

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

September 2006

TWO DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST'S "IMMINENT RETURN"

... The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

**While WE WAIT for the BLESSED HOPE—The
GLORIOUS APPEARING OF OUR GREAT GOD
And SAVIOR,**

J-E-S-U-S C-H-R-I-S-T,

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Titus 2:11-14, NIV

* * *

**Murder, Anger, Hate--
And the Call to Be *Different***

32nd ANNUAL CENTRAL LOUISIANA CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

November 13-16, 2006 at Glenmora Church of Christ

Every Morning 9:30-9:55 Prayer Time

Every Evening 7:00 - 7:30 Congregational & Special Singing

Every Evening 7:30 Youth Service conducted by Sonny Childs

MONDAY November 13

7:30 - 8:15 Romans 8: What we know: We're God's Children Julius Hovan

TUESDAY November 14

10:00 He believed in what he's never seen: rain--Noah Bill Anderson

11:10 The Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants Kenneth Istre

12:00 Lunch

1:15 The Judgment of Ourselves Don McGee

7:30 Romans 8: What we know not: How to Pray Julius Hovan

WEDNESDAY November 15

10:00 He believed in a kingdom he'd never seen: Daniel Bill Anderson

11:10 The Davidic Covenant Jack Harris

12:00 Lunch

1:15 Judgment of the Nations Don McGee

7:30 Romans 8: What we need to know: Security in Christ Julius Hovan

THURSDAY November 16

10:00 He believed in a God he'd never seen: Job Bill Anderson

11:10 The New Covenant David Johnson

12:00 Lunch

1:15 Judgment of the World Don McGee

7:30 Rom. 8: What can never be known: How Deep God's Love
Julius Hovan

Hospitality Chairman:

Dennis LeDoux, Glenmora Church of Christ, P. O. Box 314,
Glenmora, LA 71433 Phone: (318) 748-4243

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

Dennis L. Allen, Missions

Bennie Hill, News & Notes

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In This Issue

Theme: The Imminence of Christ's Return

Our Blessed Hope -- Alex V. Wilson	258
The Imminence of Christ's Return -- Alex V. Wilson	259
Two Differing Interpretations of Christ's Imminent Return	261
Persecution--Are We Ready or Not???.	268
Preparing for Persecution -- John R. W. Stott	272
Lessons From the Farm (4) -- Bob Yarbrough	275
Voices From The Fields	277
Murder, Anger, Hate--And the Call to be Different -- A.V. W.	281
Reply to Some Brotherly Criticism -- Alex Wilson	286
Our Reformation -- Wayne Newland	288
News and Notes -- Bennie Hill	288

*Food for Thought and Study;
Source of Joy and Hope:*

Our “BLESSED HOPE— the GLORIOUS APPEARING of CHRIST”!

Alex V. Wilson

A personal friend and fervent disciple of the Lord Jesus wrote, "The most important prophetic development of the 20th Century was the regathering of the Jewish people to their historic homeland resulting in the creation of the state of Israel. The 2nd most important development was the formation of a European confederation known as the European Union. Both of these momentous historical events point to the fact that **we are living in the end times....**" [My emphasis—avw.]

By and large I agree (though I would put the growth of world-evangelization since 1946 as #1 -- based on Matt. 24:14 and Mark 13:10 – and the others as #2 and 3). But I strongly feel the word "*probably*" should be added to his statement. We are *probably* living in the end times. Why do I say that? Because of the **many times** during church history when Christians were sure Jesus would return *right away!* Charles Trumbull, a fine Christian leader, made this observation: "The difference between this day and earlier generations, when some of God's people have mistakenly supposed that the Lord's return was at hand, is simply this: *In our generation for the first time since Christ ascended to heaven, ALL the predicted major signs of the end of the age are synchronizing.* One or more of these signs have occurred in earlier generations; never before have they ALL occurred simultaneously, as we see them today."

That's a good point, except that he wrote those words in 1937. Sixty-nine years have passed, and our Lord has not come back yet! Let's avoid dogmatism. Yet let's indeed keep watching and waiting, and urge others to do the same.

Another personal friend and zealous servant of Christ recently wrote, "**The church is not going to go through any part of the tribulation.** Certainly we can expect tribulation in this life—it has always been so. And when a person becomes a Christian he or she is not issued a pass that will isolate them from trouble. Ask any Christian living in a communist or Muslim country and they will agree. However, just because Christians experience tribulation does not mean they will go through 'the' tribulation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 [verses 15-31; the NIV calls it "great distress" and "the distress of those days"]. There are several reasons why, but the most

obvious one is that **such a view of events is contrary to the doctrine of imminence.** That is, if the church must go through some or all of the tribulation then Jesus cannot come today. The Bible teaches, and the early church believed in, the imminent return of Jesus.”

I love and respect both of those brethren. And I gladly share and “wait for the blessed hope” Paul mentioned in Titus 2:13, “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” (Notice Paul defines that “Blessed Hope” as Christ’s “glorious appearing,” not what some folks call His “secret rapture.”) But, as the preceding sentence indicates, I also beg to differ to some extent with my friends’ quotes in paragraphs one and four above. Please study carefully the following materials. Of course I may be wrong. On the other hand, of course they may be wrong. Let’s keep on searching the Scriptures with open minds. Later on in this issue a suggested solution is made to the disagreement. So be sure to read the 3rd article (after reading the 2nd one)!

The IMMINENCE of CHRIST’S RETURN

Alex V. Wilson

A. Jesus told His followers to “wait,” “watch” and “be ready” for His Coming, and they did: Matt. 24:42, Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. Matt. 24:44, Be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. 1 Cor. 1:8, You eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. Phil. 3:20-21, We eagerly await a Savior from [heaven], the Lord Jesus Christ.... 1 Thes. 1:9-10, You turned to God... to wait for his Son from heaven.... Tit. 2:13, We wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

James 5:7-9, Be patient, then, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.... Stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. 1 Peter 1:13-14, Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 John 2:28, And now, continue in [Christ], so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. Many other passages could be added to those nine.

B. Yet, 3 times in His main prophetic sermon, Jesus strongly implied His Return might not be for “a long time.” Matt. 24:48, The wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time.’ Matt. 25:5, The bridegroom was a long time in coming.

Matt. 25:19, After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

C. Also our Lord Jesus and His apostles foretold the following would occur Before His Return:

1) "The gospel must first be **preached to all nations**" (Mk. 13:10). It would be "preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:14; v. 3 shows that "the end" He spoke of was "the end of the age"--this present age). Worldwide evangelization must occur before His return. This preaching to all "nations" (literally, "peoples" or ethnic groups) **still awaits completion. But great strides are being made**, and not just by Americans. South Korea sends the 2nd largest number of missionaries, and may soon surpass the U.S. Let's get the job done!

[In case you wonder what Paul meant in writing "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit," and "the gospel...has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven" (Col. 1:6,23), it seems to me the NIV Study Bible's note gives a clear explanation. These statements are "hyperbole, to dramatize the rapid spread of the gospel into every quarter of the Roman empire within three decades of Pentecost (see Rom. 1:8; 10:18; 16:19 [& 15:19b]). In refutation of the charge of the false teachers [in Colosse], Paul insists that the Christian faith is not merely local or regional but worldwide."]

2) **Jerusalem** would be made desolate; then it would be trampled on by the Gentiles for **some time** (Luke 21:20, 24) **before Jesus' coming** (v. 27). 3) **Peter would become old and be martyred** (John 21:18-19). If so, the "rapture" could not occur while Peter was alive, for then he would never die! But Jesus said he *would* die. 4) The Lord commissioned **Paul** to go "far away to the Gentiles," and later assured him that he **would reach Rome and testify for Him there** (Acts 22:21; 23:11). Obviously He would not come for the church before those events occurred, for it would require Paul's being left behind!

5) **The church in Smyrna** would suffer persecution and some of its members be imprisoned. (Rev. 2:10.) Could Christ come at "any time any day" before that imprisonment took place? 6) The Lord told His people in **Thyatira** that He would bring suffering on the false prophetess "Jezebel" and her followers there. "Then," He said, "all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts...." (Rev. 2:22-23). Could He come for the church before fulfilling that prediction of His? (Most scholars agree these predictions in #5 and #6 were written in the 90s A.D.)

7) The [final] "**abomination that causes desolation**" would be set up in the holy place (Matt. 24:15, 21; Mark 13:14). That event will be the kickoff of the Great Tribulation. Christ's "coming" and "gathering His elect" would occur afterwards. (Matt. 24:29-31.)

Compare the “coming” and “catching up” of Christians mentioned in 1 Thes. 4:15-17.)

8) The “lawless one will be revealed” (2 Thes. 2:3, 8-9) before the Day of the Lord will come. And in the context of that passage, the Day of the Lord seems clearly to be the time of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and *our being gathered to him*” (v.1) as well as the time of His *destroying the lawless one “by the splendor of His coming”* (v.8). Paul doesn’t separate those two “comings” into widely-separated events, as some Bible teachers do.

So several events were predicted to occur during this age, before the Lord’s return. It would seem He could not return before they came to pass. We gladly admit that most of them have now been fulfilled. But the point is that until they were, His coming was not “imminent” in the any-day, any-moment sense. And **numbers 1, 7 and 8 are still not fulfilled. Can Christ come for us before they are?** [See the following article.]

TWO DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS OF CHRIST’S "IMMINENT RETURN"

Compiled from various writers

VIEW #1:

Christ could return ANY DAY -- AT ANY MOMENT. (This is the Pre-Tribulation view of His coming.)

a. "Other things **may** happen before the imminent event, but *nothing else must take place before it happens. [You] should always be prepared for it to happen.... It could happen at any moment. The necessity of something else taking place first destroys the concept of imminency.*" (R. Showers; emphasis added by avw.)

b. "The imminence of the Lord’s coming is destroyed the moment you locate between the first and second coming...any period of time whatsoever that is a definite period, whether 10, or 100, or 1,000 years. I cannot look for a thing as an imminent event which I know is not going to take place for 10 years to come." (A. T. Pier-son)

c. "It follows from the very fact that Christ is certain to come, while the time of his coming is concealed, that His coming must be always imminent to his people. Since he has told us to watch for his returning and has not told us when he would return, we must expect him constantly." (R. H. Boll, in the Boll/Boles Discussion, p. 321)

d. "If we are told to watch because we do not know the day nor hour, and to watch to avoid the possibility of being surprised by his coming, as if by a thief breaking into our house, does not that mean that Christ could come...at any time? Thus the coming of Christ...is imminent, in the sense that it can occur at any moment. By the very nature of **this inference** the coming...which is imminent must be a coming different from the coming in glory after the tribulation. For a coming that must wait the Antichrist and great tribulation...cannot be imminent in the sense that it can come upon us at any moment." (Lewis Neilson; emphasis added.)

VIEW #2:

Christ could return DURING ANY GENERATION after His ascension, but Certain Predicted Events Must Occur First. We "Watch" for His coming by Staying Awake Morally and Alert Mentally (for this is the meaning of the Greek terms often translated "watch"), and by Being Alert for Those Events Which Precede and Usher In His Return. (This is the Post-Tribulation view of His coming for His church.) We include more quotes here than we did above, because this view is not nearly so well understood as the other.)

a. "The imminent return of Christ meant that the signs could be fulfilled and that **He could return within the lifetime of any individual generation of believers.**" (Samuel Kellogg; my emphasis in these quotes too, unless noted otherwise.--avw)

b. "The Scripture declares plainly that the Lord Jesus will **not** come until the Apostasy shall have taken place, and the man of sin (or personal Antichrist) shall have been revealed as seen in 2 Thes. 2 [verses 1-4]. Many other portions also of the Word of God distinctly teach that **certain events are to be fulfilled before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.** This does not, however, alter the fact that **the coming of Christ, and not death, is the great Hope of the Church,** and, if in a right state of heart, we (as the Thessalonian believers did) shall 'serve the living and true God, and wait for His Son from Heaven.'" (George Muller of Bristol, England.)

c. "If then, it is **the sign of the consummation of the age** that the gospel of the kingdom should be preached to all nations for a testimony unto them, and then shall the end come --**let us do all we can to speed further God's great work, and hasten the day according to his will.**" (See Matt. 24:14, Mark 13:10, & 2 Pet. 3:12.) (R. H. Boll, 1910. See the next quotation too.)

d. "At the very first there appears to have been a certain margin of time within which Christ's coming was not likely to oc-

cur. Thus the apostles and early Christians were commissioned to disciple all the nations, and to be witnesses...unto the uttermost part of the earth.... But that work was relatively accomplished within that generation (Col. 1:6,23)....We also learn that Simon Peter knew that he would have to die for his Lord [after getting "old"—avw; Jn. 21:18-19]....[Yet] we have seen that if any generation had an excuse to defer their expectation of Christ's return, it would have been that first generation of Christians; but they, instead of counting the day far away, looked for the Lord's return with peculiar fervency." (Boll, 324-5)

[avw's comments now: Of course Bro. Boll believed in the pre-trib. coming, but we include these quotes here because they show **Christ's coming was not imminent (in the any-moment sense) during the Church's 1st generation--yet they fervently "watched" for Him anyway!** This fits in with the post-trib. view: We can do the same today though there are still events to occur before He comes. **If at that early period He could not have immediately returned--for various events had to transpire first--then AT WHAT POINT IN CHURCH HISTORY did "any-moment" imminence begin? Some of the events foretold in Scripture have even till now not occurred** (though most have). These facts strongly support the any-generation view. Yet don't misconstrue my point. Note the statement a few lines above, "Yet they fervently 'watched' for Him anyway." Yes, and so may we—even though we, like them, know certain events must occur first!]

e. "No reader can put his finger on the book, chapter and verse which clearly and definitely, without doubt, teaches that the coming of Christ is imminent, liable to happen **at any moment.**" "Jesus taught his disciples that they should go 'into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.' He said of the woman who used the precious ointment upon his body: 'Wheresoever **the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world,** that which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.' (Mk. 14:9) ...Since he knew it would take some time for his disciples to do this, he did not teach that his 2nd coming was imminent--i.e. liable to occur at any moment." (H. L. Boles, 406-7.)

f. Mt. 24:42 (RSV) says "Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." Comment: "'Watch' is correctly translated 'be on the alert' (NASB) and means to be watchful and careful....The command to watch is described in terms of two slaves in verses 45-51. The 'faithful and sensible slave' is happy when his master returns because he is alert and busy. But the cloddish slave has catnapped and gets caught in his pajamas instead of his work jeans. Every Christian must heed the warning. It is a matter of atti-

tude and action....True believers always will be watchful, ambitious for God, and ready for His return, even though it is on the other side of the tribulation.” (A. Katterjohn)

g. The NT terminology of **watchfulness** justifies an attitude of **expectancy** toward Christ’s return, but **not a belief in [any-moment] imminence**. “If a delay in the [2nd coming] of at least several years was compatible with expectancy in apostolic times, a delay for the several years of the Great Tribulation is compatible with expectancy in current times.” (R. Gundry)

h. Christ gave the early Christians a number of commands and/or predictions which required time: the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations; ...and the assurance given Paul in Jerusalem that he would witness at Rome (Acts 23:11). Regarding these—“Whether general or specific, long or short, **the delays were delays and, by being stated, rendered the second coming non-imminent to the apostolic Church....[And] if ‘watching’ could not have connotated [any-moment] imminence in the apostolic age, it need not connote [any-moment] imminence now.**” (Gundry, 39f)

i. **General Predictability and Specific Unpredictability of His Coming**: Jesus plainly stated that no man can know the day or hour of His coming. And He said this “in immediate connection with His coming **after** the tribulation (Matt. 24:36, 42, 43; Mark 13:32)....Jesus’ emphasis on ‘day,’ ‘hour,’ and ‘watch of the night’ shows that **we shall not know exactly**. But the delineation of preceding signs, including especially if not exclusively tribulational events, shows that **we will know approximately**We are to watch, both because we cannot know exactly and because we must be alert to the signs which will enable us to know approximately.” (Gundry, 43)

j. “The true meaning of the command to watch is not to watch for Christ’s return. Scripture does not use this language. **Nowhere are we told to watch for the coming of Christ. We are exhorted, rather, in view of the uncertainty of the time of the end, to watch. ‘Watching’ does not mean ‘looking for’ the event; it means spiritual and moral ‘wakefulness.’**” (Ladd)

k. “Gregoreo” is the Greek word most commonly translated “**watch**” [especially in the older versions; the NASV usually translates it “**be alert**”]. It means “**to be awake**.” Sometimes it is used literally: in Gethsemane Jesus used it when urging the disciples to stay awake and pray with Him (Mt. 26:38,40,41). “In a number of places, the word is used of general spiritual alertness”: e.g., Acts 20:31; 1 Cor. 16:13; 1 Pet. 5:8. “In all of these verses, ‘gregoreo’

is used of general spiritual vigilance without immediate reference to the 2nd coming of Christ.

“There remain 9 uses of the word [*gregoreo*] in which God’s people are exhorted to watch in view of the impending end.” 5 times it is used in **Christ’s Olivet Discourse**--but **His only “coming” mentioned in that major passage will occur after the Tribulation** (Mt. 24:29f)! He never mentions any pre-trib rapture in this, His main teaching to the apostles about the future (Mt. 24-5; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). Thus what He exhorted them to be watchful or awake about was His coming after the Tribulation! Likewise, Paul’s only use of this command which is related to endtime events is 1 Thes. 5:3-6, ending “Let us watch and be sober.” But the watchfulness he urged those Christians to maintain was **not** related to some pre-trib coming of Christ but to the Day of the Lord, which the pre-trib view says occurs **after** He has snatched away the church. (Ladd, chap. 6)

1. Lk. 12:36 KJV/ASV says, “Be like men looking for their Lord.” [NASV/NIV say “waiting.”] “The use of the word ‘looking for’ does not carry the necessary idea of an any-moment event, although it does connote a **complex of events which might begin at any time**. We may discover the meaning from its uses elsewhere. Simeon was a devout man who was ‘looking for the consolation of Israel’ (Lk. 2:25). Joseph of Arimathea was ‘looking for the kingdom of God’ (Lk. 23:51). Both of these pious Jews were living in constant expectation of a complex of events which would include the appearing of Messiah, the overthrow of the enemies of God, and the inauguration of the kingdom of God.” (Ladd, 116)

m. “**Looking for** the blessed hope...” (Tit. 2:13): “We do not look for something in everyday life with less intensity because we know something else must happen first. Peter (2 Pet. 3:12,13) looked for ‘new heavens and new earth’ even though that is not the next event in God’s calendar.” (Norman MacPherson)

n. **If the pre-trib view is correct, it seems Paul would have changed 2 Thes. 2:1-3 to read like this:** Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed...for **nothing needs to happen first. That day shall come BEFORE the rebellion [or falling away] occurs, and BEFORE the man of lawlessness is revealed.** Of course **what he actually wrote was,** “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed...for **that day will NOT come UNTIL the rebellion [or falling away] occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.**”

Also note carefully the opening words of this passage, "...the **COMING of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being GATHERED to him.**" Compare that expression with Jesus' words in Mt. 24:29-31, "Immediately after the distress of those days...they will see the **Son of Man COMING** on the clouds of the sky....And he will send his angels...and **they will GATHER his elect** from the four winds."

Both Christ and Paul lump together our Lord's coming and His people being gathered. WHEN will this occur? Let Christ answer that question: "After the tribulation" (Mt. 24:29, ASV). Let Paul answer: After the falling away and the revealing of the Man of lawlessness (2 Thes. 2: 1-3, ASV). In other words, after the Great Tribulation. Both our Lord Jesus and Paul say that something precedes the gathering or catching up ("**rapture**") of Christians to be with the Lord. Both predict the coming of the Beast and his Great Tribulation before Christ's coming and gathering His people. **Anti-christ** will come, **then Christ** will come--and we shall be gathered to him (or caught up to be with him, as 1 Thes. 4:17 puts it)! If that seems like heresy, please re-read 2 Thes. 2:1-10. (avw)

* * * *

William J. Rowlands wrote: "These prophesied events forbid the thought that the Church at Pentecost was looking for Christ to come without intervening events. And if *we expect what they could not expect, our hope is different from theirs.*" Again: "If we state abundantly in our writings and preaching that **which Holy Scripture nowhere states**, we are building on a sandy foundation." I.e., since God's Word never **plainly** says it, how dare anyone **dogmatically** claim that there are no events which must precede Christ's return for His people? Since such a view is built only on inferences (mainly about "watching" and "waiting"), rather than on clear and definite statements, we need humility and open-mindedness on this matter. It (as well as the opposite view) should be taught tentatively, as a possible position but one that has difficulties too. Let's all be open-minded and keep studying.

Listen once more to Rowlands: "It has been said that the [pre-trib] teaching is the **general teaching** of Scripture. But how can doctrine be according to the whole trend of Scripture when its advocates cannot (when asked) show it clearly even in one verse?" Remember what pre-trib writer John Walvoord admitted? He wrote, "**Neither** post-tribulationism nor pre-tribulationism is an **explicit teaching** of Scripture. **The Bible does not in so many words state either.**"

Scripture **does** clearly declare that Christ is coming **after** the tribulation: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days...they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power

and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds....” (Mt. 24:29-31). Post-tribs cannot absolutely, positively, without the shadow of a doubt prove that “the elect” in this passage means the Church--though in a number of passages it does. But at least this *is* a definite statement of a post-trib coming of the Lord. The pre-trib view lacks any such clear declaration of a coming before the reign of the Beast. To me (and Walvoord seems to admit as much), that position appears based almost entirely on inferences and implications. But the post-trib view fits *its* inferences together (along with the definite statements like the one just quoted) with far less difficulty, it seems to me. Study it for yourself, knowing I’ll love you whether you agree with me or not.

Points Which BOTH VIEWS Can Heartily AGREE ON:

a. **“The Christian life is to be lived in the light of Christ’s coming.** That constitutes the imminency of the Lord’s return, according to the definition given of the word ‘imminency.’” (R. H. Boll, p. 329) Amen to that! Those holding either view agree there.

b. In 1897 A. C. Gaebelin (who held the pre-trib view) “courteously admitted that Paul did not teach an ‘immediate coming,’ but that he ‘did teach that **our attitude was to be one of constant joyful expectancy**, consistent only with the **possibility** of that coming at any moment.” (R. Reiter). Amen to that, too, if it also includes the **possibility** of other events occurring first. **Most surely He will return:** constantly rejoice in that certainty. **Maybe** it will be today--for the post-trib view held by myself and others may be wrong! And our Lord did say, “Be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Mt. 24:44). But **Maybe** we shall go through the Great Tribulation: review the many strong evidences presented above for that possibility.

c. **THE SOLUTION:** “You ask, Is the Church to go through the Tribulation? That is not the question. It is this: **Is the Church ready? Are you ready, ready either for Tribulation or Rapture?** If you are, that is all that matters. What difference does it make so long as you are ready? If you are to be in it, you cannot avoid it, and if you are to escape, you will not be in it.” (Oswald Smith.)

Amen. **Be Prepared!**--for either possibility. **Live holy lives and share the Gospel.** And **Pray**, as the first Christians did: “Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!” If we all fulfilled all those duties, everything would be fine. “The King is coming!”--be jubilant!

We recommend Leila Morris’ old Gospel song, “Jesus is coming to earth again, What If It Were TODAY?” Yes, that’s the “watch-

ful” attitude we should have, while realizing that even the Great Tribulation may come first.

1) Jesus is coming to earth again, What if it were today?

Coming in power and love to reign, What if it were today?
Coming to claim His chosen Bride, All the Redeemed and purified,
Over this whole earth scattered wide, What if it were today?

2) Satan’s dominion will soon be o’er, O that it were today!

Sorrow and sighing shall be no more, O that it were today!
Then shall the dead in Christ arise, Caught up to meet Him in the
skies,
When shall these glories meet our eyes? What if it were today?

**3) Faithful and true would He find us here, If He should come
today?**

Watching in gladness and not in fear, If He should come today?
Signs of His coming multiply, Morning light breaks in eastern sky,
Watch, for that time is drawing nigh, What if it were today?

[Chorus:] Glory, glory! Joy to my heart ‘twill bring;
Glory, glory! When we shall crown Him King;
Glory, glory! Haste to prepare the way;
Glory, glory! Jesus will come some day!

PERSECUTION—Are We READY Or NOT???

Just presume, for the sake of argument, that the church *will* go through the greatest of all its ordeals before Christ returns. Though that view is not often heard today (compared to the popular pre-trib view), for many centuries it was the only position widely believed. In fact, before 1800 the pre-trib outlook was hardly known at all. That does not prove it wrong, but it does give us good reason to study seriously the post-trib viewpoint too—rather than just brush it off because it hasn’t produced any exciting novels or films! (Worse than that, *some* folks don’t dare consider it because they don’t *want* it to be true. Who desires to go through dreadful suffering?)

There are a number of fine pre-trib scholars, of course; but there are also many excellent post-trib teachers of the Word. And neither view has a monopoly of strong supporting arguments. So, back to our opening challenge: Just suppose, for the sake of argument, that the church *will* go through the greatest of all its tribulations before Christ returns. Are we ready and willing, or not? Am I? Are you?

With such questions in mind, here are some challenging thought-stimulators from various people, times and places. May we consider them soberly.

Thought-Provokers from Here and There--on Persecution

Our Lord Jesus: "A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God! I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:2,4,33)

* * *

Tertullian (160-240 A.D.), an outstanding teacher and church leader: "The pagans have their own heroes, men willing to die for their country, but if a Christian is willing to suffer for God he is called a fool. But go to it, my good magistrates. Torture on, rack us, condemn us, crush us...God allows us to suffer all this. But nothing whatever is accomplished by your cruelties...It is the bait that wins men for our school. *We multiply whenever we are mowed down by you. The blood of Christians is seed.*"

* * *

A writer in an Asian Christian magazine--"The wind, rain and flood of persecution will not be kind. Our work will be tested. Have we produced Christians ready for any storm? Or have we produced Christians for the sunshine only?"

* * *

The Apostle Paul: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse." (2 Tim. 3:12)

* * *

Richard Wurmbrand, during the height of Soviet persecution: "I never met one single lukewarm Russian Christian. The Underground Church is a poor and suffering church, but it has no lukewarm members." --*Tortured for Christ** * *

The Apostle Peter: "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (1 Pet. 4: 12f.)

* * *

A Call to Disciples made by the Asian Theological Consultation (1976, but still timely): 'We call the churches to prepare themselves in spirit through deeper fellowship with our Lord and Savior, through prayers and the study of the Word of God.

"We urge all Christians to give more attention to memorization of scripture and hymns....

"We call the theological schools to **teach their students how to endure suffering**...and to train them in leadership of small groups and house churches. We warn against over-dependence upon one person who may easily be removed in times of trial."

* * *

The Apostle John: "They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." (Rev. 12:11; 14:12)

* * *

It'll never happen here??? Richard Ramsey in *The Exhorter*: "If an anti-God government should take over our nation, older Christians would be liquidated, younger ones brainwashed, and little children raised up on anti-God propaganda. Christians would have to hide their true identity, meet secretly. A typical Christian service under such circumstances might consist of 2 or 3 Christians meeting for prayer in a barber shop while the Christian barber was cutting the hair of one of them. Evangelists might pose as traveling salesmen, businessmen, doctors, government officials, etc. Secret symbols for identifying other Christians would have to be devised.

"A Christian's hope is in the Second Coming of Christ...But if he delays his coming and evil times do descend upon us, we would do well to be prepared for them... Christian leaders might have to flee during the night to some prearranged fishing camp stocked with canned goods where they might continue to direct Christian activities in secret.

"The hardest thing for us who live in easy-going America to realize is that this is not fantastic dreaming.... We cannot get it through our head that attempts at church services in many countries today bring swift prison sentences."

* * *

It Happens Here NOW, in Subtle Ways:

About ten years ago, syndicated columnist Cal Thomas was scheduled to do a TV interview for a *Good Morning America* segment about homosexuality in San Francisco (reported by Joe Maxwell in *World* magazine). When Thomas's conservative part of the segment was canceled, he called the producers for an explanation.

The producer explained, "My senior producer was afraid you would get on and quote some Bible verses." Thomas protested, "You'll have every other screwball on that show. They even mention God in a blasphemous way on some of your entertainment programs. Are you saying I can't speak well of him?" But Cal Thomas was excluded. He said he's come to expect that kind of treatment.

* * *

Can It Possibly Be Harder Here Than There?

He had just emerged from existence under a regime that took an intolerant view of Christianity. But now, viewing Christians who live not only in freedom but in relative popularity, this man was appalled. To him, these Christians seemed casual about their commitment, preoccupied with position and possessions, contaminated by the world. And he said so.

A few months later he went back to visit the friend to whom he had spoken so bluntly when he first arrived. He asked if his friend remembered what he had said, the bitterness of his criticism. The friend remembered.

The man stood silent for a few moments, reflecting. The friend tensed for a second attack. "I have come to apologize both for what I said and the way in which I said it," he said simply. "I was merely afraid. I did not know how dangerous freedom could be. It has been a year now. And I am worse than those I criticized."

Then he added a significant statement: "*It is more difficult to live the Christian life under freedom than under repression.*" --Ruth Graham in *Christianity Today*

PREPARING FOR PERSECUTION

(Summary of a sermon preached by John R. W. Stott)

*And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant
to Thy servants to speak Thy word with all boldness*

(Acts 4: 29, R.S.V.)

So began the persecution of the Christian Church. Since that day it has never ceased. It continues unabated today.

Peter and John, after healing the lame man at the Beautiful Gate and preaching to the people, had been arrested, put in custody and brought to trial. The Supreme Jewish Council had forbidden them to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, and when Peter and John quietly replied that they must obey God rather than men, the Sanhedrin further threatened them (whether with imprisonment, the dreaded scourging or death we are not told) and released them. Peter and John went straight to their Christian brethren to pray.

In many parts of the world today the persecution of Christians is open and undisguised. Violent attempts are being made to stifle the Church's witness.... [We omit his examples, now outdated. Our May and June issues told of several gripping examples. --avw]

It is, therefore, instructive to note how the early Christians reacted in a time of persecution and under threat to give up their testimony. In particular, let us observe their attitude to God and their persecutors.

I. They Trusted the Sovereignty of God

The opposition of the authorities did not overthrow their Christian faith. They did not begin to doubt whether God was God. They did not complain against His providence or whine over their sufferings. No. They prayed. And as "they lifted their voices together to God" (v. 24), their hearts and minds were filled with the divine sovereignty.

They called God "sovereign Lord," using the word *despotes*, which was used of the Roman Emperors and slave owners and signified a sovereign and absolute rule. They also called themselves His slaves (v. 20), and they described those who had been responsible for the death of Jesus as doing "whatever Thy hand and Thy plan had predestined to take place" (v. 28). They believed that God's "never failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and on earth" (from the Book of Common Prayer). They did not deny either

human responsibility or man's freedom to choose, but they saw these things within the wider context of the over-ruling sovereignty of God. Herod and Pontius Pilate, Gentiles and Jews, rulers and people were free agents, who set themselves of their own purpose against the Lord and His anointed, and yet in so doing, they were accomplishing the very thing which God's hand and purpose had fore-ordained.

1. *First, they referred to creation.* "Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them" (v. 24). God's sovereignty is viewed first and foremost in His creative work. The whole universe and its contents (earth, sea and space) were brought into existence by the will of God. They owe their origin and continuance to the purpose and power of God. They have no inherent self-control; they are upheld by the authority of the living God. Only God depends for His being on Himself; all other things come from Him and depend on Him.

2. *Secondly, they referred to prophecy.* In their prayers, the apostles spoke not only of what God had done (in creation), but also of what He had said (in Scripture); not only of His creative work, but of His prophetic word. "Sovereign Lord. . . who by the mouth of our father David, Thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit 'why did the Gentiles rage . . .'" (vv. 25, 26). This is a quotation from Psalm 2, in which God clearly foretold the raging and rebellious fury of the world against Himself. Kings, rulers and people would conspire together saying "Let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us." But the God who predicted the opposition of the world predicted also its final overthrow: "He who sits in the heavens will laugh them to scorn. The Lord will have them in derision."

This prophecy of the world's opposition to God's Christ had been historically fulfilled. In that very city of Jerusalem there had been a vile conspiracy of Gentile and Jew, leaders and people, against the anointed Son of God. Yet the victory was not in the hands of God's enemies. God had not abdicated His throne. His own purpose of love will ultimately triumph.

These assurances should bring us comfort. The most frightening fulminations of men against God and Christ should not alarm us. If opposition breaks over our heads and we are threatened with extinction, let us take fresh courage from the works and words of God, from the evidence of His sovereignty to be found in what He has made in the universe and what He has said in the Scripture.

II. They Preached the Word of God

We have seen that the apostles felt no bitterness in their hearts towards *God*, and complained against neither His love nor His wisdom. But what about their *persecutors*? Did they show resentment towards them or seek to take revenge? Did they plot against their enemies as their enemies had plotted against Christ and them? Or did they run away and seek safety in the hills and caves of Judea or Galilee? No. They did none of these things. They stayed at their post, although it meant imprisonment and scourging for some, and death for others, and they prayed for boldness to preach.

How positive they were! They were not content just to grit their teeth, to stay and stick it out. They loved their enemies and desired the eternal good of their persecutors. They longed to see them won for Christ and saved by Him for ever. They thirsted not for the destruction, but for the salvation, of their foes. They wanted them to hear the gospel, to embrace it and to enjoy its innumerable benefits. So they prayed for utterance, for freedom of speech and courage to preach the word.

And God answered their prayers. The place where they were assembled was shaken. They were all filled anew with the Spirit, and in the power of the Spirit they preached the word of God with boldness.

Down the Christian ages persecution has too often caught the people of God unprepared. We need to prepare. Let me make three suggestions.

1. *We need a deeper confidence in the Sovereignty of God.* The whole world is in the grip of a vast convulsion. The old order is passing away with bewildering speed. Nothing is secure or certain in the future. Our greatest need is a quiet, serene, unshakable confidence in the sovereignty of God. So we must meditate on the revelation which God has given of Himself in His works and in His word, in nature and Scripture, until we are still and know that He is God, exalted in the earth. Then no catastrophe can shake us.

2. *We need a deeper experience of the Spirit of God.* A persecuted Church cannot stand in its own strength or survive by its own power. It would be engulfed, its life stifled and its witness smothered, apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps our desperate need in the Church today of the fullness of the Holy Spirit will only come home to us when we are driven to it by the violent opposition of the world.

3. *We need a deeper knowledge of the Word of God.* If the day comes when we are forbidden to preach or teach in the name of Christ, we cannot obey. The world can persecute the Church, but it must not be allowed to silence it. Our backs may be against the wall, but our mouths must remain open in testimony. But what would happen if they took the Scriptures from us, or if the Edict of Diocletian in A. D. 303 was re-enacted and all our Scriptures were ordered to be burned or confiscated? We must prepare soberly and sensibly for this eventuality too. We need to store God's Word in our hearts, meditating on it, memorizing it, digesting it, until it is so much part of us that it cannot be taken away from us. They may take God's Book out of our hands, but they cannot take His Word out of our hearts.

Lessons from the Farm (4)

Bob Yarbrough

I live on a farm. Our last female duck has made her nest during the last three years just to the left of our porch behind a large shrub. Bless her heart, she sits faithfully but has never produced any ducklings. This year there are nine eggs with the hopes that this is the year. I have always worried that some varmint would rob her of her eggs, but I never expected what happened one evening as my wife and I were sitting in the living room at dusk. We both heard a tremendous ruckus coming from the area of the duck's nest. I went outside to see what was the matter when I spied the duck lying in the front yard motionless with a three-foot snake coiled around her. I thought we had a dead duck for sure. My wife got mad at the whole situation. It was as if one mother could feel the pain of the other mother's tragedy. All of a sudden with a burst of energy the duck began to flutter and flop around, and I saw that the duck had the snake by its throat as they thrashed about together--and she was not about to let go. It was obvious that the duck was in a life and death struggle to protect her nest and her eggs.

By this time I had gotten a baseball bat to see if I could do the duck some good and the snake some harm. The duck had the snake stretched out on our front driveway, so I stepped on its tail and proceeded to beat on the snake at its mid point. There we were, the duck and I, ganging up on that snake. It didn't have a chance. The duck seemed to sense that I had things under control, so she let loose of the snake's neck, while I continued smacking the snake. The duck also took some parting snaps at the snake because, by this time, she was mad. What a sight!--the two of us against that snake. She finally backed away so that I could finish the job with a final blow to

the snake's head. Then a funny thing happened. The duck looked up at me, gave one quack, and then waddled on back to her nest. The next morning I checked on the duck and she was fine— just sitting on her nest as usual. Three buzzards finished off the snake that afternoon. He was no match for the duck and me!

This story describes a victory. There is another victory that is just beyond the horizon. One day soon, the ultimate victory will occur when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory, and with the sword (the Word) that proceeds from His mouth He will slay His enemies (Rev. 19:15). For the believer in Christ, however, the battle is over. Jesus said it was over (Jn 17:4; 19:30). Victory has been won. The apostle Paul said that “death has been swallowed up in victory,” and that “God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

This doesn't mean, however, that there will not be some major skirmishes along the way. The old saying, “*there's a snake in the grass*,” is certainly true. The crafty serpent (Gen. 3:1) has his eye on our nest. He would love to disrupt our lives and literally steal our off-spring and our effectiveness for the Lord. So we must always be alert because our enemy (the serpent) is always slithering around looking for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

My duck may not make it past the summer because she is just a duck, and nature works its will in the animal kingdom; but I was certainly proud of her the night she battled the snake. Instinctively she protected her nest. Instinctively, she was on guard and alert to possible enemy attacks. Instinctively, she was ready to give her life, if that's what it took, to protect her eggs—her offspring. No enemy was going to rob her nest without a fight to the death. God made her that way, and it speaks to the genius of His creative hand. Oh if we, the objects of His true love, were only as diligent! The snake was more threatening and seemed to be more powerful; and it looked at first glance as if the snake had a death hold on the duck. But no! The duck had a grip on the snake and she was not about to let go because the snake was wound around her. If she did, it probably would have meant her death. Now, I don't pretend to know what goes on in the mind of a duck; but if she were a human and a believer, about now she would be calling on the name of the Lord. “O Lord, the enemy is upon me! I'm in a struggle for my life and the lives of my family. I'm at war against this snake, and if I let go, I don't know what will happen. Help me Lord!” Almost sounds like one of David's Psalms doesn't it (Psa. 18:6; 30:2).

About the time I stepped onto the front porch and saw the motionless, helpless duck, she had done her best, but that was not good

enough. Since the enemy was so powerful, she needed help beyond her means. Fortunately, I was bigger and more powerful than the snake, so literally she laid her problem out before me. The Apostle Peter admonished believers to “cast all their burdens upon Him because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). When the duck let go of the snake, I handled her problem for her. She was no match for her enemy, but I was. She relied on my strength and power to win the battle. That is exactly what the Lord calls upon us to do. Rely on Him—not yourself. Paul declared, “I can do all things *through Him* who is my strength” (Phil. 4:13). I was able to give the snake a death-blow to the head. The first Messianic prophecy in the Bible declares that the seed of woman will crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). That happened when Jesus came forth from the grave victoriously, and Praise God, He is only the beginning (the firstfruits) of millions more who one day will be resurrected when Jesus returns for his own at the Rapture (1 Cor. 15:23, 51-52).

My little duck looked up at me, gave a *quack*, and then went on about her business. It was as if she were saying, “Thanks buster, I couldn’t have done it without you.” And that’s true; she couldn’t, and we can’t either. We cannot live, we cannot move, we cannot fight the good fight without the Lord going before us into the battle. Jesus said, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). It seems appropriate then to continually give thanks for such a powerful God. It only makes sense to be on the winning side, and faith in Jesus Christ will bring victory every time. The old song rings true: “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.” Meanwhile, it’s back to the nest... and by the way, stay alert!

VOICES from the FIELDS

Michiya and Tomoko Nakahara Shizuoka City, Japan
August, 2006

The Reading Club, begun in April, 2006, has been the highlight of our children’s ministry. We have held four club meetings thus far, and we see an increasing interest. It began with 12 children, and we had 28 children at the last meeting. These are all non-churched children who have stepped into our building for the first time. They love the club, and I even have received some phone calls from other children asking when the next club meeting will be. The other day, I had a chance to speak with my son’s teacher at school, and she even asked me about the reading club, because she read in some children’s school journal about how much children are enjoying this club. We had gotten some free advertisement, PTL. As our

society changes, and the world becomes more "unsafe" for young children, this club offers a safe haven for kids in the neighborhood. But most of all, it is a perfect opportunity for us to introduce Christ to these children. You see, the choice of reading materials is ours. Please pray with us that as seeds are being planted, these children will come to know Christ.

Thanksgiving: Thank you for praying for our dear brother in Christ, Mr. Yatabe, who was in an accident a few years ago. He and his wife live in another town about an hour and a half away. After the accident it became impossible for him to make that trip. He has been in rehab for a long time, and God has healed him. He has started to attend our worship services again recently with the help of a walking cane, via public transportation. It is very difficult for him because of the many stairs at the depots, but he does it because he wants to worship with other Christians. He has been a great example for our Sunday School children, for they have been praying for him for a long time. They were happy to see him again at church.

Prayer Requests: 1) One of the biggest concerns we face today is in regards to our future spiritual leaders; not only those who would serve as pastors, but also people who would rise up as workers in the church. I feel a great need for an accountability partner in our work here. 2) Regarding the property that is for sale adjacent to us, please pray that whoever buys it will not be a hindrance to our ministry. Also pray that the new owners would not create a visibility problem for our church building. 3) The New-Age Buddhist temple which I have mentioned in several recent newsletters is being built right by our church building. Please pray that our ministry for the Lord will remain strong here in Shizuoka. These groups have been known to overtly oppose ministries such as ours.

Family News: Our boys are growing strong and healthy each day. Kazuma began junior high school this spring and Lynn is now in third grade. I have begun to teach Kazuma about Christian baptism, and I pray that God's Word would fill his heart as he desires to learn more about his Savior. Tomoko is now in her second year as a full-time kindergarten teacher at the only Christian kindergarten in Shizuoka. She enjoys her work, especially the fellowship with her Christian co-workers. She is extremely busy with work, housekeeping, children, and helping me with the church work; but God has blessed her with good health, and we are grateful. Yes, I help her, too. As for me, I just finished a comprehensive physical exam in June on my neck at a major hospital nearby. The doctor is encouraged that my condition is stable for now. I asked him again about the possibility of surgery, but he said that this type of surgery is re-

served for senior citizens. There are too many risks involved, so they don't recommend surgery for someone like me, whose condition hopefully can be stabilized through daily exercises.

Thanks for remembering us in your prayers and with your love offerings. I am very hopeful, Lord willing, that I can visit you in person next year during the summer. I would love to visit some of our supporting churches and perhaps join many of you at the Kentucky/Indiana Fellowship in August, 2007. Please pray that physically I will be able to make the trip. Maranatha! That would even be better!

[*Treasurer:* Bob M. Yarbrough, 19930 County Road 324, Terrell, TX 75160. You may obtain a 15-20 minute DVD of the Nakahas' work from him.]

Robert and Joy Garrett
August 4, 2006

Harare, Zimbabwe

Women's Monthly Meeting: For many years the women of our Harare congregations have had an all day meeting on the 3rd Saturday of each month. They have women to give Bible lessons and plan the good works they want to do. Joy was privileged to teach all day this month and to answer questions.

They have purchased enough mattresses so that the 350 women have something to protect them from the concrete floor here at Rockwood Park's dormitories during our camp meetings. They are buying buckets to provide something to carry warm water for bathing. The water is first heated over our wood fires. Cold water showers are all we have in our dorms.

Women's Camp: Our women's camp in May was a great success and the mattresses much appreciated as it can be pretty cold here during our winter season (which is your summer).

Men's Camp: The men's camp is coming up the 2nd week of August with the Junior camp to follow it. Food is cooked over open wood fires and it is a bit of a problem to buy enough firewood for that.

Electricity woes: For the past few months it has been necessary to run our generator 20 to 50 hours each week. The nation is not able to generate enough electricity for its expanding needs and imports some from neighboring countries which are not always able to supply. Thus we have periodic and sometimes lengthy power cuts called "load shedding." Then there are also frequent and sometimes

lengthy power failures, some of which are caused by thieves stealing transmission wires or draining cooling oil from transformers (they sell the oil for diesel fuel) and that causes the transformers to burn out.

But our overworked generator broke down--I think it is the brushes--and has gone for repair. We use the generator to keep the fridge and freezer going and also for lights, the pump which supplies us with water, and Joy can cook on a little portable two-plate stove--but only one burner at a time.

Gospel Week in Banket: Several of our ministers with their wives and some other men held a gospel meeting in the town of Banket. The leaders there joined them in going to the houses in the township. They meet in the shed behind the home of the main leader there. Seven people were baptized. There were up to 57 in attendance.

Elders & Deacons appointed: The last Sunday of July was another milestone in the growth of the churches here in Harare. Three elders and two deacons were installed in the Kuwadzana congregation. This is now the third congregation in this city to have elders. The church building was overflowing with the children sitting in the aisles and in front of the pulpit as they had invited other congregations to join in and witness this special occasion. There was some wonderful singing from singing groups from four congregations. I gave the sermon and prayed over the new elders and deacons. It was a glorious time.

Furlough time: Lord willing, next year, 2007, we would like to return to the States in May for 11 months and return to Zimbabwe in April of 2008. We need to spend some time with our children and grandchildren. I would be available for a limited number of meetings, either gospel or teaching, and of course would like to report back to as many as possible of those congregations who have supported the Lord's work in Zimbabwe. Your support and prayers are so deeply appreciated. We thank God for each of you.

Murder, Anger, Hate-- And the Call to be Different

A.V.W.

In August 1993, a pistol-packing young woman entered a medical center in L.A. She fired 6 shots at a woman whom she claimed had stolen her husband from her. But what she didn't know was that a Jesus-like woman was there, too. You'll learn the rest of the story at the end of this article.

We considered Matt. 5:20 earlier in this series of studies: "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

Most Pharisees were careful only regarding the content of God's commands—their externals, the letter of the law. They were concerned how they would appear to others, how they could impress others. Jesus was concerned about the **Con-tent** but also—and especially—the **IN-tent** of the law—the internals. He was careful about the law's purpose and spirit; the doer's attitude and motives.

If we're concerned about the intent of God's commands we'll *also* be concerned about its content: We won't be lax about obeying. But we'll remember that "the Lord looks on the heart"—our purpose, desires and love.

Now note **Matt. 5:21-22**, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother [or, who nurses a grudge against his brother] will be subject to judgment."

Jesus is saying that at the heart of God's prohibition, Don't Murder, is His opposition to our *hateful anger* toward others. Or even our *disdain or scorn* for them.

Some Clarifications

Not all anger is wrong: We often read of God's wrath against evil: For instance, Rom 1:18, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Also Col 3:5-7, "Because of sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed...the wrath of God is coming." There are many similar statement in the Old Testament.

We also read of Jesus' anger: For example, Mark 3:5 says he "looked at them in *anger, deeply distressed* at their stubborn hearts." There were also other occasions of His righteous anger.

But much human anger is sinful, first because of wrong motives—selfish, undeserved anger. Second because we don't control it. It may start out justified, but then gets out of hand and rules us, turning into hate. Thus much, if not most, human anger is terribly dangerous and destructive. Obviously it sometimes leads to murder, and also may lead to broken health.

Dale Bruner writes that angry words lodge in the soul "like a bullet in the spine. Words that [deny our worth, or] throw our mental ability into question, or that consider us morally vile, reach places in our nervous systems that even lasers cannot touch. Out of [the cesspool of grudges] hisses the careless or the bitterly critical word, and it *poisons* others.

"There are more pollutants than we recognize. Resentment and hard words kill people more swiftly than cigarettes and alcohol. Jesus performs a major act of public health when he bans from the community this source of sickness and damnation. When Jesus left the sick at the end of the [preceding] chapter and began teaching, he did not cease healing; he began to heal *at the depths*." [Bruner, *The Christbook*, 176.]

The results of anger, especially if it grows into hate, include not only broken health, but also broken friendships, fractured families, divided churches, murder and wars. We must take heed to this warning of Jesus.

But we must also understand Him accurately. Here's another clarification: There are two Greek words for anger: 1) **Short-lived anger**--temporary; hot temper that blazes up fast and dies down fast. This is dangerous and requires self-control lest we act stupidly or harmfully. Yet it also can be good, stirring us up to oppose evil.

2) But the word Matthew uses here means "a **long-lived anger**, like that of a man who feeds his wrath or nurses his grudge to keep it alive," says William Barclay. So the anger Jesus condemns here is not just a feeling, a moment of anger. It is a *chosen and continuing attitude*—"anger prolonged and carried around."

Jesus says that such anger will be punished. Listen again to His words: "Anyone who is angry with his brother [or, nurses a grudge against him] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' [or, 'You idiot, you bird-brain!'] is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, '*You fool!*' [or possibly:

‘Worthless person! Reject! Outcast! Wretch!'] will be in danger of the fire of hell.’

Note the *Process* of Such Anger

First we get irritated, exasperated, hyper-critical of our “brother” (possibly a fellow-Christian). So we lash out-- “Idiot! You blockhead! What a dumbbell!” We put them down – ridicule their *intelligence* – humiliate them.

Second we angrily strike out at their *character* – run down their moral reputation. Why? Not because we want to warn and protect others from them—which sometimes is necessary and good--but because of our selfish anger!

Again, don’t be overly-literal regarding Christ’s statements. He is not referring to someone slipping up and uttering some damning word. A boy told his dad: “I’m gonna go to hell because I called Freddy a fool!” No, Jesus did not mean that you’ll go to hell if you call someone a fool but that you can still go to Heaven if you only say, “You crazy nerd! You stupid dork!” In fact, Jesus later called the Pharisees “blind fools” (Matt. 23:17). And Paul wrote, “O foolish Galatians.”

Jesus’ point is, Beware of hateful words, that result from bitter contempt. God will judge not *actions* alone, but even hateful *words*, and the selfish *attitudes* and evil *heart* from which they spring.

Hate, He is saying, is the egg from which murder is hatched. He is dealing here with *roots*, not just *fruits*. Without contempt and hateful anger there would be no murders! Eliminate the one and you automatically eliminate the other. So deal with the sources!

However, notice the progression of penalties Jesus mentions in His three illustrations (22): “Anyone who holds anger toward his brother will be subject to *judgment*.” And anyone who says to his brother, “You idiot” is answerable to *the Sanhedrin*. But anyone who says, “You worthless reject” will be in danger of *hell-fire*.’ He goes from judgment (a local court), to the Sanhedrin (their supreme court) to hell (God’s judgment).

Christ implied that spoken insults deserve greater judgment than anger, though it too can be very serious. The angry thought can be checked, and dealt with. But once an insult is spoken it can’t be recalled--and may cause a violent reaction—by the *person*, and by *God*: You “will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

Jesus believed in hell, and talked about it when teaching His disciples. Matthew records seven times when He mentioned hell. While

we should not overemphasize it, as some do, we also must never neglect its reality.

So may we never downplay or brush off our angry words. Let's take this matter seriously.

Urgency and Hope

Next, in verses 23-26, Christ gives commands which are both urgent and hopeful. "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **First** go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Settle matters **quickly** with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you truly, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

His counsel is urgent, for in His first illustration He says, *First* go and get reconciled to your brother. Don't delay; hurry! This is your primary problem right now. The setting is the place of worship, which is appropriate. For worshipping God should sensitize our relationships with people.

So Jesus says, "When you offer your gift at the altar"--for His original hearers were still under the Old Covenant and brought their offerings to the temple altar. The application to us now is, When we gather with our fellow-Christians to praise God and present our love-offerings to Him and remember Christ's death at the Lord's Supper--and suddenly we remember: *Brother Smith has something against me, because he misinterpreted what I said to Tom about him . . . [i.e. I was not really at fault, but he thinks I was, and maybe the reason he's not here today is because of that.] Or, *he has something against me because I really did treat him rudely in class last week, or I broke the promise I made to him . . . [i.e. I actually did wrong him]. Whichever it is, if he has something against me, I should go *try* to be reconciled first, and then come to the Lord's Table. If I'm satisfied to stay at odds with him and have made no effort to make peace, I'm grieving God and giving the Church a bad reputation before outsiders.

But there's hope as well as urgency here: Maybe you and Brother Smith can be *reconciled*! If we failed to control our temper, at least we can seek to make amends and thus undo the harm! If not fully, at least to some extent.

His second illustration also warns us. The disciple's opponent here is not called brother. For some reason not stated, he is our adversary and is suing us. Jesus says, Settle matters quickly—as soon as you can. If you don't tend to such matters *quickly* you shall suffer *lengthily* due to your lack of urgency. Your problems will proliferate. Your opponents will multiply like rabbits, and your court-cases intensify.

And if unconcern in human relationships breeds greater problems, how much more our relationship with God our Judge—who gives us chance after chance but does not guarantee even one more!

Every time an unconverted person delays surrendering to the Lord, it intensifies his guilt! Yet there is hope right now – if he turns and calls to Him for mercy. Jesus the merciful stretches out His hands in invitation, but He also says “Settle Matters Quickly!”

A major lesson Jesus teaches again and again in this sermon is, “I call you to be different! This call implies a promise as well: *“I can make you different—different from what you are!*” He forbids hate and killing. The opposite of killing is saving and preserving. He can make us into life-preservers in our hateful and violent culture. The opposite of hating is loving, and of anger is patient self-control. Defeat your vices by practicing Jesus' virtues – through His Holy Spirit. It's possible. His power can make us what we ought to be!

A True Contemporary Example

Tom Tripp reported this event which happened in August 1993, at the USC Medical Center in Los Angeles: A young woman, Sophia White, brandishing a 38-caliber pistol, entered the Center looking for a nurse named Elizabeth Staten – alleging she'd stolen her husband. Firing 6 shots, White hit Staten in both her stomach and wrist. Staten ran into the emergency room, but White followed her, firing again.

There, with blood on her clothes and a hot pistol in her hand, the attacker was met by another nurse, Joan Black, who did the *incredible*. Joan Black walked over to the gun-toting woman—and *hugged her, speaking comforting words*.

The assailant said she didn't have anything to live for, that Staten had stolen her family. Black told her, “You're in pain. I'm so sorry, but everybody has pain in their life. I understand, and we can work it out.” As they talked, the invader still kept her finger on the trigger. Once she began to lift the gun as though she would shoot herself. Nurse Black just pushed her arm down and continued to hold her.

At last Sophia gave the gun to the nurse. She was disarmed by a hug, by understanding, by compassion. Black later told a reporter, "I saw a sick person and had to take care of her." [Quoted by Lee Camp in *Mere Discipleship*, p. 35.] That's what it's all about.

We all need to receive Jesus not only at conversion, but every day – not only as our Savior, but as our Life! "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." Then we'll experience living the Sermon on the Mount more and more. Lord, bring it to pass, starting with me!

Reply to Some Brotherly Criticism

Alex Wilson

In the July issue (p. 195), I wrote, "We should not gullibly swallow everything we hear from preachers and writers. Be Berean-like, and compare the teachings we hear with God's inspired Word." One of our readers (a longtime friend) took that admonition very seriously. He disagreed with something I wrote elsewhere in that same article, and wrote a thorough reply! Thanks, brother, I appreciate that. Here is my offending statement: "*God's commands to us Christians are found mainly in the epistles.*"

My friend rightly feels that such a statement downplays the commands of Jesus Himself, given in the *gospels*. Also my statement overlooks or even contradicts Matt. 28:20 where Christ commissioned the apostles to teach disciples to obey *everything He had commanded them*. He writes, "My understanding of the Great Commission tells me that it contains our commands from Christ because what we are to teach had already been given to the apostles." That is, Jesus didn't say to teach disciples what you will learn (future tense) but what "I have commanded you" (past tense). "What we are to teach had already been given to the apostles."

In reply, first of all I admit that my statement is, by itself, erroneous. Obviously we are not to ignore nor minimize in any way the commands of our Lord Jesus. (Our current series regarding His Sermon on the Mount stresses that point.) As He clearly said—repeating His thoughts for emphasis—"If you love me, you will obey what I command." "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love" (John 14:15 & 21; 15:10).

Actually the main point I was making was related to the change of Covenants which God made at the end of Jesus' life. Here is my comment in full context:

“Jesus said ‘Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter... will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.’” (Matt. 5:17-18) Of course the laws which were in effect when Christ spoke these words were the commands of the Old Covenant which God made with Israel—as the words “the law and the prophets” make clear. Among other things, they included such matters as circumcision, Old Covenant feasts and sin-offerings, etc. We today are under the New Covenant, inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection plus the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God’s commands to us Christians are found mainly in the epistles, though they repeat a number of the commands first given in the O-C scriptures and later repeated or expanded by Christ in the gospels.”

What I was trying to bring out was that with the establishment of the New (and better) Covenant (Heb. 7:22), there came a number of changes in worship and rituals. Under the Old Covenant with Israel, there were many laws regarding Sabbath observance, and a priesthood limited by ancestry, and certain rituals to be performed only at the temple (or the earlier tabernacle), etc. Jesus lived under the O.C. and kept those laws. But with His redeeming death and the N.C.’s establishment came the expiration of some of those old regulations and the establishment of new ones, including baptism and the Lord’s Supper, etc. The epistles were written to N.C. people. That is an important point some people overlook.

To summarize: Certainly we ourselves should obey Jesus’ commands, and teach them to others too. There’s no true discipleship without such submission to Him. Also, we should never over-emphasize the epistles to the neglect of studying and applying the four Gospels. (Nor vice versa! And of course we shouldn’t neglect the O.C. scriptures either.)

But one more point should be made for accuracy’s sake: Some of Jesus’ commands do *not* apply to us now because He Himself amended them by His later commands. Examples include His instructions to the apostles in Matt. 10 when he sent them on an evangelistic trip: “Do not go among the Gentiles” [cf. the Great Commission.] “Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts” [cf. Lk. 22:35f]. Again, when the rich young ruler asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life, Christ replied, “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Luke 18.) He knew that the ruler’s wealth was the one barrier to full surrender to God’s will. In such a case today, if the Spirit so leads we might well refer a rich person to this passage. On the other hand we should realize Jesus did not make that specific demand of any other unsaved person. Last, Jesus commanded the apostles, “Now that I, your Lord, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” Most disciples

today (not all) believe those words applied only to a culture of sand and sandals; we should copy His humble *attitude* but with *actions* adapted to our own culture.

OUR REFORMATION

Wayne Newland, Falmouth, Maine

About 170 years ago, the religious movement that spawned Churches of Christ had been struggling for thirty years to reform Christianity in America. It sought to achieve unity by attempting to restore the essence of the primitive [that is, early] New Testament church. A father in the faith set forth seven "**central attributes of the proposed reformation for which we contend.**"

These are timeless and worthy of focus today: A more intimate acquaintance with the holy oracles of both Testaments;

A weekly meeting on the Lord's day in honor of the risen Lord, with the Lord's supper the most cardinal and essential part;

A stricter discipline in the church, and greater attention to good order and behavior;

A more Christian morality in keeping promises, doing justly, and loving mercy;

More gravity, temperance, moderation, more self-denial, and strict self-government;

More piety and devotion, more prayer and praise, more communion with God;

More cooperation among all churches in the work of converting the world.--Alexander Campbell, Millennial Harbinger, 1836, as cited in The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement, 2004, p. 124

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

SORRY to be so Late getting out last month (I hope not this month too). Seemingly inevitable delays have made the following "news" to be "olds." Please pray for all the Word and Work--our printer, helpers, and editor. -- AVW

Help Preserve Our Heritage. During the week of the KY-IND Fellowship, Sis. Rita Smallwood made available to me numerous schedules & photos of past fellowship weeks that her husband, Bro. Bill Smallwood had collected over

the years. Anyone with past schedules & or photos are asked to contact Bennie Hill who is trying to put them in a binder for the "record" and to help preserve our heritage. Contact: Bennie Hill, P.O. Box 54842, Lexington, KY 40555. (859) 269-1312 or Email: Bhill40482@aol.com

SCEC The Southeastern Christian Education Corporation continues to provide scholarships to students who attend certain Christian Colleges and Universities. SCEC is currently working with the following schools: Asbury, Bryan College, Cincinnati Christian University, Harding University, Kentucky Christian University, Lipscomb University, Milligan College. Students should contact SCEC if interested in attending one of these schools. Students may receive information by writing to SCEC, 476 Sparrow Lane, Harrodsburg, KY 40330. **NOTE:** Requests should be made no later than February in the year in which the student plans to attend.

Meetings for October:

Ebenezer Church of Christ (KY)
Oct. 1-4 with Alex Wilson.
Theme: The Holy Spirit and His Work. Call Hughes Jones for times: 859: 734-7197.

LaGrange Church of Christ (KY)
Oct. 2-6 with Bennie Hill. Theme: "The 2nd Coming of Christ."
Time: 7:30 p.m.

Tell City Church of Christ (IND)
Oct. 8-11 with Sonny Childs. Sun. Morning 10:00 a.m. (Central Standard Time). Sun. Night-Wednesday 7:00 p.m. Pitch-In Dinner at the church Sunday 12:00 Noon.

5th Sunday Singspirations on October 29 will be held at Buechel Church of Christ (Louisville area) and Bohon Church of Christ (central Ky. area). Join the singing to praise the Lord and exhort each other.

Portland Christian High School announces its White Elephant Sale for Saturday, November 11, 2006. Start making plans now for a full day of fun, fellowship, & food with all proceeds benefiting the school.

"On the Wrong Runway" was the initial response to a Delta Comair Jet #5191 as it crashed soon after departing Lexington, KY Bluegrass Airport early Sunday morning August 27th. Forty-nine passengers & crew members died suddenly in what many described as the worst disaster in Lexington's aviation history. The community has been drawn together through prayer and opportunities to minister to surviving family members. What a strong wake-up call to those who haven't yet made peace with the Lord Jesus Christ and to those who may be "on the wrong runway" of life. We are made more aware of the uncertainties of life and just how quickly one's life can end. "Today is the day of salvation."

Beware! Recently there has been an attempt to swindle money known as an advance-fee fraud, or the "Nigerian scam," in which victims are told that a sweepstakes prize or some other riches are waiting for them if they send in money to cover the processing expenses. This is mainly done over the internet and those of you who spend a considerable amount of time at your computer should be on guard!

A Reprint Worth Re-reading--

Neglected Prayers

J. R. Clark

One morning at the recent Kentucky Bible Conference at Winchester, KY [1956], the leader requested that those present mention some neglected prayers. The list was written on the board. Most of our prayer lists are limited to the sick and shut-in, missionaries, and the Children's Home, and a few emergencies. But these consecrated Christians came up with a list of sixteen things which they feel that we neglect in our prayers. Our prayer-life is more impoverished than some of us have thought. Here is their list in the order in which it came from their lips.

1. For enemies. 2. For God's Will. 3. For the Holy Spirit to fill us. 4. For wisdom. 5. For chastening. 6. For one another. 7. For men in high places. 8. For laborers in God's harvest. 9. For boldness to live for Christ and to speak the Word. 10. For Israel. 11. "For us, that the Word of the Lord may run and be glorified." 12. For the lost. 13. That we may escape the great tribulation. 14. Open doors. 15. For the Coming of Christ. 16. That we might be one, to the end that the world may believe in our Christ.

Now let us each enrich our prayers!

[Larry Miles recently discovered the above thought-provoker in the April 1956 *Word and Work*.]