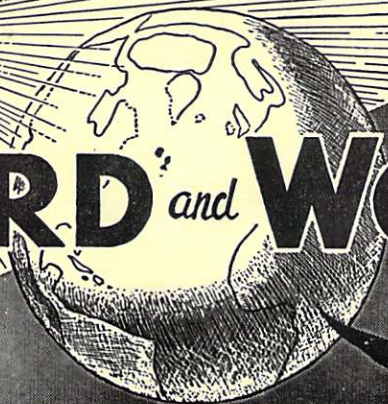


"Holding fast the faithful Word . . ."



The **WORD** and **WORK**



"Holding forth the Word of life."

JULY, 1992

CHURCHES AND CHANGES

Learning Lessons from the Book of JOB

Goodness – Means or Ends?

“How seldom, friends, a good, great man inherits
Honor and wealth, with all his worth and pains!
It seems a story from the world of spirits
When any man obtains that which he merits,
Or any merits that which he obtains.”

“For shame, my friend! Renounce this idle strain!
What would'st thou have a good, great man obtain?
Wealth, title, dignity, a golden chain,
Or heap of corpses which his sword hath slain?
Goodness and greatness are not means but ends.
Hath he not always treasures, always friends,
The good, great man? Three treasures, love and light
And calm thoughts equable as infant's breath:
And three fast friends more sure than day or night,
Himself, his Maker and the angel Death.”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

The Word and Work (USPS 691-460) is published monthly except December under the auspices of the Portland Ave. Church of Christ, Inc., Louisville, Ky. Subscription: \$6.00 per year; bundles of 10 or more to one address = \$5.50 per subscription. Address correspondence to Word and Work, 2518 Portland Avenue, Louisville, KY 40212. Second class postage paid at Louisville, Ky.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Word and Work, 2518 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212.

Volume LXXXVI

JULY, 1992

No. 7

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THEME:

CHURCHES and CHANGES

Alex V. Wilson

For once we have two main themes: *change*, and *Job*. There is overlapping there, come to think about it. He certainly experienced dramatic change in his circumstances—from flying high with everything going his way, to the pits of the pits. So join the writers who ponder his life and struggles, and even those of his wife. Job offers us a wealth of important insights. But first let's consider *change*.

A friend of mine handed me this wise saying: "The secret to a happy life is to *accept change gracefully*." Of course some changes are bad and should be resisted and avoided if possible. But others are good and should be welcomed. Let's consider this matter in just one aspect of church life—singing praise to God.

SINGING THROUGH THE CENTURIES OF CHURCH HISTORY

The book of Psalms and many other passages show how God's Old Covenant people used music to worship the Most High and to encourage one another. But for lack of space and time, we limit this article to singing during the Church age.

The first few centuries: During this time believers always sang in *unison*, not in four-part harmony as we usually do today. Also, having no hymnbooks, they commonly sang either responsively or antiphonally. In *responsive* singing the leader sang a line and the others repeated it after him; then he sang the next line, and they repeated that. In *antiphonal* songs, half the congregation sang the first part of a Bible verse (usually from Psalms), and the other half of the congregation sang the second part of the scripture. Many of the tunes were more like *chants* than like modern melodies. [In the hymnal *Great Songs of the Church*, #2, you may find chants like "All Things Come of Thee," "By Christ Redeemed, In Christ Restored," and "For All the Saints." An antiphonal hymn is #525, "Watchman, Tell Us of the Night." And the words of some ancient hymns are found in "Shepherd of Tender Youth" and "Art Thou Weary" (written around 200 and 700 A.D. respectively)—though of course they are set to modern tunes.]

The Middle Ages and the Reformation

During the Middle Ages (roughly 500-1500 A.D.) when the Roman Catholic Church became dominant in Christendom, congregational singing degenerated. That's because the congregation hardly sang at all! Choirs of priests sang, leaving the rest of the church members as *passive listeners* only. Worse than that, they were not edified by the words of the songs they heard, because they were all in Latin. By then, Latin was a *foreign language* to the ordinary people. Passivity and ignorance are surely not God's will for church meetings (see 1 Cor. 14 for example). But alas, for a thousand

years the singing provided little or no edification to the vast majority of the people. Surely these were changes for the worse. No, come to think about it, singing in Latin was a *refusal* to change. In 300 A.D. almost everyone in Europe understood it; a thousand years later the Church insisted on maintaining its traditional language though by then only priests and other scholars knew its meaning.

In the Reformation (early and mid-1500s) Martin Luther restored not only more Biblical doctrine but also more Biblical worship. He believed that *all church members* should sing, and in *their own language*. He himself wrote "A Mighty Fortress in Our God," "Away in a Manger," and twenty-one other hymns, and translated over twenty more hymns into German. He encouraged his countrymen to develop poetic skill and write hymns for God's glory. His success is seen in the preface to a 1546 hymnal, which stated that in the Protestant part of Germany "there is scarcely a pastor or shoemaker who lacks the skill to make a little song to sing at church with his neighbors."

Other reformers took different approaches. Ulrich Zwingli banned all singing from church meetings. No songs ever, at any Christian gatherings! What led to that extreme prohibition? His rigidly literal interpretation of Paul's words, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns," etc., "making melody in your heart." Zwingli reasoned, "It says *speak*, not sing, and urges melody in your *heart*, not throat. So we should say songs rather than sing them." He overlooked a few things, don't you think?

John Calvin agreed with Luther in stressing congregational singing in understandable language. But he disagreed with the hymn-writing by Luther and others. He felt, "How dare any Christian today place his own noninspired writings on the same level as passages from the Word of God, the Bible?" We today are not infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit in the same way that ancient prophets and apostles were, Calvin *rightly* believed. Therefore we should not sing anything but passages of Scripture, especially Psalms, Calvin *wrongly* concluded. At least I think he was wrong, and so do most Christians.

Locked In, Locked Out

But Calvin and Calvinists churches for centuries believed so ardently that only quotations from the Bible should be sung, that sad results occurred in Scotland. Horatius Bonar (1808-1889) was a godly minister and gifted poet. He wrote "Yes, for Me, for Me He Careth," "Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face," "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say," and a number of other spiritual songs. But while Christians in other lands and denominations sang and were blessed by his hymns, his own denomination never did. His own congregation was not allowed to use their minister's songs, all because they were *locked in* to tradition and thus *locked out* of change.

Hymns and Gospel Songs

Bonar lived in the 1800's. But let's backtrack a bit, to the late 1600s. The churches in England had only a few hymns, most of them

badly written. Mostly they sang Biblical Psalms, but the majority of those were poorly paraphrased in English. Here is an example; I don't know what verse it supposedly translates.

Ye monsters of the bubbling deep,
Your Maker's praise spout out.
Up from the sands ye codlings peep,
And wag your tails about.

When young Isaac Watts dared to criticize such verses, people asked him if he could do any better. He could, and did. For the next two years he supplied his church with a new hymn to sing, *weekly!* Over two hundred hymns in as many weeks. During his lifetime he wrote 697 hymns, including "Joy to the World," "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "Alas and Did My Savior Bleed," "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," and "Come, Ye That Love the Lord."

A few years before Watts died in 1748, Charles Wesley began writing hymns. He composed some of them to appeal to the unsaved to turn to Christ (he was an outstanding open-air evangelist), such as "Arise, My Soul, Arise." He wrote others to teach Biblical doctrine to believers and to strengthen the many new converts: "Soldiers of Christ, Arise," "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," "Love Divine, All Love Excelling." Over 6,500 hymns in all! If you wrote a new song every day, it would take over seventeen years to write that many.

Wesley died in 1788. A decade or so later, over on the U.S. frontier, evangelistic "camping meetings" began and spread. And in those camp meetings a new type of song became popular—the *gospel song*. Such songs had a number of stanzas, and a chorus would be sung after each one. They were usually livelier than hymns, and tended to be more subjective. That is, as a rule they were more experienced-centered than doctrinal. A number of outstanding gospel-song writers arose during the 1800s, but none matched blind Fanny Crosby. It is thought she wrote over 8,000; since she sometimes used pseudonyms the exact number can't be determined. I won't even start listing titles here; it would be too hard to quit. No doubt some of your favorites would be in that list.

But here's food for thought: Horatius Bonar's church in Scotland in the mid- and later-1800s *never* sang hymns by Luther, Watts, Wesley or others because of their traditional view that only Bible passages should be sung. And they *never* sang gospel songs by Fanny Crosby or anyone else—because of their closed-mindedness. And they refused to sing hymns by their own beloved minister. *THINK WHAT THEY MISSED*, and all because they were locked in to tradition and looked out of change. It's a wonder they didn't insist on singing in unison, and either responsively or antiphonally.

Us and Our Times

During the turbulent 1960s hell seemed to boil over: assassinations, riots, drugs, demonstrations, defiance toward all authority, unbridled sex, occultism, and more. But God answered by a mighty

movement, mainly among young people. Lots of them were saved dramatically after living deep in sin. One result was a great burst of creativity, especially in songs of praise. Then and during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, many writers and singers have poured forth a flood of Christian songs. I mean folks like Keith Green, Andre Crouch, the Gaithers, Don Francisco, Amy Grant, Sandi Patti, Michard Card, Steve and Annie Chapman, Steve Green, Steve Camp, and various other individuals and groups. One group of "fulfilled Jews" called their singing group the Liberated Wailing Wall!

Of course there has been chaff among the wheat, fleshly commercialism and celebrity-ism among the spiritual. Nonetheless, during the last twenty-five years disciples of Jesus such as those just named have written and sung hundreds of *good* Christian songs. And dozens or scores of *outstanding* ones, that will be sung decades from now if our Lord delays His return.

Such songs range from simple choruses taken word for word from Scripture ("Be Still and Know that I am God") to songs with challenging words and beautiful music ("People Need the Lord"). Some call us to discipleship, others to holy character. Some exhort us to faithful, realistic family living ("Love is not a Feeling, It's an Act of the Will"), others to stronger faith ("Because He Lives, I Can Face Tomorrow").

But most of all there has been a revival of *Praise*. This has been the keynote: Thou art Worthy. For Thou, O Lord, Art High above All the Earth. We Have Come into this Place to Worship You. Let All that is Within Me Cry, "Worthy." Majesty. I Will Glorify the King of Kings. Our God is an Awesome God. What a Mighty God we Serve. Etc. Some of those songs are solemn, some are exuberant, but all of them extol the Lord for His greatness, grace and glory.

Not only have many writers and composers appeared, but many concerts have been held. Not only in church buildings but in parks, amphitheatres, and stadiums. Large concerts with throngs of people. Informal, vibrant occasions, with clapping and raising of hands to express joy and love and praise. Festive celebrations that remind us of revivals in the days of Hezekiah, Josiah, and Ezra (note Neh. 8, for example).

Of course there are dangers and temptations. I've already mentioned commercialism and celebrity-ism (beware of idols). But the spiritual singers repudiate those attitudes. Care is needed to keep valid stirring of emotions from becoming extreme, harmful *emotionalism*. Also, as is always true in music, tastes differ widely. Some of the beat is too rocky for me, but mature disciples twenty years younger than I love it. And the volume at some concerts keeps me away; but the same songs in my tape-player (turned lower) have been a rich blessing, as King Jesus is lifted high.

The Heart of the Matter

Here's my main concern. Older Christians don't realize how much music affects the younger generations. That is an inescapable-

able fact. Folks under forty grew up with cassette-players in their rooms and Walkmans in their ears when elsewhere. Christian teens and twenties that aren't listening to Steve Camp, Michard Card, "A Cappella," or other Christian singers are almost certainly listening to secular rock or country singers. They may even be listening to Madonna, Michael Jackson, Prince, 2 Live Crew or Guns' n' Roses! Which do we prefer?

We dare not be like Horatius Bonar's church, which impoverished itself because of refusal to change. Don't misunderstand me. I don't know anyone in my church who wants to quit singing hymns by Luther, Watts and Wesley, or gospel songs by Crosby, Bliss and Havergal. But I do know many of our younger folks who want to include contemporary songs as well—like those listed above. Perhaps with freedom to raise hands in praise during some songs. Or perhaps with freedom to clap during some songs. (Not that *everyone* must, but that *anyone* may do so.) We find that a mixture of good old hymns and good news songs helps to enrich and enliven our times of worship. Tensions sometimes arise due to differing opinions and desires. Prayer, humility, love and flexibility are constantly required. But the Lord is helping us.

Let's concentrate on the worthiness of our majestic Lord God and Savior. Praise pleases Him; praise strengthens us. Let's love Him more, and each other more, as together—perhaps in differing ways—we adore God the Highest.

Thank God For Innovations

Denny Boultinghouse

To innovate or not to innovate, that is the question. In the mind of some brethren, there is no question—we must not innovate. We must not question or change. "Innovation" has become a dirty word.

To some dear brethren, innovation is tantamount to apostasy. Entire speeches bemoan all the innovations in the church. Some want everything back like it was before we started "drifting."

In reality, most of our current practices were originally innovations. If Christians from the first century were to visit our assemblies, they would recognize very few of the things we are so accustomed to. Things like song books, printed Bibles, song leaders, pulpits, closing prayers, invitation songs, passing the plate, Sunday school, Wednesday night service, and four-part harmony would be totally foreign to them. All of these are changes since the first century—they are innovations.

Nor would first-century Christians be familiar with such things as: Christian colleges, Christian camps, religious magazines, church buildings, Christians voting in political elections, child-care ministries, ladies Bible classes, two services on Sunday, lectureships, gospel tracts written by uninspired writers, insurance on the building, tiny

cups filled with grape juice, air-conditioning, visitor's cards, and so on. Each of these is an innovation.

Does that mean that everything should change? Of course not. Nobody believes that. There are certain fundamentals of the faith that cannot change. These fundamentals relate to redemption; to the gospel, or to God and his nature. They are foundational, and they cannot change. And Scripture is pretty clear about what kinds of things fall into this category. Such fundamentals are generally in a salvation context in Scripture. Truths about sin, the Cross, the response God wants from mankind, Jesus, and His nature do not change. And such things will remain the same throughout the ages, regardless of the time or culture.

Simple Christianity is actually rather streamlined and baggage free. It has very few of the trappings we often attach to it.

This is why Christianity is so adaptable to every time and culture, further demonstrating the foresight of God.

Most railings against innovations in the church are not concerned with any of the foundational matters of the faith. Instead, these railings are against innovations in human traditions or cultural practices. When comfort zones are violated, people scream. When traditions are challenged, people react in fear.

As someone has wisely said, "We can neither break with the past nor return to it." Of course we are the result of our past. And we should recognize and honor our past. But to attempt to reproduce that past is suicidal. It cannot be done.

If we are to continue, we must innovate. In fact, we must continually innovate, adapt, and grow. True stability lies only in motion, in transition, in growth.

We must be people with a disposition of innovation. We must be predisposed toward change. The very message of Christ is one of change. It demands repentance and growth, and neither is possible without change (innovation).

To take an attitude against change is to take a stand that is untenable. It is not biblical, nor is it realistic. To work against innovation is to live in a fairy tale world. In reality, we do not have the option of living in a world where change does not occur. Innovations will continue to occur, and the pace, variety, and breadth of those changes will continue to increase.

We must examine all innovations to see if they are consistent with the will of God. Whether or not they fit into our church of Christ culture should be of minimal concern. It should be more important to us that the suggested innovation be consistent with the will of God. If it is, and if it will help people grow or help the lost to hear the gospel, then we should pursue it.

We must not be a self-serving, sectarian group. Such is not consistent with our heritage, nor is it biblical, nor is it realistic. May we be a people of innovation; for without innovation we die. Thank God for innovations in the church.

[Editorial in IMAGE magazine. Used by permission.]

An urgent message for ALL churches is found in this sermon preached in Dallas on May 31 of this year—

Changing Times, Changing Churches

Bob Yarbrough

I want to share a message that has been upon my heart for a long time. (Recently I heard my thoughts presented by another minister here in town. Much credit is given to Mike Armour, minister at the Skillman Ave. Church for his message and I have asked him for permission to share it with you today.) Basically our congregation is made up of older members, and I want to talk to you about that generation, and some things that you are experiencing, and some thing we ought to be honest and forthright about.

Yours is the generation that has weathered more change than any in the history of mankind. One brother at Prairie Creek, before he died, lived to span the time from the horse and buggy/covered wagon days to see a man walk on the moon, and walk in space. Think about that: From spoke wheels to Sputnik in one lifetime. No era in man's history has asked people to make the adaptation that the generations represented in this room have been asked to make. And yet the pace of change is not slowing down. By all forecasts we are going to continue to see that pace of change accelerate. In today's high-tech world, if a person writes a piece of computer software, its average shelf-life before it becomes obsolete is twenty-two months—and I dare say some of us here today do not even know what is meant by the term computer software. Never before in industry have products come on line so quickly and become obsolete so quickly as today, because technology and the demands of the world about us are changing so rapidly. And you've been asked to weather that change, and you've done a magnificent job with it. Yours is a generation that has had a "can do" spirit about it from day one. It is a generation that licked the Depression, fought World War II, weathered the Cold War, and even in your senior years continues to play a more active role in politics in the community than any generation before you.

And yet the struggle with change is not becoming any less. Because during those years of change, when government was changing, business was changing, society was changing, and our community was changing, you experienced a setting in which, for the most part, the church did *not* change very much. The church of the twenties was pretty much like the church of the late forties, and the church of the late forties was pretty much like the church of the late sixties. But the church of the late sixties is not at all like the church of the early nineties. In earlier decades your church experience was a rather stable thing. It was predictable. You knew how things had always been done, and therefore you anticipated the sameness of your traditions. You understood how things would always be done. But now, even there, change is occurring.

There are some things which are attractive to young families, which are not particularly attractive to you. Many of you have talked to Chuck, and me, and you cannot understand why younger ones want to go elsewhere in their religious life than stay with what you are used to. But that's part of the change we are experiencing. There is a tremendous gulf in expectations, and interests, and willingness to be involved in various activities between the generation represented here in majority, and the younger generations which are so absent from this congregation today. About a year ago *Parade Magazine* ran a survey of their readers to find out what the top ten TV programs were among their readers by age groups. They looked at the people basically from 18 to 28, then the people 28 to 48, then they looked at the people 50 and above. And in those first two groups, 8 of the 10 programs appeared on both lists. But when they came to the age group representing your generation, not one program on your top ten was anywhere to be found on the lists of the other two groups. Not one! And I don't know if you have heard, but recently NBC has announced that some of your favorites are going away from their network, like *Matlock*. You know why? No young audience.

We are living in a world in which there is a wide difference of interests, perceptions, and felt needs by the two generations. For one thing, those who are under 35 today have a different prospect of the future on middle age and old age from what you had. You came along at a time when the presupposition was that if one worked hard enough and diligently enough, he would be better off in middle age and old age than mom and dad had been. That is not the perception of today's 25 and 35 year olds. The economists and the forecasters tell us that their pessimism is correct. Today's young adults are the first generation in the history of our Republic who will never do as well on average as their parents did on average. That's because the cost of *housing* is so far out of reach for them to get started that many of them will never be able to get into the housing market. And even those who are getting into the housing market are not enjoying the appreciating values the earlier generations had.

They also do not know the *job security* that was taken for granted by your generation. When many of you got serious and went into the business world, you went to work for a good company and gave them a serious endeavor, and believed they would take care of you. You would be with them and retire and have a comfortable retirement, because they would watch out for you. But if you watch today you'll see how many men in their 30's and 40's have been put on the street after years of faithful service to a company because company X merged with company Y, and company Y was bought out by company Z and company Z had no loyalty to the employees of company X. Today, no young person expects to be with a company very long because he knows how quickly job security can be taken away from him. These young adults have a completely different outlook on their careers, their financial future, and their financial security. There are very few in my peer group who really believe they will draw much Social Security. And the ones behind me feel they will *never* draw it

because the system will be bankrupt by the time they get there—if they ever do. That's a different outlook from your generation. Across the board we're widely different. And when these differences are put before us, and we look at them, they are far different than differences that have ever existed before between an older and a younger generation.

As we deal with the issue of how do we best take the message of Christ to two generations who look at things so differently, it creates a tension that elders and ministers, and congregations—this one in particular—struggle with at this present time. How can we do things that you will feel comfortable and at home with, but which at the same time are not so foreign to younger families which we need to attract and hold within our congregation? Now to give you an example: In a church worship service conducted not long ago at another place, there was a young lady who came and sat in the assembly at the front of the auditorium. One of the church members had been encouraging her to come for months because she was a very spiritually minded person. She had expressed interest in the Bible and Chris-

She likes rock, he likes Bach. Some want Fanny Crosby, others prefer Keith Green. So . . . ?

tianity, so finally she came with the church member. The minister said that he thought it was a very good worship service. The songs were sung, everyone participated, colds and coughs were at a minimum. It was a good morning, thought the minister, as did most others there. After the service, the young lady was asked how she enjoyed the service. What did she think of it? These were her words, "It all seemed so old!"

Now for most of you today that probably would have been one of the richest worship services of the year, but for her it seemed "old." She didn't mean that the people were old, though some were of course. She meant the style. It had nothing contemporary to it. The *songs* sung were 70, 80, 100 years old, and were unlike many of the songs she and her friends sing. And the structure of what they were doing seemed so *formal*, because today's younger people are very *informal*. Your generation tends to think of spirituality in terms of *quietness and reflection*. The younger generation tends to think of spirituality reflected by *spontaneity and freedom*. And so, what they come into an assembly looking for is quiet different than what you come into an assembly looking for. And how do we keep those forces in balance? At what point do we sing the songs your generation loves, and at what point do we sing the songs the younger generation loves? Must we remain formal, and somber, and expect the younger generation to toe the line or else? An honest look at our attitudes about this matter will reveal that we may have driven away much of the younger generation (perhaps even our own children) to an almost total annihilation of our

very existence in many, many churches. How should we keep a reasonable mix of those things so as to perpetuate our existence rather than destroy ourselves in the name of truth and protocol as we see it? That is a tough, tough problem. And so it's important for us to realize as we are trying to deal with this shift, as we are trying to work with the entire spectrum of generations and meet a variety of needs, sometimes it's difficult to come up with one "package," a "one-size-fits-all" kind of Christianity. It is also difficult for us to understand why this shift is so hard for us emotionally.

That is why I want you to turn with me today in the scriptures and consider an episode that you are familiar with in Acts 15. Here we are going to find no less than the apostles themselves struggling with feeling comfortable in shifting the way they went about religion. You see, there are some things we can change in our society, and it's a little disruptive, but it's OK. The bank changes its hours, the supermarket changes its checkout procedures, and we eventually adjust to it. But there are other things that, when we're asked to adjust to, they are very, very emotionally laden.

For example, music is one of them, for every generation. That's why the choice of songs is so difficult. Your generation is comfortable with one style of music, and the younger generation is comfortable with another, and it's more than just comfort. Frankly, you feel very strongly that we ought to sing your kind of music, because it's what you grew up on. It's as if God himself wrote and sanctioned it. Younger people prefer other styles and tempos and accompaniment, but out of respect for their elders, they defer in most cases to the older generations. That's the way the Lord must want it, they are told. But the Lord never said anything in the N.T. about music *per se*. He had much to say about it in the O.T.. The same psalmist who wrote Psalm 23 also wrote Psalm 150. The same God who loves to be the Shepherd of Psalm 23, Is He not the same God who loves to be worshipped with music in Psalm 150? But when you start tinkering with the music, you get people quite animated, especially older ones. But that's true of religion in general. When you begin to change the way religion is "packaged," you tread in dangerous waters. Whether we have Sunday morning services, or Sunday night services, or Wednesday night services, and *when* we do that and how they are *structured*—when we start playing with those things, emotions run high. Ideas become to a large degree very selfish, rather than Biblical. And it's all because religion is so dear to the core of what we are, and what we are perceived to be by others.

That's the problem they were facing here in Acts 15. The setting is at the end of Paul's first missionary journey. I want to emphasize that because this is a story that does not take place immediately after the church is founded. Time had passed. It's only 7 or 8 pages in your Bible from the founding of the church on the day of Pentecost, but in fact, years and years had passed to this point. The church had grown in Jerusalem and Judea. It had reached out to the Gentiles, it had established itself in a mighty way at Antioch. Paul had been converted, Barnabas had worked by himself, then with Paul. Later they

went on a missionary journey throughout Asia Minor (Turkey), planted churches through that area for several years, and they had come back to Antioch. So we are well down the track in the history of the early church. And then the problem came up that Luke describes in Acts 15.

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. . . . When they came to Jerusalem . . . some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them . . . [Then] the whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul When they finished, James spoke up Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided . . . (Acts 15:1-22).

I must be honest with you. I hadn't really thought about this story very much until something struck me. They had to spend so *much time* discussing this issue. When those men showed up at Antioch and said emphatically, "It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles, and make them keep the law of Moses to be Christians," why didn't Paul and Barnabas say, "Hey, wait a minute! You've been in the church at Jerusalem. Is anyone there circumcising their kids? Have you heard anyone there teach the doctrine of circumcision? This is a new doctrine you are teaching." They didn't say that. Instead, as Paul and Barnabas got back to Jerusalem, there was no clear thought on this in the minds of the apostles and elders. They had a considerable discussion, according to the text—a lengthy debate! You know what that tells me? It tells me that those Christians there in Jerusalem had continued to circumcise their sons according to their custom and tradition. That had continued to be part of the way they had gone about their religious expression—doing what their parents before them had done. Otherwise, there would not have been the need for so much dialogue to resolve this problem. Do you follow my logic? These people were still following much of the law of Moses. And they were being encouraged that way by leaders from within their group who had come out of Phariseism. They had brought many of their Pharisee ideas with them into the church, and the church was simply following along with those. Interestingly enough, when they realized that Christ died to set them free from a yoke of bondage, and they could not bind circumcision on the Gentiles, nothing was said to those Jews who still felt they should continue in that practice. They were not told to stop the practice. There was simply *the recognition that the way they had been doing things should not be imposed on others*. They must not force the Gentiles to do something that the Jewish Christians had been doing, and just taking for granted that that was the way it should be done. But this was a very difficult decision for them to reach. That's why there was the lengthy dialogue and discussion that the text mentions.

[To be concluded]

LEARNING LESSONS from the Book of JOB

Contract Faith

Rubel Shelly

My concern about the faith of many of us is that it takes the basic form of a contract with God. The provision we have stipulated in the pact goes something like this: *I'll believe, worship, and follow You, Lord, so long as life treats me well.*

The reason for thinking something like this is at work among us is simple enough. People too often complain about life, blame God for their problems, and walk away from Him in frustration. Just so long as people continue to confuse God with their circumstances will their faith be shallow and subject to easy overthrow. Some of us need to rethink the nature of our commitment to God.

The Book of Job deals with this problem directly. It was Satan who thought Job's faith was a contract with God. "Let me take away the trappings of his 'charmed life,'" he declared, "and Job will curse Your name!"

So, one by one, all the tangible things we humans tend to view as proofs of God's love were stripped away from him. He lost his immense wealth, his children were killed in a violent storm, and he was immersed in suffering.

His friends told him all these things were God's punishments. His wife turned against him. There was no word from God to explain what was happening in his life. But Job persevered.

A modern example—Philip Yancey published a book in 1988 titled *Disappointment With God*. It deals with the problem of evil. Specifically, it addresses the fact that many Christians have felt betrayed by God because of some terrible event in their lives. In that book, he tells of a person he calls Douglas.

After his training in medicine and psychiatry, Douglas chose to forego private practice in favor of urban ministry. His troubles began a few years ago when his wife found a lump in her breast. The malignant lump was removed, but two years later the cancer had spread to her lungs.

Chemotherapy followed and devastated her. She couldn't keep any food down. Her hair fell out. She suffered from chronic fatigue and depression. Douglas had to take over almost all of the family responsibilities for managing the household and parenting.

Right in the middle of this trying ordeal, Douglas and his family were driving down a city street where a drunk driver swerved into their lane and hit their car head-on. His wife was shaken but unhurt. Their daughter suffered a broken arm and severe cuts to her face. And Douglas received a whopping blow to his head.

Resulting from this accident, Douglas suffered regular but unpredictable headaches that debilitated him. He couldn't work a full

day. He sometimes became disoriented and forgetful. And his vision was permanently affected from the wreck. One eye wandered at will and would not focus. He suffered double vision and had to be helped down stairs.

Yancey asked to meet with Douglas one day and told him about the book he was writing on disappointment with God. "What have you learned that might help someone else going through a difficult time?" he asked his friend. The response he received humbled him.

"To tell you the truth, Philip, I didn't feel any disappointment with God," he began. "The reason is this. I learned, first through my wife's illness and then especially through the accident, not to confuse God with life. I'm no stoic. I am as upset about what happened to me as anyone could be. I feel free to curse the unfairness of life

I learned not to confuse God with life . . . God is not a good luck charm.

and to vent all my grief and anger. But I believe God feels the same way about the accident—grieved and angry. I don't blame Him for what happened. . . .

"We tend to think, 'Life should be fair because God is fair.' But God is not life. And if I confuse God with the physical reality of life—by expecting good health, for example—then I set myself up for a crashing disappointment."

God is not the brand name for a good luck charm, and faith is not the secret to health, wealth, and security. We must avoid the simplistic formulas that "Suffering is punishment," or "Whatever happens is the will of God," or "God is trying to teach me something."

Much of the suffering in this world is undeserved and random; it is the "common misfortune" that is part of the human experience. Some of it is the result of sin—sometimes one's own and sometimes that of others. And some of it is persecution for the sake of doing right.

So don't expect life to be fair, and please don't "contract" your faith. Otherwise, you will either lose your faith or have to stifle the hard questions about how it works in this world.

It is best to realize that God is not the source of our misfortune, pain and grief but is instead the one who has identified with us in these things through the incarnation. Since our high priest has been one with us in flesh and blood, we can know He sympathizes with our weakness. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Life will not always treat you well, but the God who is faithful to His promises will never abandon you to its evils. So don't ground your faith in your circumstances. Ground it directly in the steadfast God who was himself treated so unfairly in life.

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When the Facts Don't Add Up

A just, loving, and powerful God should follow certain rules, shouldn't he?

Philip Yancey

What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? —Job 7:17-19, NIV

If you had asked me a few years ago what the book of Job was about, I would have been quick to respond, "Job? Everybody knows what Job is about. It's the Bible's most complete treatment of the problem of pain and suffering."

I refer to Job whenever I write about pain. And without doubt, the bulk of the book (chaps. 3-37) revolves around the theme of suffering. Those middle chapters render no action to speak of, just five prickly men—Job, his three friends, and the mostly silent Elihu—sitting around discussing theories of pain. They are trying to account for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that have fallen upon poor Job.

We cannot get enough of Job's story. Its central motif of undeserved suffering seems peculiarly suited to our own pain-wracked century, an era that has included two world wars, two atom bomb attacks, and more than its share of genocide attempts.

More, the portrait of genial old Job, moaning mournfully while life caves in around him, seems to fit a favorite modern stereotype. Neal Simon borrowed the Job setting for his play, *God's Favorite*, as did Archibald MacLeish (J.B.), and Robert Frost before him ("*The Masque of Reason*"). Recently, novelist Muriel Spark again tried to update the play of Job in a contemporary setting (*The Only Problem*).

All of the takeoffs explore the conundrum posed by the original book. Job and his friends agreed that a just, loving, and powerful God ought to follow certain rules on earth. Mainly, he should reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. Job's suffering, his friends argued must therefore have come as punishment for some unconfessed sin.

For Job, who knew his own soul, the facts did not add up. And for us, too, they do not add up. We see the face of unexplained suffering wherever we look: the Jews in the Holocaust, famine victims in Africa, Christians in Communist and Moslem prisons. Those who still subscribe to the neat formula of Job's friends—and there are many, if religious television is any indication—would do well to consider just one sobering fact: the most aggressively Christian continent on Earth, Africa, is also the hungriest. (And the most aggressively non-Christian region, around the Arabian Sea, is the richest.)

In short, the questions asked so eloquently by Job have not faded away over the centuries. They have grown even louder and shriller.

Yet, despite all the echoes in modern literature, despite my own reliance on Job as I write about pain, despite the fact that all but a few pages of Job focus exclusively on the problem of pain, I am coming to the conclusion that Job is not *about* the problem of pain at all. Details of suffering serve as the ingredients of the story, the stuff of which it is made, not the central theme. A cake it not "about" eggs, flour, milk, and shortening. It merely uses those ingredients in the process of creating a cake. In the same way, Job is not "about" suffering but merely uses such ingredients in its overall scheme.

Rather, when seen as a whole, Job is a book about faith. It tells the story of one man selected to undergo a staggering test of faith. His trial and response present a message that applies not just to suffering people, but to every person who lives on planet Earth. Most of the time, our visual faculties admit a narrow spectrum of "natural" light; Job temporarily lifts our blinders and reveals the supernatural activity going on behind the scenes.

A STORY WITHIN A STORY

To understand how the themes of faith and suffering work together in Job, it helps to think of the book as a mystery play, a "whodunit" detective story. We in the audience showed up early for a press conference in which the director explained his work (chaps. 1-2). We know in advance who did what in the play, and we understand that the personal drama on earth has its origin in a cosmic drama in heaven—the contest over Job's faith. Will he believe in God or deny him?

But then the curtains come down, and when they are raised again we see just the actors on stages. Confined within the play, they have no knowledge of the "omniscient" point of view enjoyed by the audience. Although we know the answer to the "whodunit" questions, the star detective, Job, does not. Obsessed with sufferings, he spends his time on stage trying to discover what we viewers already know. He scratches himself with shards of pottery and asks trenchant questions: Why me? What did I do wrong? What is God trying to tell me?

For those of us in the "audience," Job's "whodunit" questions should be mere intellectual exercises, for we already know the answers. What has Job done? The answer is easy—he's done nothing. God himself called Job "blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (2:3). Why is Job suffering? We know in advance that he is not being punished. Far from it—he has been selected as the principal player in a great contest of the heavens. God is using Job to prove to Satan that a human being's faith can be genuine and selfless, not dependent on God's good gifts. Job represents the very best of the species.

Because of the glimpse "behind the curtain" afforded in chapters 1 and 2, the author of Job forfeits all elements of narrative tension but one: the question of how Job will respond. In short, it is the question of his faith.

THE CONTEST

It is a testament to the genius of the book—and the reason it has endured as a work of literature—that we can forget chapters 1 and 2

and get swept up in Job's personal anguish. He struggles with the imponderables of suffering with such force that, for the duration of the book, his questions become our questions. We must remind ourselves that behind the lofty speeches looms the background setting of those first chapters in which the director explained in advance the nature of the contest.

Some commentators treat chapter 1 and 2 with a tone of mild embarrassment. I get the distinct impression they would like the Book of Job much better if it began with chapter 3. The scene in heaven shows God and Satan involved in—and you can almost see blush marks on the commentary pages—well, something resembling a wager. The two have a kind of bet going, at God's instigation, a contest in which God has stacked the odds against Himself.

Satan's accusation that Job loves God only because "you have put a hedge around him" stands as an attack on God's character. It implies that God is unworthy of love in himself; people like Job follow him merely because they are "bribed" to do so. Job's response when all the props of faith are removed will prove or disprove Satan's challenge.

The remainder of the book weaves together wonderful strains of dramatic irony, the most prominent being a double-hinged trial of integrity. To Job, God is on trial: How can a loving God treat him so unfairly? All of Job's legal briefs, however, are contained within the setting of the larger trial set up in chapters 1 and 2, the test of Job's faith. From our omniscient reader's viewpoint, we watch for cracks in Job's integrity as he loses, one by one, everything of meaning and value.

It says something about our modern culture that we find such sympathy for Job's point of view. C. S. Lewis put his finger on the reason behind our empathetic response in his essay, "God in the Dock":

"The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that Man is on the Bench and God in the Dock."

The Book of Job may help us form questions about God, but it fails to give many answers, for a very simple reason: chapters 1 and 2 have clearly shown that, regardless of what Job thinks, God is not on trial in this book. Job is on trial. The point of the book is not suffering—"Where is God when it hurts?"—that's dealt with in the prologue. The point is faith—Where is Job? How is he responding?

Do human beings truly possess freedom and dignity? Satan challenged God on that count. We have freedom to descend, of course—Adam and all his offspring have proved that. But do we have freedom to ascend, to believe God for no other reason than, well . . . for no reason at all. Can a person believe even when God appears to him as an enemy? Is that kind of faith even possible?

Or is faith, like everything else, a product of environment and circumstances? These are the questions posed in the Book of Job. In the opening chapters, Satan reveals himself as the first great behaviorist. Job was *conditioned* to love God, he claims. Take away the rewards, and watch faith crumble. Job, oblivious, is selected for the great contest.

JOB

Trapped in the “ingredients” of the drama, Job concerns himself exclusively with the issue of suffering. Of course, he knows nothing of the cosmic contest of faith—knowing such inside information would keep his trial from being fair. As a result, he feels betrayed by God.

How, then, does Job respond? What does his faith look like? His speeches contain some of the most profound expressions of pain, despair, and outrage in all of literature. He wanders just to the edge of blasphemy. The first words in his first speech set the tone for what follows: “May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’” (3:2, NIV). (For a sampling of Job’s expressions of anguish, see 3:24, 6:3, 10:21, 14:18-19, 16:9, 19:7, 30:20-27).

To Job in his misery, God seems a villain who “destroys both the blameless and the wicked” (9:22)—the reverse image of Jesus’ concept of a Father who sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). The same bleak fate awaits everyone, whether good or evil: “Side by side they lie in the dust, and worms cover them both” (21:26).

In his final speeches, Job marshals every example of unfairness that he can find in the world. Those of us who know the full story, and rush to the ending, may easily miss the impact of his words of anguish. One does not expect to find the arguments of God’s greatest adversaries—say, Mark Twain’s *Letters from Earth* or Bertrand Russell’s *Why I Am Not a Christian*—bound into the center of the Bible.

Yet, in the end, God praises Job, in marked contrast to his verdict on Job’s pious friends: “I am angry with you [Eliphaz] and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has” (42:7). In light of Job’s vitriolic responses, how does he triumph? To put it crudely, how does God “win the wager” on Job’s faith? Why does Job never follow his wife’s advice at the beginning, to “curse God and die”?

Though it is true that he questions God’s fairness and goodness and love, and despairs of his own life, Job refuses to turn his back on God. “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him,” he defiantly insists (13:15). He may have given up on God’s justice, but he stubbornly refuses to give up on God. At the most unlikely moments of despair, he comes up with brilliant flashes of hope and faith (9:33; 16:19-21).

In desperation, Job settles on one request, and sticks to it until the end. He asks only for a personal explanation from God himself (13:3, 31:35). He wants a day in court, a chance to hear God testify on his own behalf about what surely looks like a gross injustice.

This last request arouses Job’s friends to fury. What right has he, one insignificant human being, to call God into account? How

could a "man, who is but a maggot—a son of man, who is only a worm" (25:6) oppose the God of the universe? Job will not back down. To the end, he insists on his right to question God.

Job ultimately passes the test of faith by clinging to belief in God although he has no evidence in support of that belief, and much against it. And he clings to his own human dignity even as it is being assailed on all sides. One might even call Job the first Protestant, in the fullest sense of the word. He takes his stand upon individual faith rather than yielding to pious dogma.

THE FINALE

Ironically, God appears to Job just as Elihu is explaining why Job has no right to ask for divine intervention. Much has been made about God's magnificent speech in Job 38 - 41. I too, have marveled at the wonderful images from nature, but along with marvel comes a nagging sense of bewilderment. Why does God avoid the very questions that have been tormenting poor Job? His avoidance of the issue of suffering seems shocking after 35 chapters on nothing else.

God's choice of content leads back to chapters 1 and 2, the "behind the curtain" context. Job and his friends talked about suffering because they were trapped in the "ingredients" of the drama; they could see nothing else. God, of course, knew all along that the real question was the challenge of the original contest: Job's faith. Would he cling to faith when every self-interested reason for doing so was pulled away? "He will curse you to your face," Satan had gambled. And he lost. Job's character held up.

God does have some words of correction for Job, and the message expressed in splendid poetry boils down to this: *Until you know a little more about running the physical universe, Job, don't tell me how to run the moral universe.* God criticizes Job for only one thing: his ignorance. Job made his judgments on the basis of incomplete evidence—an insight that those of us "in the audience" had seen all along.

His lecture delivered, God sets about restoring double all that Job had lost. Some people like to dwell on the good-news account of Job's restored fortunes. They emphasize that Job underwent trials only for a season before again receiving material reward.

True, God did reward Job lavishly. But the thrust of the book convinces me that faith, not rewards, is the main emphasis in Job. I say this carefully, but from God's viewpoint, Job's material prosperity was insignificant *in comparison* with the cosmic issues involved. *Oh, pain? I can fix that easily. More children? Camels and oxen? No problem.* Those rewards on earth were peripheral to Job in exactly the same sense that they were later peripheral to the apostle Paul, who prayed that "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20).

FAITH, NOT PLEASURE

Because of the unique angle of vision afforded us in Job 1 - 2, we can see in the saga of Job far more than the exaggerated trials of a sad, old man. Without knowing it, Job played a key role in a cosmic

HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE JOB'S WIFE?

The Truth About Faith

David Wilkerson

Is your faith weak? Are you perplexed because your faith doesn't seem to get results? Have you diligently prayed about a request and believed for it with all your heart—and it didn't happen? Even worse, the very opposite happened? A loved one was not healed. The desire of your heart was not granted—at least, not to your satisfaction. The miracle you needed has not yet come. Time drags on, and the problems are still there.

The worst part of it all is that the Word of God tries you in such times. You read all the glorious promises: "All things are possible to them that believe." "Ask, nothing wavering, and it shall be done." "All things whatsoever you shall ask in faith, believing, you shall have them." You set out to claim those promises. You know God is not a liar, and He would not tease you with unreachable goals. Yet, try as you may to believe—really, truly believe—you often are left confused, because the answer is either delayed or not in view.

According to the theology of some, there are only two reasons why you did not get what you asked for. Either your faith is faulty or there is sin in your life. You are made to believe that God had to withhold the answer until your faith improved enough to satisfy Him. Either the quality or quantity of your faith did not come up to God's criteria for answered prayer.

You are made to believe that God is obligated by His Word to answer every request—the moment you reach the proper pinnacle of faith. That includes removing from your vocabulary any negatives thoughts, words, or confessions. You see, you dare not offend God. He may have been almost ready to grant your desire—but, oops! You made a negative confession. You said the wrong words, so God's taking it all back? Now you have it—now you don't!

My friends, that kind of theology is silly, and it's a slap in the face of an intelligent, loving Heavenly Father. Everywhere I go today, I meet Christians living in fear of saying the wrong thing and thereby blocking the flow of blessings—as if God is hanging on every word His children say, tiptoeing around, ready to slap a penalty on everyone who speaks out of line.

I am meeting Christians throughout our nation whose faith is shipwrecked because they are disillusioned and hurt. They came upon a "faith" teaching that made them believe that getting every desire of the heart depended simply on getting their formulas correct. They were challenged to launch out in God for prosperity, perfect health, and whatever else their minds could conceive. "Conceive, then believe," they were told. They were urged to blot out of their thinking all thoughts of suffering, pain, poverty—or anything negative.

They were carried along by the testimonies of those around them who were getting new cars, homes, jobs, fur coats, diamond rings—whatever their hearts desired—all through positive faith.

But when none of these things happened for them—when, instead of prosperity, there came accumulating bills—when, instead of healing, there came a time of testing, tears, sorrow, and all—they ended up confused! What happened? It worked for the teacher. It worked for the evangelist. He prospers. He gets anything he wants—right when he wants it. Then comes the questions, “It works for others—why not for me?” “What am I doing wrong? It must be in me—my faith must be weak, imperfect. There must be a secret sin blocking the answer.”

Let me share with you some very healing thoughts about faith and love. I believe God works miracles in answer to the prayer of faith. I believe every promise in God’s Word—as is! But, through much suffering and tears, I’ve discovered something wonderful about the way God works. What you are about to read should help renew your confidence in the Lord and set you free from the bondage of trying to figure out faith.

LESSON ONE:

God is not motivated to act for us as a result of our faith alone. God is love, and that is what motivates Him to act.

Suppose my son Greg was caught in a bear trap in the woods near our home. I hear his cry for help. He is hurt, bleeding, and calls for me with all his might.

As his father, do I stop first to analyze the quality of his faith? Do I ask myself the question, “I wonder if Greg believes I’ll answer him? Does he have faith enough in me—trusting I’ll come to his rescue?”

No! A thousand times no! I run to my boy’s side—no questions asked—no faith involved—because I am motivated by a father’s love for a hurting child. His faith doesn’t motivate me. It is not anything he does at all. It is simply my love for him.

What kind of an earthly father would leave a child bleeding and hurt in some forsaken woods—simply because the child didn’t voice some kind of faith in him? And God will never leave one of His children to suffer alone. He will never shut His ear to their cry—simply because their faith in Him is weak.

God so loves His children, He hears *before* they call, like a mother who anticipates her baby’s cry. He loves me and comes to my rescue when my faith is weak, when I don’t deserve any answer from Him—all because of His tenderness and kindness.

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive with us; nor will He keep His anger forever.” (Psalm 103:8-9).

The greatest peace has flooded my life since I have convinced myself that God loves me. So much so, He will come to my rescue and do what is right—in every situation of my life. Weak faith or not, He still loves me and nothing can hinder that love.

LESSON TWO:

A right confession is no guarantee of an answer—a wrong confession alone does not hinder an answer!

Job's wife confessed the world's worst confession. She said to Job, "Curse God and die!" Yet, in spite of it, she participated in the very same blessings of her faithful husband.

One theologian asked, "Why didn't God take his wife, since He took everything else from Job?" Read almost any commentary and you detect that same kind of disrespect for Job's wife. But lately I've had a new appreciation for that suffering woman. I think we've been too hard on her. After all, those ten children who were killed were hers, too.

No wonder this woman was staggered in her faith. The devil wasn't after her; yet she suffered as much or more than Job. A woman usually suffers more than a man over the death of children. She had the added sorrow of watching her husband slowly die of elephantiasis, a terminal disease.

Job's wife had stood weeping over ten caskets—all in a row. No more grandchildren. No more holidays together with the family. The only family left now was Job, and he, too, was dying. Elephantiasis is described as a disease causing intense heat; a burning, swelling from ulcers and cancerous sores; covering the skin with knotty bark-like texture, such as the skin of an elephant. The disease grows progressively worse and affects the genital organs. This meant Job could have no more children in his diseased condition. His wife could not even look forward to raising a new family. What despair must have

Lately I've gained a new appreciation for Job's wife.

come over her. I'm sure she lost all hope. She had to have been mad at God. I don't excuse what she said, and I think it is tragic that she did not yield to God's love and hold on to her faith. But I can understand the kind of grief and pain that staggered her so. I can understand how, in her human sorrow, she could not fathom what was happening. All she knew was that all was lost. She thought there was nothing left to live for. And that is why she suggested Job commit suicide and abandon his faith in God.

Did God hold a grudge against her? After the troubles passed and Job was healed, did God hold her wrong confession against her? Did He hold back any blessing from her because of her very human outburst of fear? No! God blessed that lady! I believe God understood her. He knew she didn't mean what she said! He looked beyond her frailty and saw the cry of her heart—and He blessed her in spite of herself.

"If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." (Psalm 130:3-4)

"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him." (Psalm 103:10, 13)

"You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful." (James 5:11)

Don't ever be condemned by the things you said in haste or in fear. We serve a Father who forgives and forgets every doubting, fearful word that has been spoken in despair. Be honest with God. Job's wife was. Don't fake it. You can't understand why your prayers aren't answered, or why you have to suffer—if your heart is full of questions, fears, and confusion—tell it to God! Spill out your innermost feelings, negative or not. Our Father will let you cry it all out, listen patiently to your complaints and fears, and not once will He condemn you for it.

All you need do is turn to Him in love and cry out. "Now Lord, heal my unbelief. Take away my fears and confusion. Show me Your love, now that I need it so. Help me submit."

The God I serve holds no grudges.

LESSON THREE:

If you have confessed and forsaken your sins—they can in no way hinder God's work in your life.

If you have truly confessed the sins of yesterday, they are forgiven, under the blood, and no longer counted against you!

For the Christian whose sins are blotted out, delayed answers, suffering, tests, and trials are usually the result of loving chastisement and not sin. The Bible says,

"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently . . ." (Proverbs 13:24)

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' . . . He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble . . ." (Heb. 12:5-12).

I hear people say today, "Yes, the Lord chastens and corrects. But not by way of suffering or pain. God wouldn't do that. Proper faith wouldn't allow it." The truth is, my friend—all through history, to this very day, godly people have suffered and are even now suffering. To deny that is to deny the truth. Paul tells of the suffering of the early Christians. Shall we accuse them of not having faith?

The truth is that some of the saintliest people living today suffer from cancer, ulcers, rheumatism, heart trouble, etc., etc. I cringe when I hear people say, "They don't have to be sick. Their faith is weak."

None of these saints who have suffered would trade place with those who have not. Oh, the growth, the depths of God's love discovered, the true values and rearranged priorities that have resulted from suffering. Those who have not suffered with Christ are shallow, self-centered, and they lack the compassion that only comes from having

met the Lord in the midst of some fiery furnace of trial. There is also an impatient kind of arrogance about people who have never suffered.

I once refused to accept the term, "chosen to suffer." I was appalled by the idea that God allowed some to suffer more than others, to help bring them into a deeper knowledge of Himself. But then I look at those who suffer—and often they are the most faithful, trusting, loving of all God's children. Truly, they are chosen vessels.

I know some will be offended by what I've just said. And that is because we have strayed so far from the realities of Christ's Gospel. We are so spoiled, so self-pampering, we forget that the call of Christ is to separation, tests, trials, yes and even suffering. Proof? Yes! Much proof!

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.'" (Acts 9:15-16)

"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin..." (Heb. 11:24-25)

"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..." (Phil. 1:29)

CONCLUSIONS

If you can't give God perfect faith, give Him perfect love. "Perfect love casts out all fear."

Not perfect faith—but perfect love. Perfect love is the rest God has for His people. He wants us to rest in His love, trusting that He will always come to our aid as a father to a hurting child—in spite of our inadequate faith.

Stop evaluating or grading your faith. Quit trying to figure out faith. The Bible says, "*But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Pursue love...*" (1 Cor. 13:13; 14:1)

If you are going to "specialize" in anything—make it love. The Bible says, "Faith works by love." Without love, all faith is in vain.

If God does not answer certain of our prayers, you can be sure He has some great eternal reason for not doing so.

It boils down to this: God has all power and can do anything. Nothing is impossible to Him. He has promised to answer every prayer in Christ's name. So we must ask, in full assurance of faith—expecting an answer. *But*—should God delay that answer or choose another path for us—He must have a mighty good reason for it all. And we must believe that whatever God permits in our lives—it will one day all work to our good.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

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This is an excerpt of an article originally printed in The Last Days Magazine. If you would like additional copies of the complete article, please write to Last Days Ministries at the above address and ask for #054. If you would like a gift subscription to The Last Days Magazine, please send your request to the same address.]

Making Sense of Job

Leroy Garrett

The book of Job corrects a misconception that pervades the modern church as well as the old Jewish church, that righteousness will be rewarded (in this world) and wickedness will be punished (in this world). It is one of the themes of the old Wisdom literature, as in Ps. 37:25; "I have been young and I am now old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."

We can say that this is the way it should be, as we see it, and that it often is this way, but by no means always. The righteous do sometimes have to beg bread, and they are sometimes forsaken, as Job was, and they sometimes face bankruptcy, contract cancer, and die in war and traffic accidents. Moreover, the wicked often get off Scot-free, growing old in health and wealth. The preacher complained of this in Ecc. 8:14: "The good receive the treatment the wicked deserve; and the wicked the treatment the good deserve." The most righteous often have to suffer the most.

Why is this? We do not know; it is a mystery. The book of Job teaches us that the question is not *why* but *when*. When bad things happen to good people they are not to wallow in the labyrinth of why?, why?, why?, but to respond in such a way as to avoid the greater tragedy of not allowing good to come from their suffering. This is the role of simple, trusting faith. Job could say, "Even though he slay me, yet will I trust him." We may not understand why the Lord would choose to slay us, but still we are to trust Him for the very good reason that He is God and He loves us and He promises us the victory, if not now then later.

I've searched for an illustration that would put all this together. The best I've found is the story of the little boy whose father is a surgeon. When told that his father cuts on people causing them to hurt and bleed, he could not believe it. When allowed to look into the operating room, he saw his father cutting a person open, the blood and all. He was terribly shaken and bewildered by what he saw. But while he could not explain it he was confident that it was all right since it was his father doing it.

That is what the book of Job says to me. Our faith is to have a place for the paradoxes of God, the One who both hides and reveals Himself, the One who creates both good and evil, the One who brings peace and makes wars. It reaches its glorious extravagance in the suffering of Christ on the Cross, the greatest of all mysteries, where the Son of God himself cries out to a God that seems not to hear, "My God, my God . . . Why? . . ."

—Condensed from *Restoration Review*

Even Weaklings Can Qualify

Alex V. Wilson

(Concluded from May issue; though this article is based on 2nd Corinthians, it fits in with our theme from Job.)

Paul the apostle often experienced "fears within and foes without" (2 Cor. 7:5), as we saw in May. Outward afflictions overwhelmed him; boasting critics in the church sneered at him. These constant pressures brought anguish to his heart, tears to his eyes, restlessness to his mind and groaning to his mouth (2 Cor. 2:4; 2:13; 5:2-4).

He felt daily *anxiety* for all the churches (11:28). In May we presented two possible explanations of the contradiction between Paul's anxiety and his prohibition of anxiety (Phil. 4:6). Further study solves the problem, for William Barclay in *New Testament Words* show quite conclusively that there is a *virtuous* type of anxiety (deep concern or burden for God, our fellow-men, etc.: Phil. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:25; 2 Cor. 11:28) as well as a *sinful* type of anxiety (worrying because we doubt God's love and power, or because our values are out of order: Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 10:40-42).

But the bigger question still remains and hounds us: Why is life so full of afflictions and foes and fears and tears? One time a young man in Manila asked me in desperation, "Why is life so hard? When I love someone, she does not love me in return; and when someone is attracted to me, she is not a person whom I can love. Why is life like that?" The Bible does not answer all the questions which perplex our minds and pierce our hearts, but it does provide helpful insights to strengthen our faith.

God's PURPOSES in Our Problems

One reason for problems is that we might *experience, and then share, God's consolation.*

The God of all comfort comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

Someone has observed that God comforts us, not to make us comforted but to make us comforter. A preacher I know has been used by God to counsel and console people suffering from nervous depression because he himself once suffered months of similar hopeless despair, before God delivered him. Our sorrows should make us sympathetic, and God's comfort provides us with testimonies to share.

A second purpose in our problems is this: *to knock the self-dependence out of us.*

We were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead (1:8-9)

Confidence in our selves, our abilities or training or experiences or knowledge or past successes, is one of the most subtle enemies of the Christian. It infiltrates our hearts so sneakily that perhaps we fail to notice for a long time. But our Father sends troubles to wake us up, as William Cowper observes in his great hymn, "Tis My Happiness Below":

Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to His feet,
Lay me low, and keep me there.

How we need this ministry of affliction in our lives, to deflate our proud self-sufficiency. John Stott points out, "An honest and humble acknowledgement of the hopeless evil of our flesh, even after the new birth, is the first step to holiness. To speak quite plainly, some of us are not leading holy lives for the simple reason that we have too high an opinion of ourselves. The only way to arrive at faith in the power of the Holy Spirit is along the road of self-despair. No device exists to settle this issue for good. The power and subtlety of the flesh are such that we dare not relax for one moment. The only hope is unremitting vigilance and dependence" (*Men Made New*).

A third purpose in our problems is, *to demonstrate God's power.*

We have this treasure (i.e., the Gospel-salvation) in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (2 Cor. 4:7; see vs. 8-11, too).

Paul here compares himself to a clay pot which was used in those days as a lamp. Oil was placed in the pot, a wick was lit, and there was light. The important thing was the light, not the container. The latter was usually small, cheap, and unimpressive-looking; just a plain earthenware vessel. But the light it held was a valuable treasure. In the same way Paul was not very impressive (nor are we). Yet he bore a fabulous treasure, the divine light of the Gospel of Christ's glory (vs. 4-6).

Paul seems to be saying: "If I were personally impressive or overwhelming, if you did see me bristling with power, what would make me any different from any other powerful, impressive personality in the world? As it is, you see me in all my weaknesses, in this 'earthen vessel,' but this is exactly where God can be God. You can know the power in my ministry is God's because you can trace so little of it in me. The way I am you can be sure that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to me" (*A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, by Frederick Dale Bruner, p. 305).

God's POWER In Our Problems

This theme of the inter-relatedness of problems and power is developed at greater length in chapter 12:1-10.

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults,

in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:7-10, NIV).

Paul asked God for subtraction: take away this thorn. But instead, God gave him addition: along with your thorn, I'll give you sufficient grace. "My grace is all you need," as the NEB translates it. Outer difficulties and inner weaknesses are intended to keep us humble, for only then are we useable. God taught Paul that power comes not through deliverance from all weaknesses, but through accepting and enduring those which are His will. Until Christ returns, Christians will experience various weaknesses—perhaps physical, or mental, or emotional, or circumstantial. But God's grace is available amid them all.

"Some weaknesses are apparently never to be overcome, they are to be used. They can in fact become the source of divine power in its perfection. Paul's opponents said, 'ONCE we were weak, NOW we are strong' (see 1 Cor. 4:10). Paul, however learned to say, 'WHEN I am weak, THEN I am strong.'" (Bruner). God uses us, *not* because we are *able*, but because we are *feeble*. He delights to us the foolish, the weak, the low and despised, the nobodies, "so that no human being might boast in the presence of God . . . As it is written, Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

VOICES from the FIELDS

Moto Nomura

Japan

June 16, 1992

I am very glad to know that one of the Japanese students I sent to Portland Christian School, Miss Tomoko Seo, has been baptized into Christ. I believe and pray that this will be a trigger for the other Japanese students I sent to various Churches of Christ related schools in the USA, including, of course, those high school students now studying in Portland Christian School. Some of them are back to their respective homes in Japan during the summer vacation period. They make good report on the ministry of PCS. They express their gratitude to their host families.

Kent Bowers from Jennings, Louisiana, has been with us. He will remain in Japan till the summer vacation ends. He is a fine Christian boy who wishes to be a missionary to Japan, if God is willing, in the future.

Our Hachimanyama house church in Tokyo, meeting in our daughter's small apartment, now is trying to stand on their own feeble feet. Since May, Yoriko and I do not go to Tokyo every weekend. We go there only twice a month. This saves our money, energy and time while we try to start our new work here. So, on the first, third and fifth Sundays we are now meeting in our Bethany Home in the mountains.

Students Come FROM Japan, So We Went TO Japan

by Mrs. Esheron McKay

Graham and I wanted to share with as many people as possible the month we just spent in Japan. This was our first trip back to Japan in 16 years. The trip was given to us by several families of students we have helped in different ways over the last three or four years. All of these students come to us through dear friends, Motoyuki and Yoriko Nomura.

These students, for one reason or another, choose to come to America to go to school. They come to Nomura San (through many different ways, too numerous and varied to mention here), for help in learning about coming to America for schooling. He helps them decide if they are really serious about coming, and if so then he helps them choose (with the help of Graham) which school would be right for them. If there are no dorms connected with a particular school, then host families are chosen. This is often the case with the high school students. Always Christian schools and Christian families are selected.

These students then come to our house here in Maryland for several days of orientation. Many come back for spring breaks, summer breaks, etc. Graham helps them out in many ways while they are here in school.

There were some things we needed to know about what all of this meant. So God worked out our trip, so we could be shown these things.

What a wonderful trip! First of all, we were treated like royalty. That was wonderful, but the most wonderful things were of a much more important nature. We were in the homes of all these kids. We had meals with their families; we slept in their homes, (many had never had a foreign visitor in their homes). We visited day after day with them. We learned about their lives. We witnessed about our lives in Christ. We were able to share with them what it is like to be in a Christian School environment. They could ask all kinds of questions. We learned about an overall picture of how God was working with us and the Nomuras in the lives of these families. How it humbled us to know who was really in control of all that has happened over the last three or four years as we have attempted to be helpful to these kids.

An added benefit for us was a few days in Ibaraki with old friends. We lived in Ibaraki-Ken (state) when we were in Japan from 1972 - 1975. What a joy to be reunited with those friends!

[Through this "program" 9 Japanese students have come to Portland Christian High School in Louisville during the past 3 years. Pray for them and PCHS.]

NEWS AND NOTES

Jack Blaes, Editor

A NOTE OF THANKS

Much appreciation is extended to all those who helped by contributing information for research for my Master of Divinity thesis at Emmanuel School of Religion. It is entitled "R. H. Boll: Controversy and Accomplishment Among Churches of Christ." A copy of the thesis is available for reference at the Boll Memorial Library at the School of Biblical Studies in Louisville.

—Thomas G. Bradshaw

ON THE CUTTING EDGE

You'll notice another article this month from IMAGE magazine. We highly commend its editor, Denny Boultinghouse, and recommend the magazine to our readers. Its address is 3117 North 7th St., West Monroe, LA, 71291-2227. Subscription rate is \$15.00 yearly (6 issues).

NEW PREACHER IN LOUISIANA

Ken Lawyer, after getting married to Betty Phillips, settled down in Louisiana. He is now the preacher for the Hayden's Grove Church of Christ near Amite.

HONDURAS IS THE PLACE

A letter from Dan Wilson in our May issue mentioned the missionary school where he teaches, but forgot to mention the country: Honduras, Central America. Dan will teach Bible and history there the coming year. Pray; most of the students are unconverted.

VALUABLE BOOK AVAILABLE

We recently obtained 2 copies of Don Carlos Janes' book, **Our World Tour**, published in 1924. If anyone wants a copy, send us \$5 and we'll mail it to you. It tells of Church of Christ missions work around the world in 1920 - 22.

SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES FALL SCHEDULE

August 31 - December 18, 1992

Work of the Church I
Mondays 1:00-3:00 Nathan Burks
Old Testament Survey
Mondays 6:30-9:30 Jerry Carmichael

Christian Education II
Tuesdays 1:00-3:00 Joyce Zimpelmann
Doctrines I
Tuesdays 6:30-9:30 Alex Wilson
Christian Marriage & Home
Thursdays 6:30-9:30 Dennis Kaufman

EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER: Maranatha Bible College, Bohol, Philippines

The Bible College ended up its year with 5 graduates. The concert was beautiful and well done during the banquet night and another in the graduation the following morning. It was indeed a celebration of God's faithfulness. I had much vigor; I'm sure it was the result of many prayers.

It is so hot here. The drought is widespread and the losses are in billions of Pesos. We foresee much difficulties ahead, shortage of food and sicknesses. Many children in the islands die of different sicknesses due to lack of water. Water needs to be transported from the mainland where wells are also drying up. It will be a difficult year specially for the College. Despite all this, there are 12 Daily Vacation Bible Schools going on. Evangelistic efforts continue.

Just recently, a witch came to the Lord and was baptized. She reckons she killed 9 of her own children. What a joy of deliverance. That week, several idols and charms were surrendered, destroyed and burned.

Let us share with you again our prayer requests:

1. Please pray that we can meet the Bible College weekly budget of P3,500 (\$140). Drought paralyzed the income-generating projects.
2. We have 2 camps coming, Senior & Junior camps. Pray for conversions.
3. Please continue to pray for my health. Pray for protection from demonic oppression for my family.

—Myrna (and Nemesio) Auxtero

ALEXANDRIA, LA. CHURCH OF CHRIST

David Johnson, minister

Super Saturday, a children's ministry
9:30 A.M. till 11:45 A.M. Bible les-

sons, crafts, games and refreshments are planned! (16 children, 12 adults attended; Karen and Beth ministered.)

All women of the church are invited to "Ladies Bible Class" every Monday morning at 9:30 A.M. The ladies are currently studying about godly women in the Bible. Besides study the women spend time in fervent prayer. Discussions are often on the many projects the women have undertaken. For example, the ladies have benevolent works. A child is sponsored in care of Maple Manor Christian Home, Sellersburg, Indiana.

BORDEN CHURCH OF CHRIST

Mike Abbott, minister

How to Intercede for Influential Men

Sixteen key men make daily decisions that affect the course of this nation and of your freedom. Their decisions either acknowledge God's authority, or force us to disregard His laws. These sixteen key men are the President, the two Senators from your state, the U.S. Congressman from your district, the Governor of your State, your State Senator, your State Representative, and the nine Supreme Court Justices. We have an obligation under God to intercede for these men. Think of the supernatural power of God that could be unleashed from heaven if every Christian in America would pray for these sixteen men daily by name.

Dr. Charles Stanley, pastor of a large church in Atlanta, GA, has suggested ten ways to pray for these men who occupy the highest offices in the land:

1. Pray that they would realize their personal sinfulness and their daily need for cleansing of their sin by Jesus Christ.

2. Pray that they would recognize their personal inadequacy to fulfill their tasks and that they would depend upon God for knowledge, wisdom and the courage to do what is right.

3 Pray that they would reject all counsel that violates spiritual principles, trusting God to prove them right.

4. Pray that they would resist those who would pressure them to violate their conscience.

5. Pray that they would reverse the trends of socialism and humanism in this nation, both of which deify man rather than God.

6. Pray that they would be ready to sacrifice their personal ambitions and political careers for the sake of this nation, if yielding them would be in the best interest of their country.

7. Pray that they would rely upon prayer and the Word of God as the source of their daily strength, wisdom and courage.

8. Pray they would restore dignity, honor, trustworthiness and righteousness to the office they hold.

9. Pray that they would remember to be good examples in their conduct to the fathers, mothers, sons and daughters of this nation.

10. Pray that they would be reminded daily that they are accountable to Almighty God for the decisions they make.

Vacation Bible School

Earl Mullins Sr. will lead the adult class. He will speak on the conditions and opportunities of the churches in the Philippines and Russia. Bro. Earl and his wife, Ragena, have spent time in the Philippines and Israel, working with Christians in those countries.

CRAMER & HANOVER CHURCH OF CHRIST, LEXINGTON, KY.

Bennie Hill, Minister

VBS Provides... our church people with the opportunity of serving! VBS is a training ground for potential Bible School teachers and leaders (elders, deacons, ministers, missionaries, etc.) Pray earnestly this week for each worker that God might use their efforts for His glory and to the saving of precious souls.

VBS Provides... our church with the opportunity of follow-up! Several of our young people are interested in starting Bible Clubs in strategic locations. Pray for this effort among our young people during their summer "break!"

SOUTHEAST CHURCH OF CHRIST LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Nathan Burks, minister

A Sunday Evening Song Service will have a "Ladies Night" theme. What does that mean, you ask... If you ladies can put together some special groups (solos, duets, trios, etc.), we welcome you to sing on this evening. Any and all requests will be taken from ladies only. (Don' worry men! Your time comes up next month!)

Mrs. Hollis Brown
2118 Maryland Ave.,

D

Louisville

KY 40205

BUT GOD

I know not, but God knows;
Oh, blessed rest from fear!
All my unfolding days
To Him are plain and clear.
Each anxious puzzled "why?"
From doubt or dread that grows,
Finds answer in this thought:
I know not, but He knows.

I cannot, but God can;
Oh, balm for all my care!
The burden that I drop,
His hand will lift and bear.
Though eagle pinions tire,
I walked where once I ran,
This is my strength: to know
I cannot, but He can.

I see not, but God sees;
Oh, all sufficient light!
My dark and hidden way
To Him is always bright.
My strained and peering eyes
May close in restful ease,
And I in peace may sleep;
I see not, but He sees.

—Annie Johnson Flint