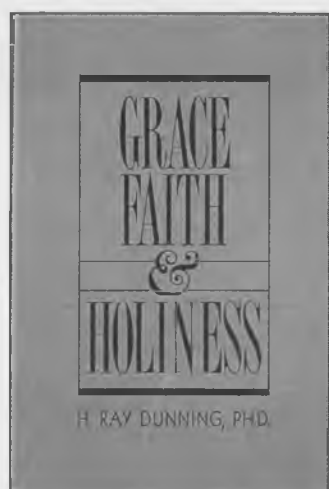
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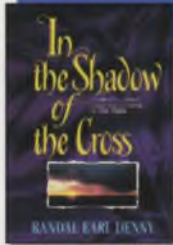
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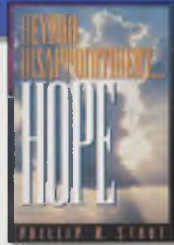
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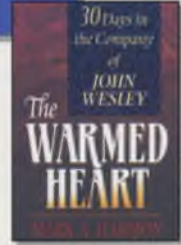
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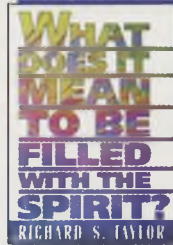


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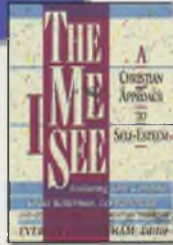
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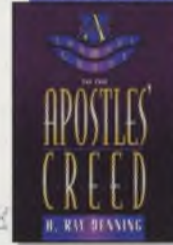


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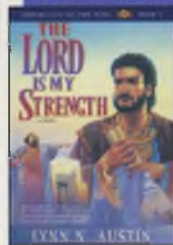
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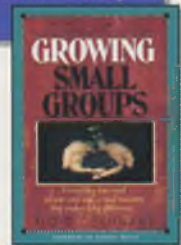


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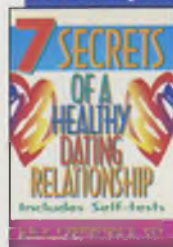
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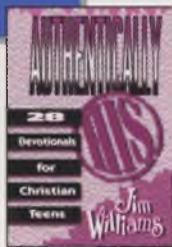


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