

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



*The* **Word and Work**



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER, 1996

**ALWAYS CONTEMPORARY,  
ALWAYS RELEVANT:**

*The Risen,*

*Living,*

*Present,*

*Active*

**CHRIST**

# "The GREAT" Alexander or Jesus?

Charles Ross Weede

"Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.

One lived and died for self; one died for you and me.  
The Greek died on a throne; the Jew died on a cross;  
One's life a triumph seemed; the other but a loss.  
One led vast armies forth; the other walked alone.  
One shed a whole world's blood; the other gave his own.  
One won the world in life and lost it all in death;  
The other lost his life to win the whole world's faith.

"Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.

One died in Babylon; and one on Calvary.  
One gained all for self; and one himself he gave.  
One conquered every throne; the other every grave.  
The one made himself God; the God made himself less;  
The one lived but to blast; the other but to bless.  
When died the Greek, forever fell his throne of swords;  
But Jesus died to live forever Lord of lords.

"Jesus and Alexander died at thirty-three.

The Greek made all men slaves; the Jew made all men free.  
One built a throne on blood; the other built on love.  
The one was born of earth; the other from above.  
The one won all this earth, to lose all earth and heaven;  
The other gave up all, that all to him be given.  
The Greek forever died; the Jew forever lives.  
He loses all who get; he wins all things who gives."

# THE WORD AND WORK

*"Declare the whole counsel of God"*

**Alex V. Wilson, Editor**

**Dennis L. Allen, Missions**

**Jack Blaes, News**

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## **In This Issue**

*Theme: Always Contemporary, Always Relevant*

Editorial -- Alex V. Wilson . . . . .	322
How To Start A New Religion . . . . .	323
Looking For The Messiah -- Max Lucado . . . . .	324
The Bureau's Most Baffling Case -- Bill Dunn . . . . .	326
A Visit With Paul -- Dwight Wallace Whitsett . . . . .	331
What IBM Taught Me About Repentance -- John Ortberg . . . . .	337
Doubt . . . Surprise . . . Certainty! -- Alex V. Wilson . . . . .	341
Voices From The Fields . . . . .	344
What The Bible Teaches -- Alex V. Wilson . . . . .	347
What About Joseph? -- Darren Johson . . . . .	349
November 1996: Heaven Is Enriched! . . . . .	350
News and Notes - Jack Blaes . . . . .	351

# **THEME:** **ALWAYS CONTEMPORARY,** **ALWAYS RELEVANT**

## **Ancient History or Current Events?**

Alex V. Wilson

Dan Wooding tells of a woman in the former Soviet Union who sought and received a Bible study course accompanied by a New Testament. She later wrote, "I am so thankful that you sent me this book that mentions the life of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. I was so touched by the words of the Apostle Paul that I would like to get in contact with him. Would you please send me his telephone number or a fax number. I believe according to the book you sent he is in Rome."

Lots of people have trouble fitting together the Bible's times and people. Paul and Noah, David and Peter and Job, Jesus and Cain and Abel--they all lived back there in a blurry jumble of long ago. Too many of today's Christians know only bits and pieces of the Bible. They are like a child who has a bunch of lettered beads which were meant to make a necklace with a message, but she doesn't know how to string the beads in order and get the message.

Then others, like the woman in the former U.S.S.R., mix up Biblical people or events with current events. Sometimes this is humorous, other times pathetic. A few years ago a primitive tribesman in the Philippines heard the old, old story of Jesus and His love for the first time. Afterwards he asked, "When was it that Jesus died for us? Was it *last year*?" When informed that it happened in the far distant past, he responded, "Then why didn't your ancestors come tell my ancestors long ago, so they could be saved?" How would you answer such a question?

Our theme for this issue centers around links between Christ's time and now. We make several time-travel visits between the first century and ours. We'll hear about a plumber who starts making astounding personal claims and doing incredible slight-of-hand stunts or superhuman deeds--depending on whose version you listen to. And an F.B.I. investigator who has fits due to some group of kooky cultists. And a guy who claims to be an apostle, but you won't believe how old-timey and ignorant he is. Then somebody asks what relation there is between I.B.M. and Jesus. But mostly we'll think about Jesus' resurrection: is it still happening?

Years ago I heard a fellow in his 20's give this testimony: "As I was a kid growing up, my parents made me attend Sunday school and church regularly. So I learned lots about the Bible. But always God and Jesus were 'way back in the distant *past*, or else 'way up in the foggy *future* sometime. Either 2000 years ago wearing robes and speaking in Victorian English, or else in some nebulous endtime judgment-day. But not relevant in the here-and-now. But then somebody showed me how Jesus was important *to me--in the present*, that I needed a Forgiver now and a Leader now and to receive a new life now--right now. And I did! And Christ became current events to me, not just ancient history. He not only arose long ago, but He is still alive and present and active, every day." AMEN! What good news!

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## HOW TO START A NEW RELIGION

M. Lepeaux on one occasion confided to Talleyrand his disappointment at the ill success with which he had met in his attempt to bring into vogue a new religion which he regarded as an improvement on Christianity. He explained that despite all the efforts of himself and his supporters his propaganda made no headway. He asked Talleyrand's advice as to what he was to do. Talleyrand replied that it was indeed difficult to found a new religion, more difficult indeed than could be imagined, so difficult that he hardly knew what to advise. "Still," he said--after a moment's reflection--"there is one plan which you might at least try. I should recommend you to be crucified and to rise again on the third day."

Talleyrand, more fully known as Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord (1754-1838), was a statesman-bishop who became a leader of the French Revolution. He was excommunicated by the Pope in 1791, but later became prime minister and remained influential in French politics throughout his life. The report of his encounter with M. Lepeaux is taken from 'Studies in the Resurrection of Christ!' by Charles H. Robinson, canon of Britain's Ripon Cathedral.

# LOOKING FOR THE MESSIAH

## How Do You See Him?

Max Lucado

Suppose Jesus came to your church. I don't mean symbolically. I mean visibly. Physically. Actually. Suppose he came to your church.

Would you recognize him? It might be difficult. Jesus didn't wear religious clothes in his day. Doubtful that he would wear them in ours. If he came today to your church, he'd wear regular clothes. Nothing fancy, just a jacket and shoes and a tie. Maybe a tie . . . maybe not.

He would have a common name. "Jesus" was common. I suppose he might go by Joe or Bob or Terry or Elliot.

Elliot . . . I like that. Suppose Elliot, the Son of God, came to your church.

Of course, he wouldn't be from Nazareth or Israel. He'd hail from some small spot down the road like Hollow Point or Chester City or Mt. Pleasant.

And he'd be a laborer. He was a carpenter in his day. No reason to think he'd change, but let's say he did. Let's say that this time around he was a plumber. Elliot, the plumber from Mt. Pleasant.

God, a plumber?

Rumor has it that he fed a football field full of people near the lake. Others say he healed a senator's son from Biloxi. Some say he's the Son of God. Others say he's the joke of the year. You don't know what to think.

And then, one Sunday, he shows up.

About midway through the service he appears in the back of the auditorium and takes a seat. After a few songs he moves closer to the front. After yet another song he steps up on the platform and announces, "You are singing about me. I am the Son of God." He holds a Communion tray. "This bread is my body. This wine is my blood. When you celebrate this, you celebrate me!"

What would you think?

Would you be offended? The audacity of it all. How irreverent, a guy named Elliot as the Son of God!

Would you be interested? "Wait a minute, how could he be the Son of God? He never went to seminary, never studied at a college. But there is something about him . . ."

Would you believe? "I can't deny it's crazy. But I can't deny what he has done."

It's easy to criticize contemporaries of Jesus for not believing in him. But when you realize how he came, you can understand their skepticism.

Jesus didn't fit their concept of a Messiah. Wrong background. Wrong pedigree. Wrong hometown. No Messiah would come from Nazareth. Small, hick, one-stoplight town. He didn't fit the Jew's notion of a Messiah, and so, rather than change their notion, they dismissed him.

He came as one of them. He was Jesus from Nazareth. Elliot from Mt. Pleasant. He fed the masses with calloused hands. He raised the dead wearing bib overalls and a John Deere Tractor cap.

They expected lights and kings and chariots from heaven. What they got was sandals and sermons and a Galilean accent.

And so, some missed him.

And so, some miss him still.

We have our own preconceptions, don't we? We still think we know which phone God uses and which car he drives. We still think we know what he looks like. But he's been known to surprise us.

We expect God to speak through peace, but sometimes he speaks through pain.

We think God talks through the church, but he also talks through the lost.

We think we hear him in the sunrise, but he is also heard in the darkness.

We listen for him in triumph, but he speaks even more distinctly through tragedy.

We must let God define himself.

[Excerpt from ch. 26 of *A Gentle Thunder*]

# THE BUREAU'S MOST BAFFLING CASE

Bill Dunn

Well, it looks like I'm going to retire without ever solving my most puzzling case. My name is Wednesday; Flavius Wednesday. I'm a cop. I've been a detective with the R.B.I. - the Roman Bureau of Investigation - for over forty years. I've worked my entire career here at the Conspiracy Division of our Judean regional office. We report directly to Caesar.

This office has the best record in the Empire. We've solved every single case we've ever had--except one. A solitary bulging file has been sitting on my desk for as long as I can remember. I often come down to the office late at night when I can't sleep and flip through it again, trying to see if there's something I may have missed. But it's always the same. I've gone over every detail a million times. It just doesn't add up. And now I'm scheduled to retire next week and I have to submit either a "case solved" or a "case unsolved" report. The truth is, I'm no closer to unraveling the mystery of this conspiracy than the day I first pinned on my badge as a fresh-faced gum-sandal straight out of the R.B.I. Training Academy. It looks like some other hotshot G-man will have to solve the baffling Christian Conspiracy Caper.

I was a rookie cop when they assigned this case to me. It was a cupcake--an open and shutter. That's why they gave it to me. The veteran detectives were too busy with tough cases. And it sure seemed simple at the start. A gang of uneducated peasants had just lost their smooth-talking leader. It seems he offended the local authorities one too many times and was arrested and executed. But instead of disbanding and heading back to their fishing boats and farms, these peasants started proclaiming the most unbelievable story anyone had ever heard. They said their leader, a guy named Jesus from Nazareth, had come back to life after being killed, had talked with them and eaten with them, and then rose up into the air to take his place in heaven. In fact, their main point in this wild story was to prove that this Jesus fellow was some sort of god who had spent time on earth to pay the price for everyone's sins. Now I don't get involved in any religious stuff. That's not my job. The natives here in Judea think there is one god who picked them to be his "chosen" people. The folks back home in Rome think there are more gods running around than there are relatives of Caesar on the payroll. Me, I don't get involved. I'm a cop. I work exclusively with facts and hard evidence. I leave religion to other people. My assignment was to shoot a hole in this conspiracy theory and keep the story from spreading and causing problems.



I went right by the book in conducting the investigation. My first step was to confirm that this Jesus guy had really been executed. The temple guards are not known for their efficiency. I soon discovered it wasn't the temple guards who performed the execution; it was a Roman centurion and his troops. And it was a crucifixion. I interviewed the centurion on duty and obtained a copy of his report. His men had flogged the victim to the brink of death beforehand and then lanced him through the side with a spear while he was hanging on the cross. Even if by some incredible stroke of luck he had been alive when they took him down from the cross--which, trust me, he wasn't--his body was immediately bound up with grave clothes and seventy-five pounds of sticky embalming spices. He would have suffocated in five minutes.

I figured my next step would shatter the conspiracy right away. It was simple and to the point; dig up the dead guy. If I could present "exhibit A," Jesus' rotting corpse, to his followers, it would certainly shut them up in a hurry. But the temple authorities had already tried this. No one could find the body. There must have been some confusion about which grave he was buried in, or his followers must have stolen the body. This was not a major setback, however. It just meant I would need a little more time to expose the conspiracy.

The missing corpse was not the main feature of this strange scheme, anyway. These people claim to have seen him alive, eaten with him, and watched his entire body rise into the sky. They were spreading this story all over the territory and it was causing a great deal of upheaval. I'm paid to nip upheaval in the bud.

The Bureau trained us at the Academy to keep an open mind about all possibilities when conducting an investigation. In this case, everything boiled down to two simple choices: the followers of Jesus were either lying or they were telling the truth. And, of course, the chances of this story being true were . . . well, come on, it's about the same chance of a man being able to fly to the moon. There was no doubt in my mind that Jesus' followers were lying through their teeth. But being a good cop, my job was to prove they were lying. I was sure it would be over in two weeks--a month, tops. I had seen other conspiracies fall apart quickly, and with people much more shrewd and sophisticated than this ragtag bunch. This case was going to be simple. Well, it's now over forty years later and I haven't been able to put a single dent in the case. In the meantime, this Christian story has spread throughout the entire Empire and tens of thousands of people believe it's really true. Needless to say, Headquarters is none too pleased that I failed to snuff out this conspiracy a long time ago. Maybe that's why I've never been promoted to Senior Investigator or transferred to a fancy seaside regional office.

When I realized it would be impossible to I.D. a body, the next step was to examine the motive behind this conspiracy. It's one of the first things they taught us at the Academy. All conspiracies have a motive. People will only enter into a group lie if they can get something out of it. In studying these conspirators, I discovered that many of them had been devoted followers of Jesus for three years. He had spoken many times about a coming kingdom, with himself, apparently, as the new king. Nothing new. Everybody and his brother wants to overthrow us Romans. His inner circle of followers were expecting prestigious positions in the new administration. When the plan backfired, all of their time and loyalty was suddenly about to go unrewarded.

My theory was that they had concocted this story as a means of attracting prestige, power, and money for themselves. They shifted Jesus' kingdom to an imaginary, spiritual realm. He was some kind of ghost king ruling over a phantom empire, and they could still somehow consider themselves high-ranking officials. I realize it's a little off-the-wall, but you see a lot of strange things in the crime-fighting business.

Early on, I was convinced the conspiracy would dissolve before it could ever get rolling. The conspirators were getting nothing out of it. The story was so outlandish that it only brought them loads of trouble. For a while I expected someone from the group to walk into my office and say, "Hey, flatfoot, I want to make a deal. I'll tell you everything about our scheme if you let me plea bargain." It happens all the time. Even lucrative and plausible plots often have someone who gets cold feet and wants to come clean. And this Christian caper was anything but lucrative. These guys were taking some serious heat. It was sure to collapse.

But the weeks turned into months; and then into years. They were sticking to the story. They received more and more grief every time they told it, but they kept on telling it. Some of them were arrested. Some were roughed up. They were all poor and often hungry. But they continued to stick to the story. Events were now going completely against the book.

Bureau Headquarters started sending terse memos demanding that I make some progress. I decided to meet with the local law enforcement officials and conduct a joint operation to crush this movement once and for all. We called it "Operation Good-bye Motive." We were going to take away any and all reason for these conspirators to continue lying. An ambitious and ruthless young local official named Saul was my point man in the campaign. He wanted to wipe out these Christians as much as anyone back at Headquarters.

They seized a conspirator named Stephen and, after a brief interrogation, stoned him to death. I was frankly stunned that this fellow

stuck to the story. It cost him his life. All he had to do was say, "Wait a minute, it's not true, we made it up," and his life would have been spared. I suppose being in the same city with all his co-conspirators put just enough pressure on him to remain silent about the plot. But to actually die for a lie? There was not a single record in the Bureau's vast archives--I had a clerk check all the microscrolls--where a conspirator allowed himself to be killed rather than expose a fraudulent scheme. I found it extremely puzzling. It was to get even more bizarre.

With the death of Stephen, I was sure the plot would be exposed. The stakes were now much higher. There had to be at least one of them--if not all of them--who would recant this wild story to save his life. As soon as I had a confession, I was going to use the Bureau's P.R. department to announce it to the world and spread the news just as diligently as the conspirators had been spreading their false claims.

I took the leash off Saul and let him run wild. He began to arrest Christians by the wagon load. They left the city in fear and scattered throughout the region. Success was just around the corner, I was certain. Now that these people were away from the city and the support of their central group, they would crack. Being imprisoned far from home, alone and afraid, would be too much for anyone to continue lying. There would be no peer pressure from their co-conspirators, only the pressure of imminent death if they didn't tell us what we wanted to hear. I waited anxiously for Saul's report that he had obtained a signed confession. I'm still waiting.

I know now that I will never break this conspiracy. All except one of the original plotters is dead. The sole survivor is named John and he has been banished to the island of Patmos. I sent two young field agents to see him last year. It was a waste of time. When they threatened John with bodily harm if he didn't come clean about the Jesus conspiracy, he kissed them both, bowed down before them, and pointed to the back of his neck, saying, "Chop here, please." My agents were too confused to do anything. They left him there kneeling on the ground. Rookies!

I was in my office late last night looking through the file one last time before filling out my final report. I've kept a dossier on each of the original conspirators.

*James, son of Zebedee*--preached the Jesus story in Judea. Killed with a sword by King Herod Antipas.

*Thomas*--preached the Jesus story in India. Killed with a Brahman sword near Madras.

*Bartholomew*--preached the Jesus story in Armenia. Skinned alive with a whip and died.

*Mark*--preached the Jesus story in Egypt. Burned to death at Buecolus.

*Andrew*--preached the Jesus story in Ethiopia. Crucified on an X-shaped cross.

*Philip*--preached the Jesus story in Phrygia. Crucified at Hierapolis.

*James, relative of Jesus*--preached the Jesus story in Judea. Stoned to death.

*Simon the Zealot*--preached the Jesus story in Mauritania and Africa. Crucified.

*Matthew*--preached the Jesus story in Ethiopia and Egypt. Killed with a spear by King Hircanus.

*Jude*--preached the Jesus story in Assyria and Persia. Killed in Persia.

*Peter, group leader*--preached the Jesus story in Judea and Rome. Crucified upside down in Rome.

And then there's the most puzzling conspirator of all. Saul, a.k.a. Paul, my point man in "Operation Good-bye Motive" quit the force long ago and joined the conspiracy. He claimed Jesus had actually appeared to him. Paul became the most damaging conspirator of them all. He traveled constantly throughout the Empire preaching the Jesus story and writing eloquent letters to his Christian friends. I just received final word from Headquarters last week about Paul. He was beheaded because he would not renounce his claims about Jesus. The report included a copy of a letter he had written to some people in Corinth, which included the lines, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?" Bureau agents in Rome report that Paul was singing these words with a big smile on his face at the moment he died.

Every single one of these men were killed because they refused to recant the Jesus story. Even more astonishing is the fact that they each suffered and died alone. Any one of them could have admitted it was all a lie and saved his life. The next time they saw their co-conspirators--if they ever saw them again--they could have easily claimed everything was going fine, and no one would have ever known. But they stuck to the story and it cost them their lives.

I've finally decided which form to use in filling out my final report on this case. I'm not going to use the "case solved" form. And I'm not going to use the "case unsolved" form either. I'm a cop. I'm a good cop. I have to follow the overwhelming evidence here even if Headquarters blows a gasket. I'm going to use the "case dropped--lack of evidence" form. The only logical explanation is that there never was any conspiracy in the first place. These simple peasants were truthfully reporting what they had seen and experienced. I'm probably going to lose my pension--boy, the Missus will be steamed--but it's the only thing that makes sense.

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## A VISIT WITH PAUL

Dwight Wallace Whitsett

It seemed like the perfect day to get some solid study in. Brenda was gone, Nathan was at school, and I had the whole house to myself. I got up early and began to work on next Sunday's sermon. Since it was still dark outside, I was severely startled by a strong banging on the door.

Jumping out of my chair and trembling with fright, I made my way to the still-locked door. Suddenly, this person walked right *through* the door and stopped in front of me! My legs gave out, and I fell in a heap on the floor of the hall . . . my head spinning.

"Peace to you and your house," he said. "My name is Saul of Tarsus, or Paul, if you prefer, an apostle of Jesus Christ and the Lord's bondservant."

"Am I *dead*?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "but I am."

It was then, I think, that I began screaming. Gently, he reached down and touched me, and a feeling of peace and calm began to come over me. I stopped screaming, and it was a much more relaxed voice that asked, "Are you really Paul? But you speak *English* . . . *American English!* Shouldn't we be talking in Greek or Hebrew?"

“No. You remember the day of Pentecost when Cephas preached to thousands of Jews from seventeen different countries? Each understood what Cephas said in their own language. I’m speaking Greek, but you’re hearing American English. *Neat*, huh?”

“You mean all that Greek and Hebrew they shoved down my throat in school won’t help me now? Bummer!”

“I’m afraid not. Greek from our time spoken with a Texas accent is almost as impossible to understand as it is unbearable to listen to.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be wearing a Toga or a robe or something? Not to say that you don’t look good in slacks and a shirt--you’re even wearing loafers instead of sandals!”

“I can’t have everybody staring at me,” said Paul. “On this mission, I need to blend in.”

“Mission?” I asked, “You have a mission? Is that why you’ve come? But what is your mission, and why have you come to me?”

“Dwight, I don’t know, but the Lord told me to tell you to write all the events of our visit down after I leave. Seems strange to me, but as I took pains to point out in my letters, he does things *His way*. He must think it will do some good.”

“Speaking of ‘good,’ *you* look very good,” I ventured. “Aren’t you supposed to be in poor health? What about your thorn in the flesh?”

“Heaven has a way of curing all that. Remember what I said about the glorified body? I’ve been well for many of your centuries. As you can see, even my head has been reconnected.”

“Have you eaten? Can I get you a cup of coffee?” I offered.

“No, I’m not hungry, and as for coffee, I don’t know what that is--we didn’t have it in my day.”

“Really? How did you have fellowships and potlucks?” Looking puzzled, he replied, “I don’t recognize those terms used that way; but I’ve only got a few hours, so we’d better get started.”

“What are we supposed to do?” I asked.

“All I know is that I’m supposed to hang out with you and have a look around.”

"Then let me change clothes and make a couple of phone calls," I said, "and we'll get started." After explaining the telephone, I changed, and we walked out the door to get in the car.

"You mean you can just walk out of your house and get into one of those cars and go? We either had to harness up animals or walk!"

"Yes I know. We have things pretty good here in the late twentieth century." As we were getting into the car, Paul jerked his head around and looked into the sky.

"What is *that*?" he asked.

"That's an airplane. It holds many people who can fly to any part of the earth in a matter of hours."

"Airplanes, automobiles, public transportation--and if you can't get there in person, you use a telephone! What a joy to have such tools to use in preaching the gospel! I'll bet you've been able to keep up with preaching the gospel to everyone in the world!"

All of the sudden, I felt defensive. "Paul, there are around five billion people on earth! We may never be able to reach them all."

He looked me straight in the face and said, "Aren't you aware that just a handful of us did it in our day with no telephones, airplanes, or cars?" At this stage, we had not talked about radio, television, computers, printing presses, or satellites, and I decided not to mention them just yet.

On our way to the church building, he picked up Sunday's newspaper sitting in the car seat. He fanned through it faster than any speed-reader--another aspect of the glorified body, I suppose. He laid the paper aside and stared ahead in contemplation. "When they said they were sending me to the late twentieth century, I knew things would be *different*--but I never expected so *much* change. The only thing that seems not to have changed is people. Same problems, same joys, same sins."

About that time, we turned into the parking lot of the church building. Paul's eyes got wide.

"What's this building?" he asked.

"This is our church building--where we meet," I answered. Silently, but with Paul still wide-eyed, we got out of the car and walked into the foyer. "Let me show you around. We're standing in the foyer, and that in there is the Sanctuary," I said pointing to the auditorium.

“The Santu-what?” he asked.

“You know, the auditorium, the place where we assemble for worship services.”

“Our auditoriums were outside, and many Christians died in them. And what’s a worship service?”

Remembering that “worship services” were not mentioned in the Bible, I tried another tack. “I mean the place where we assemble when we worship together.”

“We were just in your home,” he said, “don’t you have an assembly in your home?”

“We . . . uh, well we don’t do that any more. We just meet here. We’re going to start small groups someday, though. Let me show you the classroom wing,” I said, hoping to change the subject.

“The what?” he said, looking incredulous.

“The place where we hold our adult and children’s Bible classes.”

“You mean you don’t do *that* in homes either?”

“That’s right,” I said, becoming more uncomfortable, “but we have an excellent minister of education, trained in one of our fine schools.”

“*A minister of education?*” he said, sitting down heavily in one of the chairs.

“Yes,” I said, “he works with me, the youth minister, and the minister of involvement. We hope to add a minister to the aged soon.”

“I’m amazed! You must be reaching many lost souls!”

“Uh, *actually*, very little evangelism happens in those ministries. But on down the line we’re going to hire a minister of *evangelism* too!” I showed him the offices, workroom, library and conference room and introduced him to the secretaries as my friend Paul, from out of town. He seemed to be getting more and more uncomfortable.

“Who *pays* for all these buildings, secretaries, ministers and things?” he asked in a tired voice.

“We do--out of the church treasury.”

“*Treasury?*” he said, drooping visibly.



"Yes, we take up an offering on Sundays so that we can build beautiful buildings like this, run the air conditioners and lights, and pay our ministers competitive salaries." In spite of his glorified body, he was slumped over in the chair now, visibly distressed. "Are you all right?" I asked.

"Take me to your market place," he said. "I'll feel better there. All these buildings, sanctuaries, secretaries, treasuries, minister of this and that--it's just too much. It seems so complicated and alien to me."

"Market place?" I asked. "You mean a shopping center?"

"I suppose so. Do people gather at various stalls to buy, mend, and repair?"

"Yes, but there's quite a few to choose from."

"Well, okay! That's good news! Plenty of places to mix and mingle and preach the gospel, huh? Do you make a regular preaching circuit every week, or month perhaps?"

"Oh no, I'm far too busy for that," I replied.

"Oh really? What do you do every day?"

"Well, I go to my study at the church building in the mornings and prepare sermons, classes and articles."

"Where do you use these?"

"Oh, I preach twice on Sunday and part of the year I teach a Bible class on Wednesday evenings. The articles go into the bulletin," I said, giving him one to look at. He just glanced at it and laid it aside.

"Then what?" he asked.

"In the afternoons I return phone calls, answer correspondence, take care of busy work, and maybe do some visiting."

"You seem to have equipping and edifying down pretty good, but when do you preach to the *lost*?"

"Oh, our missionaries . . ."

"Missionaries?"

"I mean, evangelists that we send to far-away places to plant churches--they do most of our evangelizing," I said feeling ashamed

for some reason I couldn't identify. "But we plan to do more of that in the future . . . right here . . . I think."

He shook his head slowly and looked deep into my eyes. "I notice you didn't mention prayer," he said with his right eyebrow slightly raised, "When do you pray?"

"Well, as I said, I'm very busy, but if I have a few spare minutes during the day, I'll say a little prayer. Then, of course, we say the blessing at most meals."

"Say the blessing?" he repeated, looking puzzled.

"Yeah, you know the one that goes, 'For what we are about to receive, we are truly grateful, injesusnameamen.' Then there's bedtime. I say one then, if I don't fall asleep first."

It was then I noticed that a terrible look of sadness was beginning to form on Paul's face. We spent the next few hours driving around and touring several shopping centers. I tried asking him all the theological questions I had saved up for heaven, but he refused to answer, reminding me that he was here for another purpose. I could wait, he told me, and anyway, people wouldn't believe me if I told them where I got the answers.

We drove back to my house. On the way, he kept asking me questions about how and where the gospel was being preached, and I was aware that my answers were just distressing him more. We arrived home, and I told him how much I loved Jesus our savior, and he looked kind of puzzled. I told how much his visit had honored me.

"Yes," he said with what seemed to be a bit of resignation in his voice, "I certainly hope it does some good, because everything looks pretty discouraging right now."

I was about to ask him what he meant by that last remark, when he turned on his heel and walked back through my front door. I ran to the door and threw it open, but he was gone. I feel like one of the prophets of old, because as I key this story into the word processor, I don't understand the meaning of it.

Maybe you can figure it out . . .

--From *IMAGE* Magazine. September 1995.  
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# WHAT IBM TAUGHT ME ABOUT REPENTANCE

John Ortberg

The big word around IBM these days is *restructure*.

For years IBM dominated its field. Other high-risk ventures might outperform it for a season, but year in, year out, the smart money was on Big Blue.

Not anymore. IBM's stock value plunged in the early nineties. And for the first time, IBM is no longer the leading maker of personal computers.

When it became clear to management that what they were doing was not getting them where they wanted to go, IBM committed to reconstructing. This meant a leaner work force, changed spending priorities, and an organizational chart that redistributed power.

To *reconstruct* means to reconsider your strategy, to redeploy your resources to fulfill your mission. It requires both a clear understanding of the goal and a willingness to rearrange activities in ways that best bring movement to the goal.

Of course, not only corporations reconstruct. Sports teams, universities, even families do it as they pass through life's seasons. My mother, for instance, drove a station wagon when she had three children at home; now she drives a foreign convertible.

Most important, *people* can reconstruct. This suggests a helpful way of understanding the fundamental response Jesus called for in his teaching. "Repent," he says, in Matthew's summary of his message, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In other words, his was a new proclamation of the goal of human life. It was suddenly possible to live in a different way under the reign of God. With this goal in mind, Jesus says, it is time to reconsider your strategy for life. To repent is to restructure, to rearrange your activity around the offer of kingdom living.

Repentance, however, is all too often misunderstood. For many people, to *repent* means "to feel really really bad" for sin. It is a term of emotion, often thought of in terms of a cathartic experience.

I remember as a teenager attending Christian camps where leaders were masters at producing this kind of experience. Seven days of sleep deprivation, a diet of sugar and fats, relationships of incandescent intensity, radical self-disclosure, a hundred fireside verses of "Kum Ba Yah," and a speaker who died in a car crash on the way home. and

people were ready to confess to anything. They stood and confessed in tears to total strangers. The feelings were sincere, but they didn't produce lasting change. This understanding of repentance inadequately attends to the nature of human personality. We are creatures of habit. We live our lives according to long-standing patterns of speaking and behaving that, neurologists tell us, actually become physiologically ingrained; they become part of our circuitry. Change does not come easily.

This misunderstanding keeps us from seeing what a life characterized by true repentance would look like. Garrison Keillor reflects this in a passage from *Lake Wobegon Days*:

*Larry the Sad Boy . . . was saved twelve times in the Lutheran church, an all-time record. Between 1953 and 1961 he threw himself weeping and contrite on God's throne of grace on twelve separate occasions--and this in a Lutheran church that wasn't evangelical, had no altar call, no organist playing "Just as I Am Without One Plea" while a choir hummed and a guy with shiny hair took hold of your heart strings and played you like a cheap guitar--this is the Lutheran church, not a bunch of hillbillies--these are Scandinavians, and they repent in the same way that they sin: discreetly, tastefully, at the proper time, and bring a Jell-O salad for afterward. . . . Twelve times. Even we fundamentalists got tired of him. . . . God didn't mean us to feel guilt all our lives. There comes a point when you should dry your tears and join the building committee and start grappling with the problems of the church furnace and . . . make church coffee and be of use, but Larry kept on repenting and repenting.*

Like restructuring, true repentance is oriented primarily not to the past but to the future. It is not primarily an emotional experience but an invitation to reflect on life in light of God's great new goal announced in Christ.

For IBM, restructuring means beginning with a clear understanding of its mission. One industry analyst chided IBM for lack of clarity: "Job reductions will not be enough. Distracted by endless rounds of cutbacks, the company *lost sight of the ball.*"

For individuals, this means something far more challenging. The person confronted by Jesus' proclamation must begin with a clear definition of his or her mission: "Will I adopt as my ultimate goal to live the life that Jesus offers and calls me to?" Once a person has decided to become a follower of Jesus, he or she must ask, "To what extent are my current practices helping me live as Jesus would live if he were in my body?"

Consider an analogy. An alcoholic hears the news that sobriety is a possibility, even for him. He comes to believe this, not perfectly, not with 100 percent certainty, but enough to act on it.

How can he respond? Not just by regretting his drinking; he has done that before, bitterly and sincerely. Not by promising he will quit by supreme effort of will; this has been tried and found wanting also.

Instead, he is invited to a new response--to restructure his life. He cannot be transformed by his will alone, but neither is he a passive victim; he can put himself in a place where a greater Power can enable what he cannot. He restructures his days around relationships (through an organization like Alcoholics Anonymous) and activities (like the 12 Steps) that will enable him to enter a life of sobriety.

Often restructuring will involve changes that do not seem spiritual at all, that have to do with daily, even mundane choices. Understanding repentance as restructuring can break us out of the category of narrowly "religious" activities. For restructuring means ordering all my activities, from how I eat to how I budget my income, in ways that will most help me become the person God intended.

True repentance, as the Hebrew Scriptures make especially clear, also has a corporate side to it. It involves how I relate to members of my church and to society as a whole. I cannot repent without also working for the restructuring of my world. I will want to see God's justice and mercy more evident. To divorce spirituality from social concern, from Christ's lordship over economic and political spheres, is to turn it into a form of ascetic narcissism.

What would a truly restructured life look like? It would not be identical in any two people. After all, the ideal structure for IBM would not be ideal for Amway. Each individual is a unique blend of weakness to be overcome and possibilities to be realized.

But there are some general guidelines, apparent in the lives of great saints throughout history, and supremely in Jesus himself. Almost certainly, a life reconstructed around kingdom living will devote significant chunks of time to solitude and prayer, give of material possessions generously, and make room for disciplines such as serving and cultivating silence.

Repentance then will become a daily way of life that asks, "How can I reorder things today to help me move further into the kingdom?" It will become not a burden but liberation.

Indeed, true repentance is not always unpleasant. While a corporation may have to reduce its workforce, causing pain, another time it may need to restructure by expanding, bringing joy. If God is calling you to repent of joylessness, it may mean structuring your life around celebration. If the Jewish feast days are any indication, God's people need to celebrate on a far more regular basis than is common.

Perhaps you need to spend some more time with banana cream pie, if that's what has the power to move you to authentic gratitude. Philosopher C. Stephens Evans once said that banana cream pie is the greatest proof for the existence of God he knows.

Restructuring can have a game-like quality to it. Frank Laubach wrote a book called *Games with Minutes*. In repenting of his disconnectedness from God, he devoted a year to a kind of holy game, seeing how many minutes he could spend in the awareness of the presence of God. While restructuring isn't necessarily unpleasant, it is no superficial business. It is a matter of life and death.

Restructuring is not something they take casually at IBM. They recently hired two "head-hunter" firms and spent millions of dollars scouring the globe for a CEO who could move what some consider the twentieth century's most important company into the twenty-first. Millions of dollars and thousands of jobs rest on the venture.

But what the world is waiting for--although it doesn't know it yet--is the restructuring that was called for 1,900 years before the birth of IBM. *That* restructuring can effect changes beside which the influence of the most important company of the twentieth century pales in significance. That is the restructuring that has the power to change the human soul.

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## THE WAYFARER

The wayfarer,  
Perceiving the pathway to truth,  
Was struck with astonishment.  
It was thickly grown with weeds.  
"Ha," he said,  
"I see that none has passed here  
"In a long time."

Later he saw that each weed  
Was a singular knife.  
"Well," he mumbled at last,  
"Doubtless there are other roads."

--Stephen Crane 1871-1900

[Apply this poem to the following article.]

# DOUBT . . .

# SURPRISE . . .

# CERTAINTY!

Alex V. Wilson

Must a person commit intellectual suicide to be a Christian? Sometimes we give the impression, whether we mean to or not, that Christians must stifle their minds and play ostrich with difficult questions about their faith. Here's an example, told by Charles Hummel, who works with college students. One of them told Hummel he was an atheist, and then explained why. "Several years ago, when I was eleven, I questioned my Sunday school teacher about the reliability of Old Testament miracles. She said rather curtly that they were to be accepted, not discussed. When I kept asking, she told me either to be quiet and believe them, or leave. So I left. That was the beginning of this fellow's pilgrimage to atheism. He had become convinced that doubters are neither wanted nor welcome in the church, that you have to check your reason at the door and be prepared to accept uncritically whatever is asserted to be true.

Doubts may spring from one of two different attitudes: *unwillingness to believe* (because if the Bible is true, then we should surrender to the God it reveals), or *questioning and confusion* due to seeming contradictions or the accusations made against the Bible in the name of science, etc. The latter type of doubter is willing (and perhaps eager) to be convinced by evidence, but until such evidence is seen he is perplexed and bewildered, wondering how to solve the problems in his mind.

To doubters in the first century, the apostles offered firsthand, eye-witness evidence: see Acts 2:32, 3:14-15, 4:33, 5:30-32, 10:39-41, 13:30-31, 2 Peter 1:16-18, 1 John 1:1-4. And the foundation events of Christianity about which they witnessed--especially Christ's resurrection--can even in our day be historically examined and evaluated. Through the centuries there have been men who have done this very thing, often with surprising results. Let's note some examples.

1. During the 1700's, two English deists, Gilbert West and Lord Lyttleton, attempted to disprove Christianity. West set out to prove that Christ's resurrection was a hoax, while Lyttleton sought to overthrow the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. After some time the two men published the conclusions of their study. West boldly declared that Jesus must indeed have risen from death, and Lyttleton wrote a strong defense of Paul's conversion experience! West's book had the title, *Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

2. Lew Wallace lived during the mid-1800's. During the War Between the States he became a general. He was a close friend of Robert Ingersoll, the famous skeptic and opponent of Christianity. Together they set out to write a book exposing the "myths and superstitions of the Bible." Wallace traveled to the leading libraries of Europe and the U.S. to gather information. His research continued for two years. But one day he fell to his knees and cried out, "My Lord and my God!" The Truth he had doubted had revealed Himself and had overcome Wallace's sincere opposition. Later he wrote *Ben Hur*, the famous novel about the times of Christ.

3. At the end of the 1800's Sir William Ramsey was an outstanding historian and archaeologist in England. He, too, sought to discredit the Bible. He felt confident he could reveal enough errors in it to prove that it was not trustworthy. Since Luke's writings contain so many historical and geographic details--such as names of specific persons, places and events--Ramsey made the Gospel of Luke his special target for study. Imagine his astonishment when he discovered that Luke was incredibly accurate! Ramsey could not believe that such a painstaking and reliable historian could simply have invented the story of Jesus' resurrection or else have been fooled by others into believing it. Thus convinced that Jesus indeed did arise from death and was divine, Ramsey became a Christian. In following years he wrote several books about the historical background of Biblical events. [Two of them are in the School of Biblical Studies library.]

4. Similar discoveries have been made in our own times. Another Englishman, Frank Morison, as a university student felt that no enlightened modern person could believe in miracles. He was a regular churchgoer but doubted many of Christianity's doctrines pertaining to the supernatural. Wanting to refine Christianity by removing its unbelievable parts and thus harmonize it with modern learning, he too decided to write. But serious writing requires research and thought, and his honest investigation confronted him with the living Christ. So in the book he authored, *Who Move the Stone?*, the first chapter is entitled "The Book That Refused to be Written." In it he explains that his original intention of refuting the resurrection had to give way before the overwhelming evidence he found. The rest of the book presents that evidence to the reader.

5. One of the most famous twentieth-century authors is C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), professor of literature at Cambridge. Till he was past thirty he was an atheist. Because of that fact, after his conversion he became an "apostle to the skeptics," powerfully presenting Christ to modern doubters. In *Mere Christianity* he points out the only logical alternatives regarding Christ in light of His staggering personal claims:

*A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said wouldn't be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the*



level with a man who says he's a poached egg--or else he would be the devil of hell; you must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a mad man or something worse. You can shut Him up for a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But don't come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being [only] a great moral teacher. He hasn't left that alternative open to us.

### A Sad--And Common--Contrast

In contrast to these honest doubters who were open to truth when they found it, multitudes of people refuse to search for it. And if by mistake they bump into it, they run the other way. Winston Churchill observed, "Some men stumble onto the truth, but they quickly pick themselves up and go on as though nothing had happened." And the inspired John wrote in his gospel, "This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (3:19-20).

In his booklet *Have You Considered Him?*, Wilbur Smith refers to a clear example of this fatal attitude.

*Gamaliel Bradford, one of the most distinguished biographers of modern times, . . . confessed that he was afraid to read the New Testament for fear it might prove that he was wrong, and his opinions would all have to be changed--and that he did not want.*

*In his journal for September 8, 1921, in his fifty-seventh year, Bradford wrote: "I do not read the New Testament for fear of its awakening a storm of anxiety and self-reproach and doubt and dread of having taken the wrong path, of having been a traitor to the plain and simple God. Not that I do not know perfectly well that no reading would make me believe any more. But, oh, what agonies of fret and worry it would give me for I should be able neither to believe nor to disbelieve nor to let it alone." And yet in his same journal, under date of February 19, 1919, he cries out, "Who will tell me something of God? I know nothing about Him whatever!"*

*Had he only opened his New Testament and considered the life and teachings of Jesus, His death and resurrection, with the same spirit of honesty, with the same desire to discover the truth, that possessed him as he approached the study of the many great men of history, into whose lives he saw so deeply and accurately, he would have found God gloriously revealed in Christ His Son.*

We Christians should not fear having our beliefs investigated. In fact we should encourage doubters to do that very thing. But they--and we--should be certain that we really do want to know the truth. Even if it surprises us. And even if it hurts.

# VOICES From The FIELDS

Robert & Joy Garrett      P.O. Box 30, Ruwa, Zimbabwe  
October, 1996

We have been back in Zimbabwe less than two months, but it seems longer. We arrived August 21, right in the middle of the Junior Camp (ages 9-12)

A few days after our arrival I got a call to come to Binga. ("Binguh") This is a remote area near the Zambezi river on the upper reaches of Lake Kariba about 520 miles from Ruwa. It is a hot, low rainfall area but well populated. The people here are the Tonga, a tribe with a completely different language and culture from the rest of Zimbabwe. It is also the poorest area. There are no cities out here, no factories. The people scratch a bare existence from the poor soil. Because of the low rainfall, corn cannot be grown. The only cereals that can be grown are sorghum and millet.

There are 18 independent congregations here that were started by Bro. Phineas Mudenda. Phineas was employed by an agency as a bricklayer and building instructor. He preached the Gospel wherever he went and started a number of congregations. He eventually resigned his job to devote full time to the Gospel.

They had organized a camp meeting and I was asked to come. So, Friday afternoon Aug. 30, I drove to Bulawayo (the halfway point). Spent the night with the Charles family, then at 3:30 Saturday morning set out for Binga accompanied by two brethren from Bulawayo and a visiting Tonga brother from Zambia. We arrived just before 10:00 AM and they gave us some tea and bread before taking us to the meeting. The meeting place was a huge spreading fig tree (unfortunately its fruit is not edible). Seated on the dusty ground under the shade of this enormous tree sat more than 500 people. I was one of the speakers that day and also fielded some questions. As the burning sun moved across the heavens the shade under the tree shifted, so periodically the people must also shift. The program continued the whole day with a break for lunch.

I was asked to speak again Sunday morning. The crowd had now grown to well over 700. Perhaps half of these were school children.

Of the 18 congregations mentioned, there were representatives from nine of them at the meeting. Others were not there because of distance and the expense of transportation. People must either walk or ride the infrequent and (for them) expensive buses. My pickup was the only vehicle at the meeting. I met nine leaders who had come with some of their congregations. There seems to be a hunger and desire to

study the word on the part of these Christians and there is tremendous potential here for the Gospel. I do not know how many of the crowd were believers, but serving the Lord's Supper took a very long time.

Please pray for Bro. Phineas and the other Binga church leaders, as well as all the members. I hope to organize some special Bible study sessions for those leaders.

Sunday afternoon we returned to Bulawayo. Then Monday I began the drive home. About three hours into the journey I was startled by a loud explosion under the pickup. The motor was still running but it was no longer connected to the rear wheels. I coasted to a stop and tried to understand what had happened. I thought that something had burst in the manual transmission. I was alone in the car so could not leave it but managed to stop a passing motorist and get a message off to have a tow truck come for me. To make a long story short, I arrived home Tuesday morning at 2:30 AM. A few days later I took out the transmission and as I did, pieces of the clutch came showering down. It was the clutch plate that had disintegrated -- the transmission was OK! Those of you who know anything about the mechanical know that replacing a clutch plate is much, much less expensive than repairs to a transmission, or "gear box" as we call it over here. Even in such little trials we are conscious of the grace of our Lord who has kept us safely through umpteen hundreds of thousands of miles over all kinds of roads, through all kinds of traffic, and by sea and by air. O Lord, my God, How great Thou Art!

**Mark & Candy Garrett**  
**October 19, 1996**

**Senegal, W. Africa**

This is the end of our first term and we are coming back for a year of home service (furlough). This is a time for us to reacquaint, recharge, retreat, recruit, relax, refit, re-assess, re-heat, etc. For Candy and me it will be a homecoming in many ways, but for our children it will seem more like we are leaving home. Senegal is all Bryan has ever known. We expect that he and Kathryn will miss their friends in Senegal at first. Our arrival in Charlotte, NC is slated for Nov. 18.

Sept. 29 we baptized Gregoire F. into Christ. Gregoire is a literacy teacher who works for a development organization. Originally from a nominal Catholic background, he first had contact with believers through Conservative Baptist missionaries here in Thies. Later, he joined the Jehovah's Witnesses here, but soon became disillusioned with them and left that group. Last year he helped me for a short time as a conversation partner.

This year he began to come to our church meetings and Bible studies. We noticed that his attitude had changed. He decided to accept

Christ as his personal savior. Hallelujah! Now his Catholic friends are criticizing him for becoming a "Protestant." Will you pray for him as he explains his faith to them? Pray also for his literacy class that he will have great influence there for Christ.

Aliu S. is becoming literate! He encourages me every week in our literacy class as he shows a hunger for God's Word and does well in his writing. After some practice, he can read Bible passages in our meetings (even though he might stumble over a word or two). He still has a long way to go to read smoothly and naturally, but that will come. The other thing I'm trying to teach him is personal money management. Planning for the future is not a common skill in this society, because most people here are in the "hand to mouth" mode. So, it is a challenge to get some basic concepts across. As God matures Aliu we hope he might become a church leader. Handling money responsibly is so important in that position. Thank you for praying for Aliu S.

It is exciting to see two Christian young people getting married in Senegal. Believers are so few that it can be difficult to find a Christian spouse. Yacine B. will marry Jose M., a believer from Dakar, on Nov. 2. Yacine's mother is a devout Muslim, but she has finally acquiesced to this marriage. She explained to Yacine that she cannot attend the ceremony or throw a party for her as she would if the groom were a Muslim. It hurts Yacine that her mother and some others in her family say they won't come to the wedding, but Yacine's believing family (her brothers and sisters in Christ) will all be there. Candy and I get to help with the music for the wedding! Pray that Jose and Yacine will honor Christ as they make home together.

As we start our year of home service we ask your prayers for:

- \* Our personal growth as we readjust to life in the USA. (That our character would reflect Christ's character.)
- \* A dependable vehicle for our Stateside travel.
- \* A house or apartment to rent.
- \* Our financial support. This term our family has grown and our mission requires us to have a higher level of support before we can return here.
- \* Kathryn's schooling as we travel.

Important Mail Changes: c/o 399 College St. Winchester, KY 40391  
Phone: (606) 744-5233

## STARTING A NEW SERIES

We begin this month a series of articles by the editor on "What the Bible Teaches." It is the result of the Systematic Doctrines class I've enjoyed teaching for years, first in Manila and now at the School of Biblical Studies in Louisville. And by the way, "doctrines" is not a dirty word! It may sound dull and impractical, but let me assure you it's not. Doctrines are no more nor less than teachings, and what God's Word teaches is important.

Too many Christians are flabby in faith, and poorly equipped to stand firm in times of temptation or discouragement--*because they have not applied themselves to what God teaches us in Scripture!* Too many Christians are unable to share the Gospel with the unsaved, and unskilled in defending themselves or others from the errors of cultists and scoffers--*because they have not applied themselves to what God teaches us in Scripture!* Too many Christians are confused, and conform to the ungodly world's views and attitudes, and are lazy and inactive in serving the Lord--*because they have not applied themselves to what God teaches us in Scripture!*

Studying doctrines can stimulate your mind and stir your heart and strengthen your hope and love. May this series of studies help accomplish those good results. It is of course only a survey, and makes no claim to be exhaustive. Most of the articles will be fairly short--though there are exceptions, such as next month's article!. The more that you look up the Scripture passages listed in the articles, and meditate on them, the more benefit you will gain. And, as the following lesson shows, unless we are prayerfully dependent on the Lord Himself to be our Teacher, our study will be in vain. --the Editor

*What the Bible Teaches...*

### I. ABOUT ITSELF, THE BIBLE

Alex V. Wilson

The Bible (the 66 books of the Old Covenant and New Covenant writings) clearly claims to be "inspired" or "God-breathed" and therefore the very "word of God" as well as a message freely written by its human authors. (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Thes. 2:13; Luke 1:1-4.) Those men expressed themselves "naturally" as well as supernaturally: "*they spoke... as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Pet. 1:21). John Stott explains this point for us:

"The Holy Spirit spoke through the human authors so directly that their words were in a very real sense His words. But the *literary styles* of the writers differ; also their *doctrinal emphases* are different and individual. We believe these differences within the unity of the Bible are

due to the Holy Spirit's deliberate purpose. It is not an accident, for instance, that Amos was the prophet of God's justice, Hosea of His love, and Isaiah of His sovereignty. Nor is it an accident that Paul was the apostle of grace and faith, John of love, and James of works. The Holy Spirit prepared the temperament and experience of the human authors in order to convey through each a distinctive and appropriate truth."

Being God's word, the Bible is our **supreme authority** and guide for belief and behavior. We should not ignore human reason; nor the "inner light" of intuition which sometimes is from the Holy Spirit; nor personal experience; nor the teachings of the church. Yet their authority is *secondary* to that of the Scripture, by which they must be tested.

Being God-breathed, Scripture is "useful" for making us wise for salvation, for teaching truth and refuting error, for training in righteousness and correcting evil, and for thoroughly equipping us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-17). In other words, it fully reveals to us how to be right with God, to avoid mental errors and moral evils, and to know how to serve Him acceptably. Thus the Bible is entirely **sufficient** for our guidance, and no other writings or official church teachings or traditions are necessary for our salvation, growth and maturity--as numerous cults and the Roman Catholic Church claim.

The above-mentioned beliefs are based not only upon the teachings of the apostles, but mainly on the **example of our divine Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ**. He expressed full confidence in the facts recorded in the Old Covenant Scripture, based arguments on its specific wording, believed its promises, obeyed its commands, urged others to do the same, and rebuked them for failure to do so: "The Scripture cannot be broken;" "David, speaking by the Spirit, [wrote Psalm 110:1];" "You err because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God;" "You [set] aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions....You nullify the word of God by your tradition;" "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!....Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" [John 10:35; Matt. 22:43-44 & 29; Mark 7:9 & 13; Luke 24:25 & 44; etc.]. Furthermore, He made provision for the New Covenant Scriptures to be given through His chosen apostles: John 14:25; 16:12-14.

Our confidence that the Bible is the word of God also rests on such **evidences** as its fulfilled prophecies, its lofty teachings coupled with its repeated claims to be divinely revealed. its continuing relevance and especially its power to transform human beings spiritually and morally.

To understand God's word we should humbly, prayerfully, diligently study it and be willing to obey it, trusting the Holy Spirit to en-

lighten our minds: Psa. 119:18; Dan. 10:12; John 7:17 & 16:12-13; 1 Cor. 2:9-12; 2 Tim. 2:7 & 15. At the same time we should **lovingly accept all true disciples** of the Lord Jesus Christ (those who repent and trust in the Gospel: 1 Cor. 15:1-8), **despite disagreements** regarding how to interpret and apply the Bible: Rom. 14:1-15:7.

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## WHAT ABOUT JOSEPH?

Have you ever watched "The Ten Commandments"? You know, the movie with Charlton Heston as Moses and Yvonne De Carlo as Zipporah. One of the greatest moments in that movie is the Exodus scene, in which hundreds of "extras" recreate the famous crossing of the Red Sea. Who were those extras? No one knows, and no one cares.

To many Christians, Joseph is an extra in the nativity story. He has no speaking part. As a matter of fact, he isn't even Jesus' biological father. Joseph just stands around the manger and looks fatherly, right?

Actually, there's much more to Joseph's role in Jesus' birth and life than just looking fatherly. We often forget that it was well within Joseph's rights as a Jewish man to break off his pledge to Mary. As a matter of fact, Joseph was even planning to divorce Mary quietly so that her reputation would be protected (Mt. 1:19). The angel of the Lord, however, explained to Joseph that Mary's child was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Joseph believed the angel and did as he was commanded; he honored his pledge to Mary. Because Joseph was a righteous man, he also "had no union with Mary until she gave birth to a son" (Mt. 1:25). Moreover, Joseph named the baby Jesus (God Saves), just as the angel instructed him. Luke points out that both Joseph and Mary followed the Jewish purification laws which dealt with birth. They were careful to do "everything commanded by the Law of the Lord" (Lk. 1:39).

After Christ's birth, Joseph protected his family from Herod's plot to kill their son. We can also be sure that Joseph's righteous example had a tremendous influence on Jesus as he grew in "wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Lk. 2:51). Perhaps God knew what he was doing when he chose Joseph to raise His Son. No one is an "extra" in God's plan!

--Darren Johnson, Johnson City Bulletin

# NOVEMBER 1996: HEAVEN IS ENRICHED!

During November the Lord called home to His presence three longtime servants of His.

**ESTHER ELSTON FORCADE** was a devoted wife to J. Miller Forcade for many decades. She, like he, was also a practicing osteopath. (My dictionary defines osteopathy as "a system of medical practice based on a theory that diseases are due chiefly to loss of structural integrity . . ."; I'm sure Brother Forcade can explain it to you!) Above all she was a zealous disciple of Jesus, working hard for Him wherever they lived--which included periods of service in Japan and also Zimbabwe.

**IVAN DUNCAN** of Louisville is no doubt best known for his ministry of taping, duplicating, and distributing cassettes of the messages given at the Louisville Christian Fellowship weeks. He did this for decades. He also formerly used his electronic skills by helping the Words of Life radio ministry. One day Ivan felt fine, going about his activities as always; that night he died in his sleep. He was 69.

**F. G. "BOB" YARBROUGH** also died very suddenly and unexpectedly on Thanksgiving Day. He would have been 82 in December. Bob was a longtime worker and leader in many good works for the Lord, such as East Dallas Christian School, and the ministry of the Nakaharas in Japan, and Lamb and Lion outreach, etc. He was an elder at Piedmont Church in Dallas. A dedicated businessman, he generously gave time and money for the spread of God's kingdom. And he was a model husband and father. We shall gladly publish tributes to these folks and their Savior, if you submit them.

P.S.: As we got ready to send this to press, we learned of the Homegoing of another servant of Christ--**JOHNNIE TATE**, longtime leader & Bible teacher at Wichita Falls, TX. He was near 90.



# NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

## A Longtime Reader

I have been a subscriber to Word and Work since 1952: 44 years. I have retired as of Aug. 31 from the English Dept. of Abilene Christian University after 28 years of teaching. You may also be interested to know that ACU Press will publish my Handbook to Great Songs of the Church Revised in Feb. 1997. The work will be entitled Hymns and History: An Annotated Survey of Sources.

I will also be speaking next February on the ACU Lectures on the history of Great Songs, and trends in Church of Christ hymnody in the 20th century.

--Forrest M. McCann

## From Operation Mobilization Magazine: Hall and Alice Crowder

Alice, from Oklahoma, met Hall, from Alabama, in a church in Kentucky where he preached. They married two years later and have four grown children and 12 grandchildren. After pastoring for 44 years, Hall retired in 1982, and they joined OM. They worked in the OM USA office, then Hall traveled as a representative for OM for four years. In 1989 they moved to OM Literature in Waynesboro, Ga., where Hall is Director of Operations and Alice handles data entry. They operate book tables at missions conferences from Michigan to Florida, and he leads Bible studies. Pray

for their continuing good health and for safety in travel.

## Amite Church of Christ

November 10, 1996 was a very important day in the history of the Amite Church of Christ, for it was our first Friends Day. Members of the congregation had been praying privately for quite some time about it. Some had fasted and asked God to bless. Others met early on Wednesday evenings for special prayer about our Friends Day, and God certainly answered those many prayers. The day was beautiful--cool temperatures and cloudless blue skies welcomed a standing-room-only crowd of 229 people.

The prayer and goal of the Amite church has been to make a godly difference in our community. With this in mind, and because of the number of non-members attending our services it was decided the congregation needed to introduce our church family to our friends in a comfortable and informal setting. During the Friends Day services all our Bible teachers were introduced to our friends along with our youth leaders. We felt our friends would be very interested in who teaches the kids and who leads the youth programs. Our singing was under the direction of John Fulda. In addition to our regular singing the church chorus led the assembly in several congregational songs and then sang a medley of communion songs. The

message was blessed by the Holy Spirit's unction and a fabulous meal was shared afterward.

Follow-up the next week revealed a heart-felt desire on the part of a number of our friends to find out more about our church family. Many of them are looking for a church family and it is our desire to help them in this area.

God has richly blessed! And it is interesting to view with hindsight that every nerve-wracking, heart-breaking, gut-wrenching problem our church has been led to experience was nothing less than a lesson/blessing in disguise. What a God we serve!

### **Two Generations closer to what?**

PBS film critic and columnist Michael Medved recently shared this anecdote out of his Jewish heritage:

A few years ago the illustrious Rabbi Jacob Kamenetzky made a trip to Israel accompanied by his teenage grandson. Ironically these two deeply religious people had been seated in the airplane next to a prominent Israeli socialist leader and outspoken atheist who had spent his whole life fighting against Orthodox values.

After the plane reached its cruising altitude, the cynical atheist traveler couldn't help noticing the way the teenage boy attended to the needs of his aged, bearded grandfather. He got up to get the old man a glass of water, helped him remove his shoes and put on some slippers, and otherwise demonstrated that the rabbi's comfort represented his primary concern.

At one point as the boy got up for another errand on behalf of the old man the skeptical stranger could contain himself no longer. "Tell me something," he asked the rabbi, "Why does your grandson treat you like some kind of a king? I have a grandson and he wouldn't give me the time of day."

"It's very simple," the old man replied. "My grandson and I both believe in a God who rules the universe and created all things, including the first man. That means that in the boy's eyes, I'm two generations closer to the hand of God Himself. But in the eyes of your grandson, you're just two generations closer to a monkey."

-- the Amite Bulletin

### **Gallatin Church of Christ**

In celebration of our annual Homecoming Sunday we coined phrases like: "A Day to Reminiscence and Rejoice." We used the day to remember the past, rejoice in the present and use it all to step into the future.

Six former ministers of this congregation were a part of the audience of almost 400. Each of them contributed thoughts of inspiration and information that helped us in the process or transformation. Great joy, healing and fellowship resulted and God was honored and worshipped.

A special treat of the day was a well prepared compilation of information about the Gallatin Church of Christ. It asks: How can we know where we're going if we don't know where we've been?

## Do You Want News From Mozambique?

Since arriving in Mozambique for missionary work, Martin Brooks has done a great job of chronicling his family's experiences there. Last month's W&W included some of those fascinating observations. If you are interested in getting on his mailing list (or E-mail), you may write John W. Smith at 2910 Carriage Hill Drive, Crestwood KY 40014. If possible, donate something to cover the costs (though they don't mention that).

## Southeast Church of Christ, Louisville

The Southeast body is pleased to announce the arrival of Bro. Bruce DeMoss and his family, who will serve as Minister to the Congregation. Bro. Bruce has preached in a number of churches of Christ, and comes to us from Lynchburg, VA.

There are great opportunities before us for reaching the lost in our community, and we look forward to working with him, his wife Lisa, and their children Daniel and Rachel.

## Thank You!

. . . to all the Churches and individuals who showed your concern and love for me during my heart surgery and recovery. Thanks for your prayers, card, calls & visits and a special thanks for the financial gifts to help with medical expenses. Our great rich heavenly Father has many very generous children among us. In Christian Love,

-- Bro. Harry Coultas

## Words of Life

The Words of Life broadcast tapes that are aired on KJEF in Jennings, LA, are having a wider outreach for the Lord Jesus. Word has come from Bro. Doug Broyles of the Jennings Church of Christ that they have sent about 25 of these tapes to Bosnia for the soldiers. Bro. Broyles says that they heard of the need through a ministry of the White's ferry Road Church of Christ in West Monroe, LA, called "American Military Evangelizing Nations." The Jennings Church has received a letter from a soldier in Bosnia expressing thanks for sharing these messages and songs with them. He went on to say that they were uplifted in their spirits. Praise God that He is multiplying the use of these broadcast tapes to reach and strengthen Christians around the world.

## A Letter to Words of Life

"I am a man of fifty and should confess that this is my first correspondence to a religious organization or programme. From my early years I considered the Bible and Christianity to be an intrusive foreign tradition bent on challenging our local and I hated it our of hand. But after listening to you accidental on Radio Africa Two recently, I feel I must listen again because I think I have been ill-informed about the Bible message. . . ." --P.M., Gokwe. Zimbabwe

## NOTE:

The biography of William Carey, begun last month will conclude in our next issue.

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## A Club or an Army?

During the 2nd World War a man called his friend and said, "There's something good and important going on down at 4th and Broadway. Come and share in it with me."

The friend responded, "Thanks, I'll be delighted to accept your invitation." He knows there is a large hotel at 4th and Broadway, and he had heard that they were having a banquet there with excellent food and entertainment.

When he arrived, however, he found an Army recruitment booth had been set up in front of the hotel, and his friend wanted him to enlist in the armed forces. The second man could only plead, "Excuse me! I didn't know this was what you had in mind!" He had responded to a banquet, he thought, not to go to war! Thus his initial response, though he had made it sincerely, was not sound because it was based on inadequate information.

Friends, too many people who claim to be Christians are shallow in their commitment to Christ, even though they were told that He is King and deserves our total allegiance! Don't they realize what it means to "Believe on the LORD Jesus," and what it means to "DENY YOURSELF & TAKE UP YOUR CROSS & FOLLOW ME," and the meaning of "REPENT & TURN AGAIN"?? Jesus didn't invite us to join a social club, but an ARMY!

Committed Christians, we thank God for you. Uncommitted folks, wake up before it's too late!