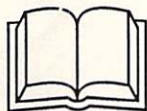


"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

January 2005

GOD in his LOVE

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MAN in his DESPAIR

PREVENTING FAMILY B-R-E-A-K-U-P

< A Great Opportunity Coming Soon! >

Last year about 2,000 researchers, clergy and psychologists who specialize in family life met in Dallas. Here are a few of the sobering facts they reported about marriage in the U.S. today:

- *The divorce rate has more than doubled from 1960 to the present.
- *Over 1/2 the couples marrying for the 1st time live together beforehand.
- *Couples cohabiting before marriage increase their odds of divorce 50%.
- *27% of children are raised in single-parent families. That is triple the rate in 1960.

Those attending the conference concurred that “a lifelong, healthy marriage is the only way to find fulfillment for a person’s deepest longings for love and family, and is the best way to raise healthy children.”

Syndicated columnist Tom Schaefer wrote, “Most agreed that if nothing is done, [marriage] will run aground. What can be done? One vital aspect to healthy marriages, researchers found, is faith [in God]. The more active faith is in a couple’s life, the less likely they are to divorce. There’s our challenge: We who claim faith to be central to our lives need to get on board in support of stronger premarital counseling opportunities. We need to speak clearly about the value of marriage. We need to seek out the countless ways available to us to strengthen our own marital ties.”

Now some *GOOD News*:

On March 10-11 the School of Biblical Studies Seminar can help your home and facilitate your family! Christian counselors James Robert Ross, Ph.D and Ann Cook, M.S., will present what they call “*a seminar for everyone who is married, or wants to be married, or wants to know why anyone in their right mind would ever get married.*”

Take advantage of this opportunity. Attend – Bring your spouse, your children (mid-teens on up), your parents & friends – single, married, divorced or bereaved.

What Others Have Said:

“The personal examples kept my attention 100%.”

“VIBRANT!”

Continued on back cover

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

The Word and Work is published monthly except December by Portland Ave. Church of Christ, Inc., 2500 Portland Ave. Louisville, Ky. 40212. Subscription: \$11.00 per year; bundles of 10 or more to one address = \$10.00 per subscription. Address correspondence to Word and Work, 2518 Portland Avenue, Louisville, KY 40212.

Periodicals Postage Paid at Louisville, Ky. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Word and Work, 2518 Portland Ave., Louisville, KY 40212.

Vol. XCIX

January 2005

No. 1

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God in His Astonishing Love Comes Down to Us in Our Deep Despair

Alex V. Wilson

The above title tells our double theme this month. Read the stirring descriptions and examples of the “wonderful love of Jesus” which we delight to sing about:

A joy by day, a peace by night;
In storms a calm, in darkness light;
In pain a balm, in weakness might
Is the wonderful love of Jesus.

My hope for pardon when I call,
My trust for lifting when I fall,
In life, in death, my all in all
Is the wonderful love of Jesus.

--E. D. Mund

And we need that love. It's indispensable in a world of conflict, hatred, terrorism and the insecurity that results from them. Read the helpful articles about overcoming depressions. Some of them are caused by inner struggles and weaknesses, by sins—whether real or imagined. Others are due to outer alarms, threats and wars.

May we experience our Lord's grace, strength and peace whatever this year may hold.

“What Wondrous Love is This, O My Soul?”

--Adapted from a sermon by A. W. Tozer

Right after World War I Herbert Hoover was made administrator of U.S. aid for Europe's orphans. The American people gave vast sums of money to help these children, many of whose towns had been broken up by the war, and they appointed Hoover to be in charge of distributing these funds. Though people gave generously, still there were not adequate funds to help the staggering number of orphans who needed help.

A newspaperman saw and reported this incident: He was in one of the centers where this program was administered, and a man and

his little daughter came in. The man was very thin, with unnaturally bright eyes and sunken cheeks. The girl also had signs of extreme malnutrition: eyes too large and bright, her abdomen distended, her arms and legs skeletal in appearance.

The man said, "I would like to have my little girl enrolled on your list." The worker asked, "This is your little girl?" "Yes." "Well," came the reply, "we're sorry but our rules limit us to helping full orphans. Our funds are so limited, and there are so many orphans who have lost *both* parents, that we don't have enough to help those who still have a parent."

The man seemed bewildered, and said, "Well, you know, I can't work. I'm sick; I've been abused. I was a prisoner of war, and was half starved and I'm ill and can't take care of her... so I brought her to you to take care of her, because I can barely stagger around. Can't you feed her?"

The worker replied, with sympathy but firmness: "We're very sorry, we wish we could, but we just can't accept any children except full orphans--those with no parents at all."

The father then got the point. "You mean that if I were dead, you'd feed and care for my little girl, and she'd have clothes and a place to stay?" "That's right," mumbled the worker.

The father stooped over and picked his daughter up, hugging her skinny frame to himself for several minutes. Then he put her down and placed her hand in the hand of the worker. He said, "I'll see to that," and walked out and shortly afterwards took his life.

The Psalmist wrote, "As a father pities his children, so the Lord *pities those who fear him.*" Jesus said to the Heavenly Father, "Here are our creatures, doomed and helpless and about to die. But I'll see to it that they need not die. I'll see to that." And He came down and gave His life that we might live.

Is Your God Picky, Grouchy, a Bookkeeper?

Urban Steinmetz, a Family Counselor

Get yourself a loving God, and make Him your friend. You're going to need Him, every day. Is it easy to get yourself a loving God? I suppose for some people it is. Some people do grow up in loving homes right from birth, surrounded by love. Their teachers teach them about a God of love.

But I certainly didn't grow up with a very loving God. Mine was a bookkeeping god who carefully kept track of all my sins. And many of the things that I thought about, during the teenage years at least, were sins. My god was a *picky* god, a *condemning* one, a *punishing* one--not a bit easy to love. As a little kid I lied a lot: I told him often that I loved him. But that was only because I was scared. I thought he would beat my brains out or strike me dead if I didn't say I loved him.

Is it easy to make God *your* closest friend? Maybe, if you've known a friendly God. But the god I grew up with always seemed to say, "KEEP YOUR DISTANCE, BUB! I'm almighty, I'm nine miles above you. You approach me only on your knees. Don't try talking to me like you talk to your friends. You speak to me only in special God language." At one time I thought I even had to talk to God in a special tone of voice. What a bunch of nonsense!

So why should I lie to you and tell you it is easy to love God and make Him your friend? It hasn't been for me, and many of you were raised with a god like mine--and it hasn't been easy for you either.

I can't even tell you how to know that you need God as your friend. But if building love [in your family] comes as tough for you as it sometimes does for me, I think you'll know you need a friend who is much wiser than you are.

Making Him your best friend, making His will the most important thing in your life--how easy it would be to build a truly loving home, if we could just do that. If we made a truly loving God the most important person in our lives, all of the false gods that we worship and that interfere with our loving would slowly go away....

--From Urban Steinmetz's tape series, "Our Marriage is You and Me"

The *KING* Walked With US

David Johnson
Reprinted from the Tell City newspaper

A story is told of Shah Abbas, a Persian king who loved his people very much. To know and understand them better, he would mingle with his subjects in various disguises. One day he went as a poor man to the public baths and in a tiny cellar sat beside the fireman who tended the furnace. When it was mealtime the king shared his simple, coarse food and talked to his lonely subject as a friend.

Again and again the king visited, and the man grew to love him. Finally, the Shah told him he was the king expecting the man to ask some favor or gift from him.

But the fireman sat gazing at his ruler with love and wonder and said, "You left your palace and your glory to sit with me in this dark place, to eat coarse, simple food, to care whether my heart is glad or sorry. On others you may give rich presents, but to me you have given yourself, and it only remains for me to pray you never withdraw the gift of your friendship."

This wonderful story reminds us that the King of kings left the throne room, left the glories of heaven in order to share Himself with us in this dark world. His gift of love will never be withdrawn from us. He loved us first. We can scarcely take it in: God became one of us. The ruler became a subject. Even subjected himself to a cruel cross and tasted death, though He is eternal. No grave could hold the Son of God. Today our Friend, our King lives evermore again in heaven.

One day the King will return to this earth. This time He will come with all the pomp and glory of heaven to walk with us again. Our King wants to get to know us face to face, to mingle with us, to enjoy our company together. Can you imagine the joy of that time together!

In God's Word, in the Book of Isaiah 65:20ff, we get a glimpse of what that wonderful time will be like for believers with their King. "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed." Then in verse 25 we have this fantastic portrait of the idyllic happiness and harmony that will excite us all. "The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, says the LORD."

In Christ Jesus, we who are in Him and He in us, wait, watch and yearn to see Him face to face, and walk with our King. You can join in too! Make Jesus the Ruler of your life today. He so much desires to visit with you personally and intimately as your closest Friend.

[David Johnson is Minister of the Tell City, Indiana, Church of Christ]

More On God's Incredible Love

Do you know the story of Major John Foote? He was a chaplain with Canadian forces during the Second World War. On August 18, 1942, Major Foote went ashore with his troops in the great raid on Dieppe. The losses were staggering. Due to many causes, a large number of Canadians were unable to be evacuated from the town and had to be left behind. Foote had personally carried and pushed into boats thirty blinded or wounded Canadian soldiers. Finally, the order was given to withdraw. He was safely on board a small boat which would have taken him to a larger craft and ultimately back to England. Suddenly it hit him that there were two thousand wounded Canadians still on the streets and docks of Dieppe. He knew they would be captured, perhaps tortured and shot, perhaps left in prison camps for what would be a long war. He knew that they would need all the encouragement and comfort to face the future that anyone could give and that he was the only chaplain at Dieppe. Without hesitating, John Foote jumped over the side of his boat and waded ashore. He deliberately went back to be with men without hope, and spent three long, miserable years in Nazi prison camps.

We rightly applaud such exceptional courage and compassion. However, he was only following the greater example of his Savior. The Lord's love for His people was so great that He too waded ashore to share our deprivations, sufferings and misery – to provide us hope. What a Savior!

* * * * *

God the Sufferer

"One reason why we are not deeply impressed by the uniqueness of the Bible is that we have never fully comprehended how revolutionary it is. It proclaims a message which is designed to produce total world revolution -- *not by causing others to suffer, but by being willing to suffer*. This, of course, is the meaning of Calvary, and we, if we are to be Christ's disciples, must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him – each one to a Calvary." --Eugene Nida

* * * * *

A Thought-provoking Definition of GRACE:

"Grace is God's love ... *at work* ... on behalf of the unlovely ... *making them lovely*."

--E. L. Jorgenson

* * * * *

A Testimony: "Wow!"

Letter to an editor: "For many years I tried to prove to God that I was worthy of His love by doing all the right things, and it left me empty and doubtful that I was really a Christian. Thank God, I at last got free of legalism and found my way to Christ ... I've never been so *excited* about the Christian life. It's *wonderful* to be free in Christ!"

* * * * *

The Hardest Things to Believe

"It was R. H. Boll who first taught me that the Gospel means grace, and when it becomes law it is no longer Gospel, no matter how 'conservative' or 'Biblical' its dress ... There is a temptation for all of us to deny, distort, misconstrue and misinterpret the eternal, fathomless, incomprehensible love of God. As Brother Boll used to say, "The hardest thing to believe about the Gospel is not the Virgin Birth, the resurrection or the miracles of Jesus, but the fact that it is simply *too good to be true.*" --J. Robert Ross

* * * * *

A Testimony: "Exhilaration!"

From a private letter: "I wish there were some way to share with legalistic Christians the tremendous joy and lifted burden that comes when one truly *lays down his own work and accepts the gift of God.* It's just hard to believe the exhilaration and sense of self-worth that come when one can really understand that Christ loved me so much that He died to earn for me what I had no capacity to earn for myself. I know beyond doubt that I am saved -- right now -- as secure as can be. That is the peace that passes understanding."

* * * * *

God's Grace, Not Our Goodness: Preach It!

Personal experience of a preacher-- Rubel Shelly's dad had always enjoyed robust health, till suddenly cancer was found. They just sewed him back up, unable to do anything. He lived only three and a half weeks more. Brother Shelly tells what happened:

One afternoon he said, "Rubel, I can feel I'm getting weaker everyday and I know it's not going to be long now. I just hope that when I stand before the Lord I've done enough that He will be able to say, "Well done."

It was just like somebody hit me in the back with a poker. I shot straight up off my cot and said, "Daddy, though you are the best man I've ever known or ever will know, I'm sure, you *haven't* done enough. But you are saved *anyway*, by the grace of God."

For the first time in my presence during those weeks, Daddy cried. He lay there, tears starting down both temples, and he said, "Son, I just don't know why I said that. I know I'm not going to be saved because I've done enough. I know my salvation is a free gift to me through Jesus Christ. I don't know why I said that."

Now I'm crying. I said, "Daddy, I'm not mad at you. I'm mad at me and preachers like me who somehow messed up the preaching of the Gospel so that we've left people like you-believers, who have given their lives to the Lord—we've left them on their death beds to doubt and fear rather than to rejoice."

I don't want anyone else who has been redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ to get to where my Daddy was on his death bed in his mid-70's, wondering whether he'd done enough. No, he *didn't* do enough, because Jesus Christ had done it all and had given it to him as a free gift. We must preach it properly, Biblically, powerfully, so that people understand it, so that in their moments of crisis, instead of doubting, they will be able to live with joyous certainty – born of faith in Christ, not in our good works.

--From a sermon preached at Gallatin, Tenn. [We are delighted that Brother Shelly will speak several times at our August 2005 Louisville-area Fellowship Week, Lord willing. --avw]

No longer under law but under *GRACE*

by Harry Robert Fox, Jr.

[Brother Fox wrote this brief article in response to a Mormon friend who asked that he limit it to 500 words. The subject matter is so huge the author would have "preferred to use 5,000 words!" But by having to confine himself as requested he tried "to highlight more sharply the radical nature of the distinction" between law and grace. --avw]

The longer I live, the more convinced I am that the Apostle's statement in Romans 6:14, that believers in Christ are no longer under law but under grace is of immense importance. It opens our eyes to the radical difference between the two kinds of relationship be-

tween God and us which Paul articulates in the third chapter of Galatians: *the difference between a bilateral "covenant" and a unilateral "promise."* The bilateral covenant refers to the kind of *relationship God established with Israel through Moses*; the unilateral promise refers to the kind of *relationship God established with Abraham 430 years earlier.*

Under the bilateral covenant, God and Israel exchanged obligations, that is, *everything God agreed to do for Israel depended upon how well Israel obeyed His commandments.*

But what God promised to do for Abraham depended only on God Himself (as Paul says so well in Romans 4:20,21: "No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.")

What had God promised? The answer is found in Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:5,6, where God promises to guide Abraham to a land for him to possess and in which to have many descendants, and through one of whom (per Galatians 3: 16), God would bless all the families of the earth (Gal. 3:8). The fulfillment of that unilateral promise occurred in Christ through whom *God acted redemptively on our behalf, not in response to our obedience, but in spite of our failure to obey.* So Paul says in Romans 5:6,8 & 10, that "while we were *helpless* (to obey), at the right time Christ died for the *ungodly* (Thus God shows His love for us in that while we were yet (disobedient) *sinner*s, Christ died for us (so), while we were *enemies* (of God), we were reconciled to God by the death of His son. "

When the full import of this stupendous information is assimilated by us, we are filled with so much gratitude for God's unconditional love and mercy for us (which Paul calls "faith"), that we are energized to become far more obedient to God's commandments than if we were still relating to Him on the basis of Law. Someone once said that the difference between law and grace is that under law, we work six days and rest on the seventh day, whereas, under grace we are given rest on the first day and work the next six days. There is a "whale of a difference" between these two kinds of work!

Work in response to law is burdensome and inadequate and often leads to "burnout," while work in response to grace is joyful, "restful" and productive (as suggested by Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30). Also, work in response to grace is of a finer quality. It knows how to discriminate between what is of primary importance and what is of lesser importance (as noted by Jesus in Matthew 23:23-24).

IF YOU HAVE SINNED

R. H. Boll

It is a serious thing, and not to be regarded lightly. My first word, like John's would be, "These things I write unto you *that ye may not sin.*" But that is not the last word, thank God; for John goes on to say, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins ..." (1 John 2:1,2).

There is a difference in sins. The Bible speaks of *great* sins a man may commit, which implies that some other sins are of a minor character. But we are not always able to estimate the relative gravity of our offences. Some sins may seem small to us because they are common and habitual; in God's sight they are great. In any case the least sin is not small in God's sight; and if unforgiven would make salvation impossible. And there are great sins. "There is a sin unto death," John says. "All unrighteousness is sin. And there is a sin unto death" (1 John 5:16,17). Of this we shall have something to say further on.

Say then, that you have sinned--perhaps a great sin: what will you do now? It is a critical time. You may take a wrong step and go down into indifference and fatal, final hardening. Or you may be forgiven and humbly rejoice in His mercy and His forgiving love. It depends on the attitude you take, and what you do about it. First of all the facts must be faced. Do not minimize your guilt. Do not put yourself off with excuses. When you deal with God you must above all things be honest. You must come as you are, without pretense or any attempt at concealment. There is nothing hid from His sight, and "all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Now, "if we confess our sins," says John again, "he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Will you believe that? "I acknowledged my sin unto you," said David, "and my iniquity I did not hide. I said I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; and you forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psa. 32:5).

"Is it enough," you may ask, "to confess my sin unto God?" Yes, for forgiveness it is. For sin is always and primarily against God (Psa. 51:4). But if God's honor, or the demands of righteousness, calls for confession before men or to men, granting you are sincere in the matter, you will not fail to make things right in this regard. If your sin was a public one you must confess it publicly. If by your sin someone was injured and by your confession the wrong can

be righted, you must confess it to the parties concerned. If it was between you and God alone, to Him alone you need confess – though even then it is good and helpful to confess to faithful brethren also (James 5:16).

The Basis of Righteousness

You may have noticed the recurrence of the word "righteous," in the passages quoted above. "He is faithful and *righteous* to forgive us our sins." And, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ *the righteous*." So David also: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness O God, you God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of *your righteousness*" (where we might have expected the word "mercy"). Or, again, when pleading for forgiveness, "In your faithfulness answer me, and in *your righteousness*" (Ps. 51:14; 143:1,2): Now righteousness means justice; and is it justice we want? God forbid. Yet God is just and cannot be otherwise. Where then does His righteousness come in, in forgiving the sinner? John tells us: "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins.. ." God gave His All, His *Best*, when He gave His Son to die for our sins. And He did it that He "might be just and the justifier of him that has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). Now He can forgive righteously.

That He Might be Feared

"There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared," said the psalmist. The forgiveness of God fills with a holy fear. All through the Old Testament God inculcated the lesson that sin is a terrible thing, and that it calls for blood, and that only the death of the poor victim at the altar could avail to meet its guilt. But those Old Testament sacrifices only *foreshadowed* the real truth: "for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins." It required a truer sacrifice--the blood of One who was the dearest, the purest, the most precious and beloved, the Son of His love, and His awful death upon the cross, to lift that debt. "He is the propitiation for our sins."

"My sins, my sins, my Savior, Their guilt I never knew
Till with thee in the desert I near thy passion drew;
Till with thee in the garden I heard thy pleading pray'r;
And saw the blood-drops falling, That told thy sorrow there."

Now come, my brother, and gladly receive that forgiveness which was bought for you there.

Rejoice and be glad; but rejoice with trembling. It is free, no fee, to you--free yet not cheap. "There is forgiveness with you *that you may be feared*" (Psa. 130:4).

"Cast Not Away Your Boldness"

But to go back to our first question--you have sinned. Now one great danger is that you may get discouraged and think there is no use in starting over. "No use" is the devil's word. When you hear that, or it is suggested to your mind, he is behind it. God says there *is* use. "Cast not away your boldness which has great recompense of reward." Whatever may have happened--cast not away your boldness (Heb. 3:6, 14). We are not left without hope and without help. John says, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins."

"Having then a great high priest, who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that has been in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help us in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).

Doubts and Fears

It seems hard for us small-minded mortals to believe in the free, whole-hearted, disinterested love of God, and His full and free forgiveness. We feel there must be some sort of hitch in it--it can't be so good and free as that. And often after we have penitently sought the Lord's forgiveness, we still carry the load of guilt around with us, with a haunting fear. Perhaps we didn't fulfill all the "conditions"? Our repentance was not perfect? Or maybe we were not sincere enough? And so on. Often the preacher adds to these doubts and fears. Anxious to uphold the high standards, he represents salvation as if it were placed on top of a greased pole, and exhorts his hearers to climb for it. That makes unhappy Christian lives. Moreover it is impossible to live right with a bad unsatisfied conscience. The forgiveness of sins is the very foundation of the Christian life. We can have it by faith, and faith takes the Lord at His word. "But I have sinned and asked for forgiveness so often I fear the Lord doesn't think I mean it," says one. A man once remarked that the passage that tells us to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18: 22) is the hardest in the Bible. "I think it is the sweetest in the Bible," another answered. "How can you say that?" replied the first man. "Well, do you think the Lord wants us to be better than He is? If He tells me to forgive seventy times seven, will He not do so, too? I can go to Him time and time again, and He will forgive me again." That is not the

best way, yet it is so; and we sometimes need that encouragement. However He not only forgives but is able also "to break the power of cancelled sin, and set the prisoner free." "Unto Him that loves us and loosed us from our sins by His blood..." (Rev. 1:5).

The "Sin Unto Death"

But there is the sin unto death, of which John speaks--how do I know that I may not have committed that? The passage is this: "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: not concerning this do I say that he should make request. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16,17).

You will notice that John speaks *about* those who sin unto death, not *to* them. As for such, they are not accessible to admonition. They are hardened, defiant, unapproachable. "It is impossible to renew them again unto repentance." Their state is described in Heb. 6:4-8. They may end up in a paroxysm of bitter remorse like Judas, but until then they are utterly impervious to the appeal of God. What is that sin? It is renouncing Jesus Christ in spite of all light and truth, and siding with His enemies. It is trampling under foot the Son of God, and treating as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and insulting the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). Is that your case, my brother? The very fact that you are fearful and concerned about your condition shows that it is not.

To a convicted sinner his sin seems mountain-high, inexcusable, unforgivable. To such a person God declares, "Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). The blood of Christ is adequate even for this. David in his plea for mercy for his frightful transgression, says, "Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." Might this be? Surely--for the Spirit of God inspired those words (2 Samuel 23:2). And to all sinful souls the Lord says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, all your transgressions ...Return to me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 44:22). "Repent therefore and turn again that your sins may be *blotted out*" -- utterly, entirely cancelled, as though they had never been. Then with love and joy start out to live for Him who did this for you. The fact that you do so is the proof that you have not committed "the sin unto death."

Escaping the of Depression

\ /
pit

Don Sparkes

"Depression is hell."

This is the way Bernard described the harrowing experience from which he had just emerged. A few months before he had been radiant Christian, witnessing to his fellow steelworkers. He had come to our church to speak on *My Faith and My Job*, and had thrilled the congregation with his radiant sincerity. Within a matter of days all this had gone. Instead of joy there was now worry, darkness, and boredom. He could not read or concentrate on anything worthwhile. The darkness became so intense that he began to feel the only way out was to take his life. *Hell* was the only term he could use.

One reason for this was the fact that God was, so it seemed, no longer a part of Bernard's experience. Had God withdrawn Himself? Men do not put themselves sometime beyond the love of God by outwardly rejecting and spurning their Creator, but we only know of one person from whom God has ever deliberately withdrawn Himself, and that person, was His Son, Jesus Christ. This withdrawal was only for a moment, and was due to Christ bearing the sin of the world. His cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me (Mark 15:34) gives us a glimpse of the depression of soul through which our Lord was going. C. H. Spurgeon, the great preacher of the last century, when preaching on these words of Christ, said something rather like Bernard:

A man may bear depression of spirit about worldly matters if he feels he has God to go to. He is cast down but not in despair. Like David he dialogues with himself and he inquires, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God for I shall yet praise him." But if the Lord be once withdrawn, if the comfortable light of his presence be shadowed, even for an hour, there is torment, within the heart which I can only liken to the prelude of hell.

Bernard found that his depression was not just a personal thing. It affected others. His home became an unhappy place not just for him but for his wife and children. It was like a disease, it spread to

and affected those with whom he came into contact. Depression was just as infectious as his former joy. Those who have got out on the wrong side of the bed will know a little of the way a mood can affect the others in the house and at work. How miserable it is to work with those who always have the Monday-morning feeling! The person who, as H. E. Fosdick once put it: "Not only do they have cellars in their emotional houses, as everybody does, but they live in them."

Very often depression is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. We see this in the large percentage of people attending doctor's offices, people who have reacted to unforeseen changes in circumstances by becoming anxiety-prone or neurotic. When we look into the reasons for Bernard's illness we find it was his reaction to something new to his experience. In his case depression had physical, mental, and spiritual reasons all springing from the basic change in his life when he found himself out of work and idle for the first time in his life.

My main aim in this article is to try and deal with spiritual depression. Before I do this a brief note on depression springing from physical or mental causes is included. Anyone who believes himself to be suffering from severe depression of any kind should, of course, consult his doctor.

Part of the trouble may be Physical

Bergsten, in his book *Pastoral Psychology* writes, "Many physical diseases, and many conditions of bodily disorder, especially in the endocrine system, are accompanied by characteristic mental and emotional changes. Very often these take the form of depression which may rise to intensity of anguish or despair. A person who is assailed by thoughts and feeling of this kind seldom realizes that they are of physical origin."* [See page 19, note.]

Bernard had developed an acute ear trouble. Because of this he became susceptible to dizziness, which made it dangerous for him to be near machinery. He was also in his middle years when hormonal changes in the body, relating in some way to the change of life in women, were taking place. For him the cure of his depression was related in a very real way with the cure of his ear complaint. Not till this was well on the way to being dealt with did the depressive state abate. Some physical reasons for depression can be dealt with easily enough, and with little enough effort, and the earlier we go and talk with our doctor the sooner we shall receive the advice we need.

Some other physical causes are not easy to deal with. Often the first need is that the cause of depression should be seen for what it is, and made the best of. An adolescent, or a woman in the change of life, or a man in his late forties, all experience hormonal changes in the body. The pregnant woman whose baby is lying low down in the womb, or the mother of a few days recovering from the shock of birth and readjustments in her hormones – such folk cannot do much but accept the situation. The changes in the body will soon pass and the depression will go, and the realization of this fact frequently is all that is needed.

Yet other physical upsets, affecting the soul with gloom, may be serious warning of serious disorder in the body and if this is the case no delay should be allowed before we see our doctor. In some cases, the earlier he can diagnose and treat us the better will be the possibility of cure.

The fact that body and soul react to each other is a truth we all recognize. This is one very good reason for taking care of our bodies – taking enough exercise, adequate sleep, eating the right kind of food, not misusing the body in any way. We should strive to make our bodies fit, clean, and beautiful.

Part of the Trouble may be Mental

Bernard had always been a very active person. He loved his work. His spare time since his conversion was taken up with service to the community. His life was so organized that there was no time to be idle, to sit and think.

Now he was off work. Weeks, maybe months, would have to be spent idle. His dizziness made it impossible to read or do anything. The reaction to this abnormal situation was normal – he became depressed, miserable, and irritable. No one seemed to be able to help him. Each day took him further into the mire until he felt the only way out was to end it all.

Boredom is only one of the many mental causes for depression. The most common one occurs in hypersensitive persons – the people who drive themselves hard, who have ideals which they must live up to, who are over-conscientious, and who feel guilty if they relax. Failing to live up to their ideals they fall into deep depression over their failures. Such folk would begin to find a cure if they could be helped to take life not so seriously. We must be what we are and advance a step at a time instead of trying to be now what it will take a lifetime to become.

Overwork and overstrain saps our very lifeblood, and it is not surprising to find Christians having bouts of depression if they take too much on, or ignore the need for a holiday and change. In such cases when one is mentally exhausted it is worthwhile sitting down and considering seriously dropping this or that commitment, and working out how one can get away from it all, if only for a week-end.

Some are depressed because they are never appreciated. They try to do their best, yet those working or living with them just never see what they do. All is accepted with never a word of praise or thanks. How many yearn to be appreciated and are downcast and depressed because the words of thanks and praise never come. Praise is better than any tonic. To quote again from H. E. Fosdick: "A word to the living is worth six wreaths to the dead." If we Christians could get into the habit of looking round for things to praise instead of complain and grouse about we would banish depression for many people. Try it with your own minister at church when something has been said which has helped you; try it in the store when you have been helped to find what you want by the sales clerk; try it when you sit down to the next meal at home!

I remember reading about an interesting experiment with babies. A film record was made of changes of expression on a baby's face during periods of absence from its mother. It was found that if the mother was absent too long when the baby was needing her it went through phases of what the author called "profound depression" – that is, it appeared to experience something not unlike what an adult would know. If this is so, it seems most unwise continually to leave a child to cry itself to sleep, for some depressions may well be related to the childhood experience of being left alone. This may throw light on the fact that some live in dread of losing someone they love, and an actual loss brings this profound depression surging back into consciousness.

So often we point to things outside ourselves that have brought about worry and depression, yet trouble is within us. *It is how we face situations which matters.* Whether we have our lives based on the solid foundation of Christ, or everything just resting on the sands of changing feelings – as in the story of the two houses which Jesus used so pointedly in His Sermon on the Mount. If all is well within, then we can cope with any situation outside ourselves, even if it is a serious physical disability which could overwhelm the soul with darkness. I have seen Christians overcome depressing illnesses such as diabetes and sclerosis because of the inner joy they had from contact with Christ.

Christianity, remember, is “good news.” That is good news for every situation which a man or woman may find themselves in. That Christ can deal with the situation is a basic Christian truth, but He may choose to use a Christian psychiatrist to help us find wholeness of mind just as He may use the doctor in bringing about wholeness of the body.

Part of the Trouble may be Spiritual

It would be nothing more than a quick look at the physical and mental case if Bernard’s trouble cleared up when his ear got better or when his boredom ended with his return to activity. But his depression was something deeper – it reached down to the very spiritual depths of his being. For him as a Christian it was the spiritual havoc that had been wrought that concerned him most. God seemed to be no longer present. Vital prayer was now a thing of the past, and no longer a present joyful experience. He could pray, but somehow did not seem to be in contact with the Lord. The reading of God’s Word was no longer a joy to him. He had lost his hunger for the things of God – somehow the Bible did not seem relevant.

The trouble was that Bernard was somehow blaming the Lord for his state. He went to bed at night resenting the Lord’s dealings with him. He ignored Paul’s wisdom: “... never let the sun set upon your exasperation” (Ephesians 4:26, Moffat’s translation); he thus awoke in the morning with this resentment and depression and irritability even more a part of him. How he needed to come to the Lord seeking forgiveness, a new start, new life in the Spirit and power to live victoriously. Yet he did not seem able to do this. Then one afternoon he sat in his home thinking. The house was quiet with the children at school, and he was turning over in his mind some words which a workmate had said only that morning: *“Your faith must make quite a difference to you in the situation you find yourself in!”*

“Why is this not true?” he thought. “Why as a Christian am I in such a state as this? He is right. My faith should make a difference.”

He opened his Bible and read at random till he came to a verse that he knew by heart. This time its relevance came alive for him – the words of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28 RSV).

Why he had not come to Jesus before with his burden and trouble he was not quite sure, but there was no time like the present. So he poured out his heart to the Lord – shared the situation with

Him. This, as he said afterwards, "... lifted the fog and brought me into the glorious sunshine of His presence again."

In Bernard's case, this led to a striking change. The depression which had sprung from, and related back on his whole being, was now cast out. He was free to be re-commissioned for service.

While not recommending this dangerous and chancey way of opening the Bible at random for a message from God, this incident well illustrates the danger of flouting spiritual laws. We recognize readily enough that if we overwork and allow ourselves to be ridden by worry then there is a possibility of nervous breakdown. The same is true of overworking the body or misusing it. We must take sufficient food and rest to function properly. Bernard will tell you that his spiritual trouble resulted partly from neglect of the means of grace; he especially mentions the missing of his morning time of prayer and Bible-reading. It was dangerous, for it meant that when his faith was needed to combat the depression coming from his physical and mental states it was so weak that for a time it was useless. He knew the answer was in the Lord, yet somehow could not get to Him.

How necessary it is, in fact how more necessary it is, to keep our daily times of prayer and Bible-reading, our meditation and our meeting with other Christians for worship and fellowship, when things are difficult and life becomes a struggle. It is not without reason that Thomas doubted the resurrection of the Lord considering he was not found in fellowship with the other disciples when the Lord appeared among them.

*After we ran an article on depression several years ago that omitted the fact that physical conditions *may* be a contributing cause of it, a dear friend who is a godly church leader wrote me as follows: "I agree with all [that the article] said, having suffered a year or so of the malady. It was awful, mostly because of the blacking out of all spiritual comfort and the ability to pray in any genuine sense. You didn't mention what doctors are attributing much depression to these days—chemical imbalance. I have concluded that they are right. I have been able to assure a number of folks that there is hope and a possibility of medication to remedy the situation. At least that was the answer for me." --avw

NO CAUSE FOR ALARM

John R. W. Stott

(Summary of a sermon preached years ago, but again especially relevant ever since 9/11/01)

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. . . All this is but the beginning of the sufferings . . . And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come.

--Matthew 24:6-8, 14 RSV.

The command of Jesus not to be alarmed must seem to many a quite extraordinary requirement. Here is the world, confronted by intractable problems. New problems are continually being added. All the time we live under the shadow of an ominous mushroom cloud. Peace and security, justice and freedom seem unattainable. Men's hearts are failing them for fear.

How then can Jesus Christ say to us, "See that you are not alarmed"? Are we to close our eyes to reality and retreat into a fool's paradise? Is the Christian religion indifferent to the sufferings of the world? Does the Church consist of a bunch of escapists? It is important to note on what grounds the command of Jesus is based.

Because Wars Are Certain To Continue

"You will hear the noise of battle near at hand, and the news of battles far away" (verse 6, NEB). Possibly the allusion of Christ was to clashes between the Roman Empire and Jewry, which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But verse 7 has a more general and distant reference: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," These are simple statements of fact; each being expressed by a verb in the future tense. Further, at the end of verse 6, Jesus said that "all these things *must* come to pass." That is, wars not only will happen, but are inevitable.

The explanation is not far to seek. The inevitability of war is due to the nature of man. The ultimate origin of every war is man's selfishness and greed. "What causes wars and fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members?" James 4:1.

Those who believe that a golden age or Utopia is going to evolve on earth base their confidence on a naively optimistic view of man, his fundamental goodness and perfectibility. But Biblical Christians,

who get their opinions from Christ and His apostles, not their own fancies, do not believe that man is evolving morally. And if man is not evolving, Utopia will not evolve. Jesus clearly predicted the continuance of war. He seems to have seen the period between the Ascension and the End as a time of political and natural disturbances. He has been proved right.

This does not mean that we may sit back and twiddle our thumbs in irresponsible inactivity. On the contrary, Christians are to be "the salt of the earth," exercising a restraining influence in society. We are to do our utmost to be peacemakers, and to pray for peace. Nevertheless, we have our Lord's own authority for believing that the world will never be wholly rid of war.

Because Wars Are Under The Sovereign Control Of God

This does not mean that God is responsible for them, but that He turns all things (including the wrath of man and the wars of nations) to the fulfillment of His Own will.

"The end is not yet," verse 6. So there is going to be an end! Moreover, the end is predetermined by God. To say that history is not evolving towards Utopia is not to say that it is out of control. Nor is it ultimately controlled either by man's wickedness and folly, or by the blind interaction of economic forces, as the Marxists believe. No. God is in control. He has His program, and both the time and manner of the consummation are determined by Him.

Christians urgently need to recover this Biblical outlook. Too many of us are fatalists. As we learn the current news from newspapers, radio or television, we sigh and shrug our shoulders as if everything were hopeless. But God is still on the throne! We need to read the Old Testament, in which Israel and Judah were tiny buffer states between the mighty empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia. As the tide of history ebbed and flowed between these empires, Israel and Judah were like little boats bobbing up and down on the swell. They were successively invaded, put to tribute, depopulated and governed by Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Yet throughout the corridors of Old Testament scripture the triumphant shout of faith resounds, "the LORD reigns." The same truth is plain in the New Testament. The empires of the world and their rulers are under the control of Almighty God. He raises up one and puts down another, as He works out His own purposes of salvation and judgment. "The Most High God rules in the kingdoms of men."

There is a second indication here of God's sovereign control. It is not only that the end is determined, but that present sufferings are in some sense a means to it. When Jesus said, "These are the begin-

ning of sorrows" (verse 8), the Greek word for "sorrows" or "sufferings" is that commonly used for the pains of childbirth. The NEB renders the phrase "with all these things the birth pangs of the new age begin." The Christian is not filled with pessimism. He knows that the sufferings of the world are not only the death throes of the old order but the birth pangs of the new. This truth is repeatedly emphasized in Scripture, that the way to life is death, the path to glory is suffering, and the prelude to birth is pain. Since Jesus referred to the new heavens and the new earth as "the regeneration of the universe" (Matthew 19:28), He seems to have thought of the political, social and natural disturbances of our day as the prolonged labor-pains which will ultimately lead to a new birth.

Because Wars Add Luster To The Gospel

It is significant that Christ goes on to speak of the Church's evangelistic task. Before the end comes, the gospel of the kingdom must be preached throughout the world (verse 14). The point is not just that international unrest must not hinder or distract the church from evangelization, but that the gospel gains meaning and force from the disturbances of the day.

This becomes clearer when we see that the gospel is "the gospel of the kingdom." It is good news that God through Christ has established His kingdom on earth. It is not a political kingdom with territorial frontiers; it is the reign of God in the hearts of men. Now we are called to publish the good news of this kingdom just at a time when "Kingdom rises against kingdom" on earth. The kingdoms of men have always been sullied by injustice; God's kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness. The kingdoms of men are wrecked by "wars and rumors of wars;" God's kingdom is a kingdom of peace. The kingdoms of men are marred by the passions of a narrow nationalism and radicalism; God's kingdom draws its citizens from every race and nation under heaven. The kingdoms of men rise and flourish and fall and pass away; God's kingdom will stand and grow forever. It is against the somber background of imperfect human kingdoms that the kingdom of God shines forth.

* * * *

"See to it that you are not alarmed," Jesus said. He implied that it would be natural to be alarmed, to share the alarm of an unbelieving world. But Christian people are to take steps to avoid thinking and behaving like unbelievers, and to conquer the alarm to which they are naturally prone. How? By reflecting on the truths of the Christian revelation which we have been considering, especially the doctrines of man and of God.

Because of our doctrine of man (that he is fallen, sinful and selfish), we know that wars must continue. So there is no excuse for surprise and therefore for alarm.

Because of our doctrine of God (that He is the sovereign ruler of all things), we have even less cause for alarm. We know that God has not abdicated His throne. He controls history, however chaotic it may seem. He has determined the end, and present sufferings are the birth pangs of the new age. Moreover, His kingdom, *one day to be consummated*, has *already been inaugurated*; it is a kingdom of righteousness and peace, stable and universal.

"View temptation positively"?

You May Be Under False Condemnation

T. A. Hegre

Many sincere Christians labor under false condemnation because they lack a clear-cut distinction between temptation and sin. Academically, almost everyone agrees that temptation is not sin, but in experience many are confused.

After one meeting, an elderly woman came forward with tears in her eyes saying, "You will never know what a relief it is to know that temptation is not sin." For years she had felt condemned. Now this release made a tremendous change in her life.

Others are falsely accused either by themselves through faulty understanding, or by the devil, who is the "accuser of the brethren."

It is not sin to be tempted. The angels were tempted; some responded and fell, but others remained in the will of God and are called "the holy angels."

Adam and Eve were tempted before the Fall, but they did not actually sin until they responded to the temptation and reacted contrary to the will of God. From that moment on they were verily guilty and worthy of condemnation.

Even Jesus Christ was tempted, but we know He did not sin. We need to get a firm grasp of this truth that temptation is not sin. In fact, it isn't the sinful that are generally tempted by the devil—they are already on his side and doing his will. The devil and his host of evil spirits tempt the saints, those who are committed to the will of God and are seeking to serve Him.

Sometimes we are drawn away by our own desires and tempted. But here too, until we yield to the temptation, we have not sinned: When the will embraces a desire that is not pleasing to God, conception takes place and a child is born. This child is sin (Jas. 1:14-16). But there is no sin if the will does not yield. Few have strong enough will to renounce a strong desire or appetite. But praise be to God, we have the Spirit of God who is available to help in every time of need.

Temptation begins in the mind with just a simple, evil thought. The next stage is fantasy or strong imagination. Then comes delight and finally consent. We hasten to add that unless an evil thought is rejected at once, it will always lead to the other stages, and sin will be committed.

The enemy of our souls seems to be able to project thoughts into our minds even if he has to use other people or pictures or writing to do so. *We are not responsible for the wrong thoughts that enter, but we are responsible for the thoughts we entertain.* We have the opportunity of rejecting them; and if we do, there will be no sin.

We have often heard the saying that you cannot keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep him from building a nest in your hair. Of course that is right. So also regarding evil that comes to us. We cannot always keep them from occurring, but we can reject them at once. We do not need to entertain them; instead we can set our minds on things that are above.

In the New Testament we are given many words concerning the responsibility for our thought life. Let us consider a few of these. Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth." This should be the habit of our minds.

We are also told to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). In other words, we must not let our minds flit from place to place and thing to thing, but rather assume responsibility for our thought life. We have this ability and we must exercise ourselves in obedience to this importance fact.

The Apostle Peter says, "Gird up the loins of your mind" (1 Pet. 1:13). Here too the same thought is in view. We must not let our minds go out to every possible thing but rather keep a tight rein on them. We must discipline ourselves to think right thoughts.

The Apostle Paul gives a wonderful word concerning the responsibility of right thinking: "Whatsoever things are true. . . honor-

able... just. . . pure. . . of good report... think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

A practical definition of sin is helpful. Many words are translated "sin" in the Bible, but in a definition we should not be satisfied with merely academic descriptions but rather a practical explanation of what sin really is. John Wesley and Charles G. Finney had a definition: "Sin is a willful transgression against a known law." This definition may not cover everything, but for practical purposes it may be the best description of sin. It shows us our responsibility concerning the law of God (1 John 3:4). It takes sin out of the abstract and makes it something we can understand.

Finney and Wesley were both criticized for their definition of sin. But study their lives and their ministries and you will see that they were more careful in pointing out sin, in getting people under conviction, delivered, and genuinely saved, than almost any others in the history of the Christian church.

One of the three items that Martin Luther considered essential for the development of a saint was temptation. We ought to view temptation positively. God has purposely made us temptable - not to cause our fall but rather to enable us to grow strong spiritually. *Every temptation is an opportunity to say no to whatever is not pleasing to God and to prove to God that we love Him supremely-more than even the thing which seems attractive for the moment. .*

At the moment of temptation we should say, "Yes, I feel the attraction of this thing and am drawn to it and know it is possible to yield. But by God's grace I refuse to embrace this thing, for it would be against the God I love. I accept this opportunity to prove to God that I love Him more than anyone or anything." *Such an attitude will take temptation out of the negative sphere into the positive.* Then the fact of temptation can become a challenge, and will become exciting instead of monotonous.

The lack of distinction between temptation and sin causes many to think that they have sinned in thought, word, and deed every day. They believe that a feeling of temptation implies they have already sinned. They think that because they can respond, they have already entered into sinful striving. This is not true; temptation only proves that they are able to respond and react, either embracing the temptation or rejecting it. If we couldn't feel the temptations, then they wouldn't be true temptations, nor would we have a clear-cut choice of reacting one way or the other.

Of course we can feel temptations; of course we can react in a wrong manner. But praise be to God, we do not have to react wrongly; we can rather reject temptation and give it no room in the mind or heart. We are not machines; we are persons, and we have been given intelligence to *know* right from wrong. We are also given sensibilities to *feel* both right and wrong. Furthermore, we are given a will which can *choose* right or wrong.

Let us consider Joseph. When both the temptation and opportunity to sin were present, he said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" His love for God made him strong in temptation. Joseph did not feel sorry for himself, but through this experience, he grew in grace and power. So it is for us all. We need to exercise resistance against temptation. This is the way of developing strong spiritual muscles.

After I shared the positive element of temptation to an audience in the West Indies, several embraced this idea and later testified that life had become, an adventure and taken on new meaning. Now they were rejoicing in opportunities to prove to the Lord that they loved Him supremely. So it would be for us if we understood our temptations and entered into the adventures of an overcoming life.

A wrEtCh! Like ME

Nick Boone

American essayist Henry David Thoreau once wrote: "I never dreamed of any enormity greater than I have committed. I never knew, and shall never know, a worse man than myself." This statement from Thoreau comes out of a long tradition of spiritual autobiography which can be traced back to Jonathan Edwards and the Puritans, which can be traced across the ocean to John Bunyan and the English dissenters, which can be traced to the Continent and the autobiographical writings of saints like Augustine, which can be traced back, eventually, to Paul.

The reason that quote from Thoreau stood out to me when I read it is that I recognize the long Christian tradition that inspired it. Chapter one of Paul's first letter to Timothy sounds quite similar:

"Even though I was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy say-

ing that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (I Tim. 1:13-16).

One could argue that Paul is speaking strictly about himself when he says, “of whom I am the worst,” but it is intriguing that he couches this phrase within the context of “a trustworthy saying”—suggesting that it applies in general to everyone. Certainly, Thoreau’s remarks suggest that this sense of oneself as the worst man alive is broadly applicable. When he says he “never shall know” a worse man than himself, he intimates that it is impossible to know another’s evil more thoroughly than one understands one’s own.

Jesus, himself, has something to say about this issue. When the prostitute poured perfume on Jesus’ feet and wiped them with her tears, Simon the Pharisee was indignant. But Jesus teaches Simon why it is appropriate for the woman to show such emotion—she has been forgiven much. He tells Simon, “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she has loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47).

Simon’s problem stems from the fact that he “loves little.” And he loves little because he, supposedly, has been forgiven of only “little.” But we understand, from Paul’s writings especially, that no one has been forgiven of “little.” Everyone is imperfect. Without Christ’s sacrifice, each one of us is condemned to the pit of hell. Each one of us has been forgiven of MUCH! Each one of us helped put Christ on the cross, each one of us shares in the blame for the crucifixion, each one of us is a BIG, UGLY SINNER. Simon couldn’t realize that. Perhaps this is why Jesus is relatively easy on Simon—there is no way he could have known, on his side of Calvary, just how much of a debt he owed, just how much he needed to be forgiven.

Those of us who have been in church and around church people all our lives have a tendency to be like Simon. We sometimes forget to understand that we are *sinners*. We reserve that word for the worldly people who never go to church. Not surprisingly, because of this our love for *those sinners* decreases and we become judgmental people.

This is why we need to keep singing old hymns like “Amazing Grace” and “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed.” We need to mouth the words, “Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a

wretch like me." We need to sing "Did he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" Some songbooks have replaced "worm" for "one," which is a travesty. The songwriter well understands that, if not for the cross, he would be where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Mitigating the language we use to address ourselves to make it more politically correct is dangerous, for it is fundamental that the Christian understand he is guilty of sin—sin which condemns him to hell, sin which put Christ on the cross. Without that understanding, we become like Simon, comfortably smug and judgmental.

Thoreau's statement also stood out to me because he wasn't a Christian. His statement shows us that the tradition of autobiographical condemnations of self that extends all the way back to Paul (and one could even reach back to David) demonstrates that the psyche has a seemingly natural predilection to understand itself as the most wicked, the most guilty. It is not just a Christian phenomenon. Perhaps God installed in our brains this conception of ourselves to make it easier for the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. Who knows? But, whether or not it is natural for us to understand ourselves as "the worst of sinners," it doesn't take much persuasion from the devil to have us thinking like Simon. Therefore, let us continue to sing "Amazing Grace," and praise God for rescuing us poor sinners.

VOICES From The FIELDS

Robert Garrett

Ruwa, Zimbabwe

Dec. 9, 2004

After six months of waiting we finally got our new Mazda DoubleCab pickup at 5:00 pm Friday evening Dec.3. It has the same 2500cc Diesel engine as my eight-year old pickup but this is turbo charged and has a wonderfully surprising amount of power. I am very happy with it. It is not as big as the American "full-size" pickups, but it is big enough and can carry three people in the back seat. I must now get a canopy for the load bed and make some benches for it so we can carry another 4 to 6 people in the back. I also need to have an auxiliary fuel tank made because of the frequent fuel shortages.

As we had written earlier, thieves had cut off and stolen three lengths -about 60 feet-of the 1 1/4 inch galvanized water pipe that feeds the tank near the church. I had installed this several years ago - about 100 yards of piping and the pipe was lying on top of the ground. I removed the remainder and then today we managed to re-

place it with plastic "polypipe" (it comes in rolls 100 meters long). I had the workers dig a ditch to bury it as it needs protection. So now that job is done for which I am thankful. The Harare area churches will have their New Years "Harvest Day" here and will need water.

The frustrating thing is that counteracting these thieves is taking up so much time that I need to be spending on something constructive. We redid the security bars on one bedroom window and also built iron cages around the windows on the end wall of the house. The cages make it impossible for thieves to fish in for whatever they can get - blankets off the beds, etc. so we can keep the windows open at night for fresh air.

We are also working on putting up an external perimeter alarm. It consists of infrared beams. From sender to receiver is 40 meters. I need nine sets to make one perimeter to surround our house, the garage, Michael's quarters and part of the yard below his house. That is a perimeter of 360 Meters. Installing these is a lot of work. We must put up posts to carry each set of transmitter and receiver. It will probably take us another week to complete that. It would be more expensive to install an internal security alarm system in each building as each room has to be covered. Our two skilled workers, Michael and Zilawe, are busy with all these things instead of working on the construction work for the various church buildings that are waiting.

Our electricity has gone off for many hours every other day and sometimes every day for the past two weeks. My generator is working overtime to keep the fridge and deep freeze going. I cannot run the computer off the generator so when the electricity is off I cannot get email or do any work on the computer

Next week Zilawe and Brother Patrick are going to Binga to hold some meetings there. I am sending them because of the great need for teaching the Tonga Christians there. We recently learned that one of their tribal customs or taboos is that while a woman is breast feeding her child - and that can last three years - she can not have relations with her husband. You can imagine the havoc this plays. How Satan keeps people in slavery to sin!

Budiriro is one of the City of Harare's many suburbs. We have a good but struggling congregation there. I say "struggling" in referring to the handicap of not having a building to meet and worship in. They used to meet in a private dwelling but this is no longer available to them and they have to meet in the open air on a vacant lot. We have long had an application in to the city authorities for a site but without success. This week we learned that the city is no longer leasing sites but is selling them to the highest bidder. All bids are

supposed to be secret, in writing, sealed and delivered to the office. It was too late for us to submit a bid this time (and we had no money anyway) but we were able to see the "price guidelines" It is likely that one or more church sites will become available in the next month or so. But we will need something like \$10,000 to \$15,000 to make a successful bid. If we had that amount on hand we would be able to purchase a church site. That is the only avenue open to us.

Your response to our losses: We want to thank each of you who have responded so lovingly with prayers and giving towards our recent losses. The adversary may think he has won a round but it only stirs the Lord's people to greater things for eternity! What a wonderful Savior we have! Philippians 4:16-20 applies.

PS: Due to our recent computer losses I have also lost most E-Mail addresses. If you would like to receive our newsletters direct please send me a note and then I will automatically have your email address. Send to: rockwood@mweb.co.zw

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

Well Said: "In times of uncertainty, it is easy to dismiss those with whom we disagree. Regrettably, this forecloses needed discussions that have critical implications for churches. **When left with little or no middle ground, we tend to choose between extremes.**"—Stan Reid, President of Austin Graduate School of Theology, a Church of Christ school

Flew flies from Atheism The Dec. 25 '04 issue of *World* magazine, an evangelical sort of *Time* news-magazine, reported some exciting news. Anthony Flew of Oxford University is a longtime prominent atheist, who has written many books and debated many Christians. Now, at 81 years of age, he has become a theist or at least a deist! [God created the world

but no longer has a personal relationship with it.] Primarily it was the nature of DNA and the arguments of the proponents of intelligent design which led to his change of mind.

"What holds him back from Christianity? He cannot believe in a God who would consign anyone to hell. Nor does he believe in an afterlife. [Yet he] now concedes that the accounts of Jesus' resurrection constitute better evidence than that presented for most miracles. He also appreciates the Bible and is attracted to the person of Jesus."

Though other atheists are downplaying the significance of Flew's defection from their ranks, Christian philosopher Gary Habermas says "the impact on the atheist movement is similar to

what would happen in the evangelical world if Billy Graham renounced Christianity." Others point out that C. S. Lewis first went from atheism to theism and then sometime later converted to Christ Himself and became His spokesman. Let's pray this may happen in Flew's life also.

Highland Community Church, Louisville, KY "Praise for a good year; Reflecting on this past year at Highland, God has certainly blessed His congregation. We have seen growth in our Sunday attendance and participation, the youth ministry continues to grow, we were able to purchase a bus for the youth ministry, God has provided teachers for the youth work, there has been a great spirit of fellowship and worship on Sunday mornings, we have seen many answers to prayer, including Lesley's healing, and we have significantly remodeled the house next door (just to name a few blessings). God has been so good to us over the past year. May we spend time praising Him for all his goodness and generosity to us. I am looking forward to what God will do in 2005, and I hope you are praying expectantly as well." - James Girdley, minister

LISTEN UP: The SBS Spring Seminar will be held March 10-11. Bob Ross and Ann Cook will lead the Fri. night workshop on "Marriage as the Path to Personal and Spiritual Growth." **NO TOPIC IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT!**

Sat. morning the session will be aimed at Ministers, Elders and ALL in your local church who want to be PRO-ACTIVE in building strong families. Just as "it is better to Build Boys than to Mend Men,"

so with Marriages. Our congregations can take steps to Build Strong Homes before the wedding occurs, as well as afterwards.

Mark your calendar now and start making plans to attend this important seminar at the Buechel Church of Christ, 2105 Buechel Bank Road, Louisville, KY 40218.

A PRAYER-&-FASTING RETREAT (or rather, *Advance!*): The churches in Borden, IN sponsored a one day Prayer retreat. From 10 till 4 there were workshops encouraging each person to take time to learn more about seeking God through prayer and fasting. The retreat was led by Scott Owings from the Otter Creek Church of Christ in Nashville, TN. Lunch and childcare were provided.

God is calling his people--to seek HIM, and to Prayer. Psalms 27: 4 says: "One Thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."

We are sorry W&W did not have information about this in time to notify our readers earlier.

Pray for Sister Irene Allen She became seriously sick, but recovered after some time. She writes, "My health seems often on the brink, but the Lord carries me through each day. I am very weak and have diminished breathing power, but the doctor says the heart, though fast, is all right now. Some medicines have their unpleasant side effects." Also her son Norman's wife, Arlene, suffered a serious fall and fractured her left shoulder blade and hurt her right knee.

Brother Eugene Pound went Home to be with His Savior. A complete obituary was promised us, which we will publish.

Address change for Harry & Kate Coultas: They have moved from Turkey Creek, LA to 33 McGlamery Lane, Baxter, KY. 40806; 606-574-9907. They write, "We thank you for your prayers and ask you to continue in prayer for us as we get settled in at Rosspoint Church of Christ."

NACC 2006: "I've been asked to serve as president of the North American Christian Convention in Louisville, June 27-30, 2006. As you know, 2006 marks the 100th

anniversary of the unfortunate division between the Christian churches and churches of Christ. I'm planning for the theme of the 2006 NACC to focus on Christian unity. It will be a celebration of our common heritage in the Restoration Movement and our common goal of reaching the lost for Christ." - David Faust, President of Cincinnati Christian College and Seminary

Ladies Inspiration Day -- Coming Soon. Theme: "Spring Cleaning for Heart and Soul." Where: Sellersburg, Ind. Church of Christ. When: April 2, 2005; registration starts at 8:30. Lunch will be provided. More information later.

SOME WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE VICTIMS!

Tsunami S-O-S #1:

[This was sent us by Jim David Yarbrough of Dallas, who has been to Sri Lanka a number of times.]

Lanka Bible College Foundation USA is coordinating efforts to get relief assistance to Christians in Sri Lanka. The College and Prayer Mountain, situated in the hill country, sustained no damage.

Kithsiri Mudalige administers one of Sri Lanka's only Christian Mobile Clinics. He is here in my home and will be interviewed by radio and TV regarding the disaster. Kit will return next week with our concern and perhaps our resources. Today the mobile van is on Sri Lanka's east coast ministering to the victims. There are at least 4 teams (that we are helping) already on the ground ministering to the need. We know these people, and they will take assistance and good news to the hurting and the lost. They have appealed to us for help. We have taken up the challenge and will faithfully direct all funds to the mobile clinic or to the rebuilding of churches and pastors' homes (usually the home is the church).

Teams from LBC were able to visit some of the affected areas today, and do relief measures to the victims. **Please keep praying for all pastors as they have to serve as shepherds, relief workers, counsellors, decision makers – and all this when some of them have lost their own families. It is very very stressful for them and they need all your prayers, encouragement and support.**

[Jim David sent many more details. You may see them via email: jdysly@comcast.net. LBC Foundation is 501(C)(3) tax exempt. Its address: LBC Foundation USA, PO Box 570001, Dallas, TX 75357.]

Tsunami S-O-S #2:

[J. C. Flanagan, the writer of this 2nd letter, is a retired preacher and a subscriber to *Word and Work*.]

I just received the following from David Bennala in India. David is a young man I contacted years ago through World Bible School. Later a friend and brother, Robert Barkley, made trips to India and helped get assistance for David in the school he founded to train preachers and church workers, and for the caring for orphans and other ministries. Robinson Church of Christ near Waco, Texas serves in handling of funds to India from individuals who have become supporters of this work, though the mission is not peculiarly a project of the church in Robinson or any other single church.

I can attest to the soundness and integrity of David Bennala and this ministry and all who are connected with it. Any contributions to the disaster relief may be sent to Robinson Church of Christ, 428 Chado Lane, Robinson, TX 76706. Phone: 254-662-1531. Please pass along this word to those who might have interest. J.D. Flanagan

Tsunami S-O-S #3:

David Ramsey sent this info later:

For information on how to donate to a coordinated relief effort by the White's Ferry Road (West Monroe, Louisiana) congregation on behalf of churches of Christ, please see www.wfrchurch.org/relief/relief/contributions.htm

A relief effort specializing in medical needs on behalf of churches of Christ is being mounted by Healing Hands International. See www.hhi-aid.org/contact.asp for contact information.

Continued from inside front cover

Marriage – Path to Personal Growth

“An excellent presentation, presented with passion and enthusiasm.”
True -- “Growth is a choice and pain is part of the growth process.”
“Fantastic! Very prepared. Great humor and visuals.”

School of Biblical Studies Seminar

2105 Buechel Bank Road, Louisville KY

Fri. March 10, 7:00-9:00 p.m. * Sat. March 11, 9:00-11:30 a.m.

Seminar is Free but Space is Limited!

Call S.B.S. at 502: 499-2704 to make your reservations. If no one is there, leave your name, phone number & the number of people coming. Childcare provided.

Sat. morning session is especially for church members, workers and leaders to learn how to enable your church to build strong marriages via practical counseling and mentoring.

Urge leaders and members of your church to attend.