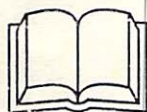


"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

January 2007

Christians at WORK—

What kind of Carpenter

Mechanic

School teacher

Businessman

Assembly-line worker

Preacher

Farmer

Salesperson

Doctor

Congressman

etc.

would Jesus be?

Returning GOOD for EVIL--

is that really possible?

Thoughts for the New Year--

Time FLIES

A newborn infant
tumbles from my arms,
and trudges off to school;
A youth walks home with her;
Their child
Brings me a shawl and stool.

--Author unknown

GOD in the TOMORROWS

"The Oriental shepherd was always ahead of his sheep. He was in front. Any attempt upon them had to take Him into account. Now God is down in front. He is in the tomorrows. It is tomorrow that fills men with dread. But God is there already, and all tomorrows of our life have to pass before Him before they can get to us."

--F. B. Meyer

SUFFERING

"The purpose of our lives in this world is not comfort and security but training; not fulfillment but preparation. The world is a lousy home, but a good gymnasium. It's like an uphill bowling alley. The point is not to succeed in knocking down all the pins but to train our muscles. We misunderstand the point of this world if we expect it to be happy.

"Paradoxically, those who expect happiness in this world are usually the most unhappy people, while those who expect unhappiness are the happiest people.... The world is a soul-making machine." --Peter Kreeft

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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Guest Editorial:

A NEW YEAR'S PRAYER

Leroy Garrett

So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12 NKJ).

I choose this as a New Year's prayer, but it is an appropriate petition for all year long. The *So* with which it begins is a *Therefore*, and there is that fitting interpretive rule, "When you come to a *therefore*, stop and ask what it is there for." This time the conclusion is given -- the *So* or *Therefore* -- in reference to the brevity of life the writer has been describing.

"All our days have passed away in your wrath," he says, recognizing that all our "iniquities" and "secret sins" are laid out before the Lord. He goes on to lament, "We finish our years like a sigh," which means something like "Our lives pass like a sigh". But life is not only brief, it is also frail. And all this is in contrast to the power and goodness of eternal God. This is the wisdom for which the writer prays -- to realize our frailty and finitude before Almighty God.

Of all the psalms this Psalm 90 is the only one ascribed to Moses, and it is one of the more scriptural psalms, with allusions to Genesis, Deuteronomy, and Job. It also inspired what some believe to be the greatest hymn ever composed in English -- Isaac Watts' O God, Our Help In Ages Past, composed in 1719, and sung by Christians of all persuasions all these years. It can be viewed as a unity hymn. If we can sing this hymn together, we should be able to work and worship together.

The first stanza can be seen as an extension of our New Year's prayer.

*O God our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.*

The second verse has a line I find especially comforting: *Sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure*. But it is the fifth verse that captures the theme of Psalm 90, the brevity of life, and that should give us pause to seek wisdom for our short sojourn on planet earth.

*Time, like an everlasting rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away,
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.*

Life is not only brief, but once we "fly away" as the psalmist puts it, we are soon forgotten -- like a dream that one cannot recall. We may have "threescore years and ten," the writer allows, "and if by reason of strength, fourscore," but what are a few decades? The writer is more of a realist than a pessimist. He is telling it like it is. Life is short! So . . . we need wisdom for life's brief sojourn.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life was even shorter since he died as a martyr at the hands of the Nazis. On New Year's day, 1945, the year he was hanged for conspiring to assassinate Hitler, he composed a prayer from his prison cell. It not only reflects the faith of a man soon to be executed, but it serves to define the spiritual wisdom for which the psalmist prayed.

*With every power of Good to stay and guide me,
comforted and inspired beyond all fear,
I'll live these days with you in thought beside me,
and pass with you into the coming year.
While all the powers of Good aid and attend us,
boldly we'll face the future, be it what it may.
and, oh, most surely on each new year's day!*

Teach us to number our days is to pray that we will realize that all earthly glory -- all its fame and fortune -- is like the mist that appears momentarily and then is gone. We make ambitious plans for retirement, but for how long? We build houses that will be lived in mostly by others, for our years are so few. The writer of Ecclesiastes lamented that even if we live "a thousand years twice" we are left unsatisfied.

That we may gain a heart of wisdom. This is the one thing the Bible tells us to pray for, wisdom, as in James 1:5. And the Scriptures tell us that wisdom begins with reverence for God (Pro. 1:7). To "gain a heart of wisdom" we must realize our ignorance --- that we stand before God empty-handed, with no way either to buy or merit his grace. The wise person is on a journey in search of truth and integrity, a journey that never ends. It is a journey of self-examination and self-improvement. Socrates taught wisdom when he insisted that "The unexamined life is not worth living."

A heart of wisdom is a humble heart. It is the servant's heart. Shakespeare had a character say, "What meat does Ceasar feed on that he has become so great." So long as people feed on the meat of self-indulgence and self-importance they will be fools rather than wise. The Lord could have been defining wisdom when he said, "This is the person to whom I will look, he who has a humble and contrite heart, and that reverences my word" (Isaiah 66:2).

William Barclay, the late Scottish theologian, wrote a prayer on wisdom that would also serve as an expansion of our New Year's prayer. I have no better way of wishing you a fruitful 2007 than to pass along this prayer for wisdom.

*Give us the wisdom which is pure,
that we may never use our minds
to think or plan an evil thing.
The wisdom which is peaceable
that we may live in friendship with all
and in bitterness with none.
The wisdom that is gentle,
that we may ever be quicker
to sympathize than to criticize
to praise rather than to condemn.
The wisdom which is open to reason,
that we may not be stubborn and self-willed,
but willing to listen and to obey the truth.*

*The wisdom which is full of mercy,
that we may be kind to others
as we would wish them to be to us.
The wisdom that is full of good fruits,
that our lives may be lovely
with the beauty of holiness.*

1st Theme this month: Sermon on the Mount--

Returning GOOD for EVIL

Matt. 5:39-48
Alex V. Wilson

E. Stanley Jones observed: "A Christian is more likely to sin by his *re-actions* than his actions." He is not likely to start a fight, but may seek revenge when others wrong him. She is not likely to tell lies about others, but if someone gossips about her she's tempted to try to get even--and to dig up all the dirt she can find about that gossip. Let's be on guard regarding our re-actions, not just our actions--and seek the fullness of Christ's Spirit.

How to Interpret this Sermon

Here is an important lesson about interpreting the Sermon on the Mount (and other teachings of Jesus, too): Christ taught *principles* of conduct, and then *illustrated* them so we can see how to apply them. He gave a principle, Don't resist an evil person, nor seek revenge. Then He gave four illustrations, one of which was, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

But the illustrations are not laws, nor a detailed code of conduct. (If they are, then He violated His own code!)

We often prefer definite lists of detailed Do's and Do-Not's, to save us from thinking and so we can obey mechanically and outwardly. Thus we can feel self-satisfied when we keep those outward rules. But such a list of laws to cover every possible situation would require a 9000-page book. And obedience of that kind is not what God wants anyway.

He gives us general principles, which we must then pray and think about and *continually* apply to *various* situations as we face them. This makes obeying the Sermon on the Mount harder, not easier. But as we go thru the process we will grow spiritually, morally and mentally.

Here's an insight I've found very helpful. This author is not trying to water down Jesus' commands, nor make our obedience easier. Rather, as just said, it will be harder--but very worthwhile! Bernard Ramm wrote,

In some statements it is the *spirit* of the statement that is to be our guide.... This is true for Jesus' commands to turn the other cheek, to go the second mile, to yield the second

garment, etc. If we take the inner spirit of these commands, they teach us lessons of [self-control, forgiveness,] kindness and helpfulness. Rather than being covetous we ought to be generous; rather than being goaded by a spirit of vengeance we should be prompted by a spirit of love; rather than being tight-fisted we should be merciful to the destitute.

Examples of Living by the Spirit of His Commands

“Our Daily Bread” told of a Christian woman who owned two prize chickens. One day they escaped from their coop and attacked a neighbor’s garden. In his ire, the neighbor wrung their necks and threw them back over the fence. Of course the woman was upset. But instead of berating the man she took the two chickens and made two delicious chicken pies. Then she gave one of the pies to that neighbor, along with an apology for the damage to his garden. He was speechless with shame and amazement at her demonstration of Christian love.

We mentioned that a backhand slap was often intended as an insult more than an injury. How do we react if someone insults or slurs us? Gen. Robert E. Lee was heard to speak highly of the skill of one of his officers. The man to whom Lee spoke was astonished because he had heard that very officer make malicious remarks about Lee. So he replied, “General, I guess you don’t know what he’s been saying about you.”

Lee replied, “I do know. But you asked me *my* opinion of him, not *his* opinion of me.”

When do *we* need to turn our cheek? To just “take it” when others trample our rights? And to return good for evil?

The SECOND Mile

Last month we considered what our Lord said about the struck cheek and the unjust lawsuit. After that He gave a third illustration about our reaction to unjust treatment or inconvenient intrusions.

3) v. 41, If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

This was based on the former Persian govt.-messenger service. (Compare the Pony Express in the U.S.) The law said that anyone could be compelled to provide a horse or act as a guide to guarantee that the messenger would not be delayed. Thus “compel” came to mean to forcibly draft someone to serve whether he wanted to or not. In Christ’s day the Roman army could do the same thing. If you were a Jew, a soldier on duty could make you carry his load by

means of your donkey or your own muscle. (They made Simon of Cyrene carry the cross for Jesus).

William Barclay makes the application: "Christ says, If someone demands from you the most distasteful and humiliating service, if someone compels you to do something that invades your rights, if you are treated like a defenseless victim in a land ruled by enemy troops, don't let it eat you up with resentment. Do what you are asked and do even more, and do it with good will, for such is my way."

A poet, Joseph Harvey, imagines it like this:

"Come here, you dog, and bear my pack a mile,"
So spoke a Roman soldier to a Jew;
"The day is hot, and I would rest a while,
Such heavy loads were made for such as you."

The Jew obeyed, and stooping in the path,
He took the burden, though his back was tired;
For who would dare arouse a Roman's wrath,
Or scorn to do what Roman law required?

They walked the mile in silence; at its end
They paused, but there was not a soul in sight;
"I'll walk another mile with you, my friend,"
Spoke up the Jew. "This burden now seems light."

"Have you gone mad," the angry Roman cried,
"To mock me, when you know that but one mile
Can I compel such service?" By his side
The Jew stood silent, but with kindly smile.

"I used to hate to bear a Roman's load,
Before I met the Lowly Nazarene,
And walked with Him along the dusty road,
And saw Him make the hopeless lepers clean."

"I heard Him preach a sermon on the mount;
He taught that we should love our enemies;
He glorified the little things that count
So much in lessening life's miseries."

The soldier tried to speak; as he began,
His head was bowed, his eyes with tears were dim.
“For many years I’ve sought for such a man;
Pray tell me more; I, too, would follow Him.”

This command involves our Reaction to Authority – government, or our parents, boss, teachers at school, or leaders at church.

Do they sometimes seem to treat us unreasonably? Ask us to do unpleasant duties, or not to do something we want? If you can convince them to change their minds, o-k. If not, then obey: God tells us that except in certain rare circumstances, we should obey those over us, so do it for His sake. Comply with the requirements cheerfully--why be miserable?

In fact, Jesus says to go beyond obeying. Go “the 2nd mile.” Samuel Chadwick, a flaming evangelist and Bible teacher from England (1860-1932), fleshes this out for us below.

BEYOND Obedience

Samuel Chadwick in *Humanity and God*

Christians are to be known by what they do in life in excess of the claims of law and duty. Others demand restitution, recognition and appreciation; but the Christian returns good for evil, and reflects the divine character in the persistence of unappreciated goodness. These “extras” are the distinguishing marks of Christianity. They declare men to be sons of the Father who is in heaven.

In Excess of the Demand

Let us look at the command concerning the second mile. Often the demand was inconvenient as well as laborious, and was apt to be rendered in a reluctant and complaining spirit. Christ’s command is that even when service is compulsory and unreasonable, it should be rendered readily, cheerfully, and in excess of the demand.

Compulsory service is still with us. In every life there are circumstances that force unwelcome tasks. The Master says they are *not to be undertaken in a spirit of angry rebellion or sullen discontent, but are to be regarded as opportunities.* Thus life is to be stripped of its irksomeness by cheerfulness, and of its hardships by the spirit of enthusiasm. The bitterness of the first mile is to be cured by adding a second.

The measured mile was the religion of the Pharisee. It consisted of a cold and calculating obedience down to the utmost minutia of life. Jesus abhorred this slavish spirit, this mechanical exactness. The measured mile made the Pharisee; it is the extra mile that makes the Christian. The yardstick is broken in the kingdom of heaven; its climate is that which revels in excess of legal demands, and delights in obedience without measure.

There can be no virtue in compulsory obedience. If the march is at the point of a bayonet, there is no room to boast about the marching. It is the service not in the contract that is precious. The sacredness of toil begins where the compulsion of wages ends.

If this is true in things human, how much more in things divine? As long as God is regarded as a hard Master, exacting His due with merciless precision, we shall find in our faith neither joy nor power. The test is the extra mile.

The 2nd is After the 1st

Many keep their "religion" at the irreducible minimum. They pray as much as they think they must to escape being lost, go to worship as much as they are obliged to maintain their respectability, and give no more than necessary to save their reputation. God hates the irreducible minimum. The grudging spirit He will not have. He seeks souls, not machinery; the love of sons, not the cringing obedience of slaves.

But there is no way of reaching the second mile except over the first. Spontaneity and delight are reached through fidelity to the compulsions and necessities of duty. There is often a toilsome stage of drudgery about halfway across the measured mile. Most people stop there; they never find the ease and joy of mastery sustained by *enthusiasm*.

It is through the compulsions of the first mile that we reach the joys of the second. Duty is the first word, though it is not the last. The second mile is reached by doubling the first. By exceeding the measure the sense of exaction is lost, and the duty is lost in the joy.

Compulsion may become a delight and drudgery a pleasure, if undertaken in a free spirit and inspired by a great motive. The spirit of consecration that accepts all duties as in the Father's will, all drudgery as opportunity, all exaction as privilege, will turn grumbling into gladness and set the Ten Commandments to music.

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

A.V.W.

Next Jesus says, "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you."

This saying is an anticlimax, following as it does the more dramatic crises in the preceding verses. "In this Word we are 'let down' again into ordinary life where *our usual exploiters are simply pushy people or undependable borrowers*. But by using this illustration last, Jesus teaches us that *the usual tests of discipleship occur in daily, unheroic situations*" (Bruner).

Christ here echoes God's law to Israel in Deut 15. "If there is a poor man [among you], do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs."

That is a clear call to be generous, but it does say "lend" rather than give. No doubt that would depend on various circumstances. The Lord did not spell out all the details: How much, how often, or for how long? "*Jesus gives direction, not directions; a compass, not a map.*" (Manson)

Always give? No, for Paul tells of lazy loafers who took advantage of Christians' generosity and so never worked, just begged and sponged off of others. (2 Thes. 3:6-13). Paul gave them this guideline: "If a man won't work, he shall not eat"—don't give such a person money. But, do give him *work* if possible. If you suspect the asker might use money on drink or drugs, give only food but no cash.

Sometimes our church has been asked for money by people who have been found to have cable TV, big fishbowls with expensive exotic fish, and ashtrays filled with cigarette stubs! We are not called to support luxurious lifestyles or harmful habits. Other people we've been glad to help.

I have heard reports that at least *some* of the folks who appear poor, who stand with signs saying, "Will Work For Food," make hundreds of dollars a day, not working! Unless your church maintains a pantry / clothes closet, it is often better to give to ministries like Wayside Christian Mission (in Louisville) or the Salvation Army, and then direct or take needy people to them.

Jesus' main point is, Be compassionate and generous. We learn from Paul to use discernment, but also to share unselfishly what we have. Brother Boll said, perhaps with some hyperbole, "I would rather give to ten people even if only one turned out to be an honest, genuine case of need, than to turn down all ten and thus miss helping that one really needy person."

Augustine observed that our Lord did not say "give *whatever* you are asked," but "give to *whoever* asks." If someone requests something excessive or extravagant, unjust, harmful, or useless—(think of some kids' wish-lists at Christmas!)—do not give them what they ask. But we should "give them something, even if only an explanation or time." (Bruner.)

Would You Have Given Her Money?

A preacher in Louisville whom I know was once preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, including this passage. That very week a disheveled woman he'd never seen before turned up at the church building asking for help. Her story seemed suspicious. She claimed that three days earlier, a friend had driven her here from North Carolina to attend a special convention. But — for no reason she could think of (there'd been no argument) — the "friend" left her high and dry, disappearing with this woman's suitcase and purse in the car. Thus she didn't even have identification.

The preacher had heard sob-stories before, including some he knew were scams. But as he questioned and conversed with her for a good while, she seemed to be sincere and claimed to be a sister in Christ. Whatever, she truly had sky-high problems. And there was this passage in Matthew 5 the preacher had been thinking a lot about lately.

He found out the bus-fare to her hometown cost more than he expected. He didn't have much money on him—not near enough for that ticket . . . Then, *HEY!* --he remembered he kept some funds stashed away in case he ever was caught in an emergency. And the amount of those funds was exactly \$2.00 more than the ticket cost! When he put together that fact and the way that Jesus' statement kept coming to his mind, he decided to buy her the ticket.

Then he didn't hear from her for a week or ten days, so concluded -- "I sure was a sucker. She claimed to be a Christian; I should have asked her if she could quote John 3:16, to test her claim. And come to think about it, though she said her longtime

home was in North Carolina she didn't even have a southern accent! How stupid I was! Yet I believed at the time I was doing what the Lord desired."

The next day he got a letter from her, sent from N.C. and filled with profuse gratitude. Then he was so glad he had been studying the Sermon on the Mount, and followed the Lord's prompting.

2nd Theme:

Christians in the Workplace

Alex V. Wilson

A lady who attended our congregation was a nurse in a hospital's obstetrics department, helping in the delivery room. (That's an important point; don't miss it.) One year in late August her daughter told her, "Mom, I guess you'll have to work harder than ever next Monday, since it will be Labor Day."

Well, for most of us, at least five days a week are labor days, so it is important that we think about Christians and our labor.

A Glaring Oversight

A number of times I taught classes in Christian ethics, first in Manila and later at the School of Biblical Studies. In doing so I had opportunity to examine many books related to the broad field of Christian standards, character and conduct. One fact struck me quite forcibly: very few books deal with the duties, problems and possibilities of Christians in their daily jobs. How deplorable! Of course there are numerous ethical issues that we disciples ought to understand and be active about: abortion, drugs, declining family closeness, homelessness, world starvation, prison reform, women's rights, racial discrimination, divorce, war and peace, genetic engineering, pornography, sexual deviations, etc. On and on the list could go. But amid all these matters, if we overlook our responsibilities to live Biblically in our careers--at the office, store, factory or school--then we are foolish indeed. John Redekop hit the nail on the head when he wrote,

For many Christians the severest test of consistent Christian living comes during the average 90,000 hours which they spend on the job from their first day until retirement. In industry after industry and business after business, Christians find themselves facing an ethical crunch.

Unless we help our church-members in these areas, many of them will flounder and fail repeatedly.

Intense Pressures, Difficult Dilemmas

Some of our members face problems like the following, which we need to understand so we can extend empathy and practical teaching and assistance.

Sylvia sat opposite me, apologizing that she had not been to church. She asked if I minded if she smoked. From the look on her face she had been drinking, too. She was an unstable person with a broken marriage behind her. Several years ago she had become a Christian. She worked in a factory and there faced temptations and pressures which the majority of Christians know nothing about.

She spoke of some of the things that went on at work--the private showing of porno films during the lunch break, the cheap magazines passed round full of lurid pictures, the non-stop talk about sex, the dirty jokes, the swearing. She fought a constant battle against being drawn into these things. Workmates wanted to know why she was so stand-offish. "Because I'm a Christian, I've given up that sort of stuff." As a result came queer looks, tittering, jibes and mockery, the attempt to break her and make her throw overboard all that holy nonsense. Sometimes she had done just that, for she had found the going too hard. But Christ always brought her back.

Other Christians, in the managerial ranks, face struggles that are different but just as intense. An executive agonized as he competed with other companies for a major contract with the Pentagon. The competition was using call girls, hunting lodges, and under-the-table payments as part of the bargaining chips. This Christian's problem was of mammoth proportions. The issue was not whether he would compromise his own career. But if he lost the contract more than 600 of his employees could lose their jobs. What to do?

Most people's jobs are somewhere in between that of the high executive and the humble assembly-line worker. But the point is still true: following Christ in the workplace can be tough, and we should strengthen one another in this area.

Is God My Boss?

As usual, the book of James offers some pointed advice.

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

James is not saying it is wrong to plan ahead, to make projections for the future. But we should plan humbly, seeking God's will, and being prepared for Him to change our plans. We should be prayerful, and take the Lord as our Partner--or rather, Boss. When we make Him the Boss, then the ultimate responsibility is His, and that's quite a load off our chest! Note the following true example of this fact.

A Christian was a senior executive in a corporation. He went to his pastor about a problem he had with a junior executive under him. "For five years this man has not worked up to the level of his ability. He's very capable, but he has always worked far less and far worse than he is able to do. And it's my responsibility to deal with him and this problem."

The pastor asked what seemed to him an obvious question: "Have you prayed for him?" That startled the businessman; he winced as though hit in the face. "Why no," he admitted, "I never have!" "Then I'd try that to start with," replied the pastor . . . and an interruption at that point ended the conversation.

Later that day the man phoned the pastor. "For the first time I've prayed for that man; and God has impressed on me that I have got to start talking differently to him." The next day he sent the junior executive a note. "Something happened to me at church yesterday. I believe God wants me to have another conversation with you."

They met for lunch that noon, talked, and even had prayer together! Not only that, but they arranged to do the same the following week. For four weeks they ate, talked and prayed together -- and the strained relationship was healed. The Lord helped the younger man to see himself in a new way, and apathy turned to diligence.

The fifth time they met together he commented, "You know, others in this company need help like this, too. Why don't we start some group meetings?" They did . . . and nine weeks later a man remarked, "I've worked here for twenty-five years and I've never seen

such a change in the whole atmosphere as we've had in the past couple of months." Loving personal concern, which produced real listening and sharing, all in the context of prayer to a God who cares about every-day, "secular" life . . . and a transformation occurred. It could happen elsewhere. too.

Though I fear that not many good books are available on this subject, one helpful one published several years ago is *Your Job--Survival or Satisfaction?*, by Jerry and Mary White (published by Zondervan; 190 pages). It deals with subjects like a Christian view of work; ambition--good or bad?; the Christian view of circumstances; etc. Then there are separate chapters on the hourly worker; salaried workers; the self-employed; sales-work; working for the government; homemakers; women working outside the home; and other types of work. Another book which may or may not be in print now is *Take This Job and Love It*, by Stanley Baldwin (Inter-Varsity Press). God help us to work Christianly. Hopefully this W&W will help; pass it on.

[Regarding out of print books: Often you can find and buy them online, through Alibris.com or Amazon.com, for example. They and other similar websites carry numerous 2nd-hand books as well as new ones.]

[We realize many W&W readers are retired from the workforce. Maybe that includes you. If so, after reading this issue, pass it on to a relative or friend who needs it more than you do.]

* * * *

Insulting God With Bad Carpentry--

"The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables. Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly -- but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? . . . The only Christian work is a good work well done." --Dorothy Sayers

At Work: Practicing What We Preach

Buford Smith; re-run from 1989 W&W

I am a high school counselor and administrative assistant to the principal. My philosophy in the work place rests on two particulars from God: "Whatever you do, work heartily *as unto the Lord*" (Colossians 3:23), and the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12 NIV)

Understanding the theory is easy. Application is difficult.

A major problem is the expectations of our co-workers. On the one hand, Christians are expected by some to be above all reproach – in fact, *perfect*. That's obviously impossible; we all make mistakes. On the other hand, many people feel that Christians aren't really all that different from them. "I did such-and-such, an unethical thing, and you would too." Their perception is, "When the chips are down, every man has his price." The "everybody does it" attitude towards stealing and lying, for example, is accepted by the world as standard. Let me illustrate:

One year when I signed on for a job, I told the principal I had a church meeting scheduled for October and would miss several days. He said that would not be a problem. When I returned from the meeting he asked if I wanted to "run it through" as sick days, and thus not miss a paycheck. I was surprised and embarrassed at his offer, which then embarrassed him as well. He expected me to lie about the week for the love of money. He saw nothing unusual about making such an offer; to have it turned down was unusual.

Then when my car was stolen and the insurance representative did not expect to see it again, I was told to list everything lost in the car. One of my co-workers said, "Too bad you lost a trunk full of clothes." I responded without thinking, "No, only our coats and my camera bag." He grinned, raised an eyebrow, and repeated, "And a trunk full of clothes!" Then I understood. The sad part – he himself is a professing Christian.

I attempt to apply the Christian principle of honesty on my job. That way I don't have to remember which lie I told to which student or co-worker. As years have rolled on, I believe I have achieved at least that status—"He is honest."

The theory is simple: work as unto the Lord, and treat others as you wish to be treated. Jesus provides the sustaining power.

[This Article first appeared in the 2/89, W&W. Though now retired from his job as counselor and administrator, the author still preaches at the Shiloh Church of Christ near Dugger, Indiana and in recent years has taught classes for prisoners at a correctional institute.]

Dilemmas in a Factory

Clarence Trowbridge

Like millions of Americans, I work in a factory. I share certain problems with other workers, but I have other problems that arise because I am a born-again Christian. You might better understand what these problems are if I told you about some friends of mine. Let's call them Christians A, B, C and D.

When Christian A was first assigned to the milling department in a certain factory, he was put to work with another man on the same machine. Theoretically, the machine required two operators, but only theoretically. The fact was it scarcely required one. After the instruction period, the co-worker notified Christian A, "I'm going to take a nap back of the machine. If the foreman asks where I am, tell him I went to the washroom or something, then come back and wake me up." The co-worker took his nap, and sure enough the foreman did come around and asked where he was. Christian A felt a little sick. What should he do? The name of Christ might be cursed if the co-worker lost his job because of telling the truth, yet neither was it right to lie. Trapped he chose to do what most Christians would have done in similar circumstances. He lied. If you think this example is farfetched, the chances are that you do not work in a factory.

Take another illustration, that of Christian B, who works in a chemical factory. When he was hired he determined to do his very best on the job. But after work on his third day, he was met by a sour delegation of men who told him very plainly the way they felt about it. "What do you think you're doin', wise guy?" "You tryin' to ruin things for everybody?" "Look, from now on you better get real slow!" "We don't like guys like you around here." And so on. They left him with this problem. Should he buck these men or lay down on the job?

Or take Christian C. He has been working at the same dairy for a number of years. He is very well liked and has always tried hard to be an "all-right guy." His trouble was that he succeeded too well. One day a friend and fellow worker came to him with a casual request: "Say, old pal, I have to leave early tonight, so I stuck my

card behind yours. Punch me out as you leave, will you?" And he turned on his heel and was gone. Christian C was on the horns of a dilemma. Should he punch the man's time card in violation of the company's rules or refuse and stand to lose the man's friendship?

The one complicating factor in these three situations is this: these Christian men wanted to remain on good terms with their fellow workers in order to reach them with the gospel. This desire is the underlying idea of 1 Corinthians 9:12; "I am made all things to all men, that by all means I might save some." The difficulty arises in distinguishing right from wrong while remaining friends with the unsaved. Some say that you should ask yourself the question, "What would Jesus do?" then do it.

Let us examine the case of Christian D, who began to witness to a fellow employee on their ten-minute coffee break. So interested did the man become in what he had to say that Christian D found himself still witnessing ten minutes after the coffee break was over. The man was obviously under deep conviction, and Christian D was faced with a real decision. Should he continue to witness, hoping for a decision, on time that they both owed to the company? Or should he return to work immediately, thereby losing an excellent opportunity that might never come again? "What would Jesus do?" Frankly, Christian D didn't know. And the chances are many other Christians wouldn't know either.

To complicate things further, the Christian in the factory must make all his decisions in an atmosphere that is hardly conducive to godliness or right-mindedness. The air is often blue with language indescribably foul. And I know that I am not the only Christian that has had to work in a room papered with pictures of nudes.

The union may also complicate the Christian's problems. In theory, as a democratic organization it is good for the union to have the Christian help mold its policy. But in some cases he may find that the union upholds inefficiency, deceit, and even disobedience of certain company rules. The union may also insist on low work output in order to protect certain unionists who do not wish to work any harder. The idea that work efficiency and higher pay scales might go hand in hand is often regarded as "bunk."

In companies that have a paid sick leave clause, it is common for most of the men to "get sick for a week." When the company eventually seeks release from such a provision, the blame is likely to fall on the honest minority who did not draw sick leave. Ridiculous, you say? It happened to me.

These are real problems, just a few out of many. And no one could pretend to have solved all the unique problems that arise from factory employment. I think, however, that I have found a workable formula that may be of value to some Christian who is meeting these situations constantly and wondering if there are principles to guide him. It's a formula I found in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: "Be always on your guard; stand firm in your faith; keep on acting like men; continue to grow in strength; let everything be done in love." (Williams translation) For convenience I have reworded this formula into three rules:

1. Make an open stand for Christ.
2. Adopt an uncompromising attitude.
3. Temper all your actions with love.

These rules are completely interdependent; you must abide by all three or none at all.

By making a stand for Christ, I mean letting your fellow employees know openly that you are a Christian. The reason for this is that many of the problems such as we have been discussing result from a Christian trying to live on a high moral plane without first letting his fellow workers know the reason why. Your fellow employees must understand that you *are* a Christian before you try to live like a Christian. If you fail to do this, the other workers will put down your good behavior either as spitefulness or just plain orneriness.

I am not saying that a man cannot be a Christian without making an open issue out of it. Indeed, I think that the majority of Christians are trying to do just exactly that. I have seen many of these "secret" Christians. I will say that any attempt to live the Christian life in a crowded factory will end in defeat and heartache if the Christian will not take a stand for Christ. The temptations will come at the secret Christian so thick and fast that his head will fairly spin.

By making a stand and sticking to it, the Christian automatically short-circuits many temptations. Once the unsaved men understand your position, they will often decide for themselves that a thing is wrong for you and never even present it to you for a decision. For example, a man who had considered asking you to help him steal something from the plant (a time-honored custom in many places) may decide beforehand that you wouldn't do it, and not bother asking. If he has the gall to ask you anyway, it will be easier for you to say, "No" because he will know that you are refusing on purely moral grounds and not because you have anything against him personally.

Again, if you leave the room when the language becomes too sickening, they will look at one another and nod - but they will un-

derstand. When you bow your head over your lunch bucket, the men will know what you are doing, and only the meanest will try to bother you. In fact, if some crass individual does decide to have some fun at your expense while you are praying, he may find to his astonishment that he himself has incurred the disapproval of the men. For even the most black-hearted sense that there is something wrong in disturbing a man who is talking to God.

If your stand is open enough you may find that it becomes almost unnecessary to "preach the gospel." You will become an "epistle, known and read of all men." Moreover, you will find the unsaved coming to you. They will often seek you out whenever they think they can have a word with you in private. At first their questions may concern factual things, like ethics and Bible truths. It is their way of finding out whether or not you will be able to answer their questions. Later, when their confidence in you has increased, they will come out with the real question(s) that has been troubling them. If ever a Christian has a God-given chance to testify for Christ, it is at that time.

Secondly, a Christian must adopt a firm, uncompromising attitude. This, at times, may tax all the determination and courage a man has. Once having made a decision based on the Bible or on what he knows to be right, the Christian must never go back on it or change it to meet changing circumstances. Painful and hard as this may be, it will spare him even greater pain in the future.

For one thing, make it a habit to always tell the truth. Lies are no longer considered sins when told in the confines of the factory. The problem of Christian A should never have been allowed to rear it's ugly head. At the other man's first suggestion of a nap, the Christian should have taken a firm stand and made it clear that he *could not lie* for him. This might have angered the man a little, but not half as much as if Christian A sent the foreman back to wake him up - which was really the proper thing to do, as the situation developed.

Christian B already had this attitude, and he continued to put out a day's work for a day's pay in spite of the warning. He was also careful to avoid an "I'll show them" attitude. Now - less than a year later - most of the resentment has died down and Christian B enjoys an envied reputation as a hard worker. When a man needs a work partner, he is apt to choose Christian B, because he knows that Christian B will make his own job easier. In Christian B's case, it evidently became clear that the resentment did not arise from the majority of the men, but from a comparatively small group of "leeches." These men are vocal and usually pose as ardent unionists, simply because their kind needs the strongest possible union to keep the lot of them from getting fired for laziness.

Christian C should have nipped his problem in the bud by stopping his friend and politely refusing to punch his card. If necessary, he should have even run after him. This would have been awkward, but not nearly as awkward as the situation in which he allowed himself to become involved.

The problem of Christian D is not so easy to answer, and I approach it cautiously. Certainly there are times when a man must take his orders from the Holy Spirit, and follow them unmindful of the consequences. At times, every Christian must say as Paul said, "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me, if I preach not the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:16) Nevertheless, in my judgment, in the absence of a Spirit directive to the contrary, it is better to gently leave off witnessing and return to work. We can be sure that the Holy Spirit will not leave off His work, but rather will continue to work in the man's heart until there is a better opportunity to speak with him.

But it is the spirit of love that makes much of this possible. The firm, unyielding stand of the separated Christian seems very harsh at times. Only the *loving nature* of the born-again Christian can soften that harshness and reveal to the world that we are friendly and kind and sympathetic to their problems.

These three rules taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians will enable the Christian to live a life consistent with the faith he professes. It must be admitted that they will have little effect on the obscene pictures on the wall or the vile language that beats upon his ears. Since there may be no escape from these things physically, it is necessary to develop an inner protection against them.

If your work is largely mental, you can preoccupy your mind with it. However, if your work is largely manual, it would be well to cultivate a sort of mental preoccupation with the things of Christ. Since my own job is manual labor, I can suggest a few devices that will help. A favorite hymn or gospel song hummed over and over will tend to hang on all day with its message of hope or praise. Or you might memorize a verse of scripture on the way to work, and all day long try to plumb its depth of meaning. Attack it from all angles and try to exhaust all the truth in it. But this third device I like best: take the offensive and tell the man next to you just what Jesus means to you.

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A Hero of Faith in Difficult Times—

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

By Catherine Damato
(Be sure to see note at the end)

It was 2 o'clock in the morning. The party in the home of a London socialite was going strong. A young man with a resonant voice and slightly stooped shoulders stood up and sang a popular ballad. When he finished, cheers encouraged him to launch into a mimicry.

Pulling his fashionable dinner jacket askance, the young wit began imitating a drunkard, staggering about until he nearly knocked over a table. A portly Englishman laughed raucously and elbowed his wife. "I say, there's a jolly chap England won't soon forget."

Later at home, the young man wearily penned a brief entry in his diary: "Home and to bed -- 4 a.m."

At 21, William Wilberforce was a rising star in London life. He was an eloquent member of the House of Commons and the life of any party.

Yet these years of acclaim seem pale and tarnished beside the later life of William Wilberforce. For he abandoned frivolous parties and popular applause to lead a lifelong struggle against slavery in England. His toil was so arduous and his ambitions so changed that his son later compared his early life to that of a statue.

The "statue" came alive and began a dedicated, selfless career after genuine conversion to the Christian faith in 1785. Wilberforce went on to become the "Lincoln of England" in regard to freeing of slaves.

Slavery in the 1700s was an accepted fact by almost everyone. Negro captives were driven across the mainland of Africa in chains, then transported to market in ships so overcrowded that many died of suffocation. Voyages lasted for weeks or even months. Disease was rampant, and many who survived the voyage were crippled by sickness. Slave traders had no feelings for their human merchandise. They sat in comparative luxury, safely separated from the filth and stench of the slave quarters.

Wilberforce had long been opposed to slavery, but his conversion to Christ added conviction and energy to his compassion. His battle with politicians and wealthy slavers was long and hard fought. Discouragement became almost unbearable, but he fought on, and just before his death, he saw success of his heroic battle.

Wilberforce was born in Hull, England, in 1759. His parents were rich, and William was a bright, sociable youth who made friends easily. His appearance was not overly impressive. Slight of build and stoop-shouldered, he was nevertheless keen-minded.

He was graduated from Cambridge University, and planned to enter public life. He campaigned for a seat in the House of Commons and won. His career promised to be brilliant. On a tour of Europe with Isaac Milner, Wilberforce became deeply impressed with the Christian faith of his companion. They began to read the New Testament together, and Wilberforce was convicted of his care-free and irresponsible life. "What madness," he thought, "to continue easy in a state in which a sudden call out of the world would consign me to everlasting misery, and that when eternal happiness is within *my* grasp."

He prayed earnestly for God's mercy, trusted Christ as Savior, and returned to England in 1785 a changed man.

In 1789 William stood before Parliament and denounced the slave trade as a national inquiry. "Never, never will we give up," he cried, "until we have extinguished every trace of this bloody traffic--a disgrace and dishonor to our country."

Proslavery interests rallied. The trade was not really so cruel, they said. The Negroes were convicts, condemned after a jungle trial. They preferred the security of slave life to the uncertainty of jungle living. Families were united in slavery--wasn't that better than being separated, oceans apart?

The lights of Wilberforce's London residence burned late as he gathered statistics on the high death rate of the slave voyages, eyewitness accounts of shipboard cruelty, proof that slaves were captured in tribal wars sometimes stirred up by slavers, and evidence that many of the supposed convicts were children and even babies, and that slaves were sold with no regard to family ties. Many days Wilberforce's diary read simply: "Slave business--exhausted."

Encouragement came when John Wesley wrote Wilberforce: "If God be for you, Who can be against you? Fight on!" Wilberforce continued the struggle in Parliament with the plea, "Let it not then appear that our superior power has been employed to oppress our fellow creatures, and our superior light to darken the creation of our God."

But his first bill to abolish the despicable activity was overwhelmingly defeated. He decided he must arouse public opposition to slavery. At his own expense he printed 50,000 copies of his anti-slavery evidence. Two volunteers took them to every town in the

land. Wilberforce toured Britain to inform the people of the national disgrace.

It was a heartbreaking battle. Opponents slandered: "He is secretly married to a Negro woman." "He is really a French spy; he wants to weaken British sea power by idling the nation's ships."

Wilberforce's helpers were threatened and beaten. His witnesses lost friends and jobs. Even the great Admiral Nelson grumbled about "Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies."

The fight went on through the 1790s. Time after time Wilberforce got an antislavery bill through the House of Commons, only to see it fail to pass. Wilberforce got married, but he wrote: "During the sitting of Parliament my house is but a mere hotel."

But the climate of England was changing. Abolition societies appeared across the country. Petitions against slavery bombarded Parliament. And in 1807 Parliament declared the slave trade illegal by a vote of 283 to 16. The announcement received one of the most thunderous ovations ever heard in the House. Cheers for Wilberforce rose to the roof. William sat with his head bowed, weeping.

It was over, he thought. At last he could rest, tend to his shattered health, and give more time to Bible study. But it was not to be. Within a year ships were weighing anchor with smuggled cargoes of slaves.

"I am sick of battle and long for quiet, but I'll not leave my poor slaves in the lurch," said Wilberforce. He campaigned for Parliament again, this time against two prominent and wealthy men. His defeat seemed certain.

The polls that year opened to a strange sight. Roads were clogged with men coming by the thousands on donkey back, in jolting farm wagons, and on foot. In skiffs and rowboats they came down canals and rivers. Everywhere the shout went up, "Wilberforce! Wilberforce is our man!" And he won back his seat in Parliament.

In 1811 Wilberforce saw a bill passed that made slave smuggling a felony. He then negotiated and won abolition agreements with Spain and Portugal. The slave trade was doomed--but not slavery, for Negroes born in slavery were destined to grow up in chains. Wilberforce saw that he must now work for emancipation.

In 1823 the Antislavery Society was formed, with Wilberforce as vice-president. Two years later, failing health forced him to retire from Parliament, but he continued to direct the anti-slavery battle.

Wilberforce was on his deathbed in 1833 when he heard the news that the Emancipation Bill was to be voted in. His years of struggle were to be crowned with victory. He rallied in strength to give thanks to God before dying. In a few weeks, emancipation became law and slavery was banished throughout the British dominion. All England mourned Wilberforce's death. His body was put to rest in Westminster Abbey. He is honored in English history as the Father of Abolition, and remembered by Christians as one of their number who not only cherished freedom for himself, but fought against evil forces that withheld it from others.

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< ; GOOD NEWS: A movie entitled *Amazing Grace* will be shown (or maybe has already been shown, depending on the dates of this W&W and of the film) in movie theaters around the U.S. It focuses on Wilberforce and also his friend, the preacher and hymn-writer John Newton (who before his conversion was captain of a slave-ship). From all that we've heard, Christians should see this film and take others with them. Hopefully it will come out as a DVD too. --avw

VOICES from the FIELDS

Joy (and Bob) Garrett Ruwa, Zimbabwe Dec. 2, 2006

After years of waiting for qualified men the Lord has enabled us to have elders and deacons now in 4 local congregations. Many of those appointed have grown up in our churches. The latest congregation to elect elders and deacons is the Waterfalls Church of Christ.

We printed some favorite Zulu hymns for our congregations in four different locations. Our Shona-language hymn book is needed badly. A brother did some new hymns for it. But when he gave it to Bob it carried with it a "virus" that caused Bob much trouble; so we still don't have the new hymns they want included.

Last week Bob and a group of workers erected the steel structure for Monera, Mhondoro church building. Now it is ready for the roof. The women had a sale and sold food to raise money for this project. The local congregations have been sponsoring this building. It has taken a long time for there were problems with the rocks on the top of the small hill where it was to be built. For the last 35 years the congregation has had only a shelter in which to hold its meetings. It is great to see progress being made.

Now the workers and Bob have been working on the steel structure at Hwange. It requires a lot of cutting, bending, and welding. Some of the bigger and heavier steel consists of old pieces that Bob bought years ago at auctions. So they must be sanded to remove rust and old paint. Then they are repainted with red oxide. They must drill holes and be sure they match up when they erect the steel and put the bolts in place. It will take two trips to Hwange to take these tons of steel.

Bob got home Thursday night from his trip to Hwange. It takes all day to make the journey one way. They should be pouring the concrete floor slab this weekend. While there Bob purchased 110 bags of cement. It cost about double the price of two months ago. Our inflation continues to climb all the time.

Note added by Robert: Lord willing, we shall arrive in the U.S. for furlough on May 3. We want to use most of May, June and July for visiting family in various places. Then we should be available from August 2007 through March 2008 for appointments.

Martin Brooks mbrooks@teamexpansion.org Dec. Newsletter

The missions professors from several colleges met at the National Missionary Convention to talk about how to effectively use business as a way to spread God's fame around the world. I've been blessed to be able to work with several of these men and be included in their meetings for the last several years. This year's topic was great because of the increasing trend to blend missions and business. The dichotomy of being a Christian on Sunday and a businessman on Monday is melting away. This very week, one of our [Team Expansion] workers in Central Asia is making a shift to work in a shipping company. She will have the inside scoop on all the new businesses coming to her region. This will allow her to help many other Kingdom minded workers to gain access to this closed region. This month we will be talking to a man about helping us better organize our Business As Missions (BAM) ministry. Please pray with this businessman about his decision to join us.

As the convention went on, I talked to a group of students from one of the Bible colleges. They want to serve together in a "hard" Muslim area. Another group of young people are interested in going to Niger, the very place Susan and I visited last year. Please pray with this group as they decide how to get to this Muslim country.

As I walked through the convention hall, a lady stopped me that wants to serve in Sierra Leone. Amazingly, when I got back to our booth, a doctor and his wife who had adopted children from Sierra Leon were wanting to discuss moving there! When two different

people volunteer to go to a place like Sierra Leone within an hour of each other, I begin to think God is up to something.

Pioneer Bible Translators met with me to discuss putting workers in Guinea alongside of their translators. This is the very area where Islam entered West Africa. Now, through God's grace and medical outreaches, a door is being opened, strongholds are being torn down, ground once stolen by the Enemy is being reclaimed for the King of Kings. These Muslim people are receptive to the Gospel and we need to get workers there.

I don't have room to tell you about the soy processing plant that may be built in Sudan to supply the World Food Program and the Darfur refugees. Nor can I tell you about the young lady that wants to go to the Middle East to teach English, or the girl who is dreaming of opening a woman's center in another Middle Eastern country, or her brother who is opening a business in a third Middle Eastern country....

POST-MODERNISM — the Main Influence on the Thinking of Most Younger People Today

Alex V. Wilson

So many mammoth changes have occurred in recent decades – within our lifetime – that scholars say we've entered a new age, a new era: the post-modern age. If you're "modern" now, you're outta date, old-fashioned, behind the times!

Eddie Gibbs, a professor of inter-cultural studies at Fuller Seminary, says: "In the broader popular culture, people of all ages—especially those under 35—have become postmodernized even if they know nothing about the *philosophy* of postmodernism." That is, many folks who can't define or explain post-modernism, nevertheless have absorbed it. They believe it without knowing they do. It's their worldview, their philosophy of life.

Your **worldview** (everyone has one) is your basic outlook on life, *your assortment of presumed values and beliefs about life's meaning and purpose*. Chuck Smith Jr. writes, "The nature of a worldview is that it is so subtle we generally are not aware of it. We are like the machinist walking around his work-bench looking for his glasses while he is already wearing them. **We do not look at a worldview, we look through it.**" When you look through pink lenses, everything looks pink; when you look at life through assump-

tions that are secular (or Christian, or Islamic), everything looks secular (or Christian or Islamic). Smith continues, "Until relatively recently, no more than one major ideological shift [i.e. major change in worldviews] was likely to occur in a lifetime, and that one would long be remembered as a significant turning point accompanied by profound soul-searching and conflict. But in today's world, a person can swap worldviews several times in a single life span."

In his helpful book, *The End of the World . . . As We Know It*, Smith makes other significant observations too. He is a Christian who wants us to understand post-modernism so we can influence its numerous adherents. (I have sometimes added annotations of my own. And we quote a number of other people too, where noted.—avw.) Ponder these thoughts.

"If the church is determined to do no more than preserve the past, we will lose the future."

"The term postmodernism is not easy to define because it is not one, complete, coherent movement or system of thought. A variety of definitions can be found in different fields of research, and some people claim it defies definition altogether."

"The changes in our society are going to create **new opportunities** for Christians to influence their communities and expand God's work in the world. We have not seen such a crucial period in church history for at least 200 years, and how we respond may affect the church for the next 200 years. We may have to discard some of our old wineskins, but *whatever lies ahead*--God is already out there, and He has invited us to follow."

Just What Is Post-Modernity?

"There was no single individual who woke up one day and decided to start postmodernism, nor is there one central figure who embodies what it means to be postmodern." (Matt Kelley) Nor is there only one type of postmodernism, but many brands. But here are some **Basic Ingredients**:

1) No Absolute Truth: There are *absolutely no absolutes!* Post-moderns often say, "What is true for you may not be true for me and vice versa. Since truth has vanished, no worldview is more true than any other. Christianity may work for you, but Hinduism (or atheism, or Islam) may work for the next guy. Don't be haughty and say your religion or faith is *the only* right one. Don't even say it is the *best* one, or *better* than that of others. All you are entitled to say is, 'Well, this works for me, so I'm pleased with it.'"

Smith shows the danger of such an approach by citing this example: The mass suicide of all the members of Marshall Applewhite's UFO cult, who believed their spirits would board a flying saucer after leaving their bodies. What we believe really does matter!

2) "Post-modernity is not irrational; it simply *does not believe that human reason holds all the answers to life's questions*. [That's true, of course.] There are other ways to know besides human reason—including story, feeling, experience, and intuition. Postmodern people are not moved by reason alone; they also want to know how a belief or object is experienced." (This means our testimonies will be important, to show that Christian faith really works.)

3) "Post-modernity *despairs of finding a true history*." History books "are interesting for discovering not what happened but how people's view of the world was skewed [distorted, twisted] by their culture." "There are *no facts, only interpretations*" (F. Nietzsche). Ponder that. It's true that the historian's personal views influence his conclusions to some extent, but that statement is tremendously over-stated. In addition, "In postmodernity, *history is not going anywhere. History is pointless*." What a heartbreaking view. Rejoice that we know who holds the past, present and future in His hands, and is working His purposes out despite the freedom He gives us.

4) "Postmodernity refuses to judge one culture or way of life superior to another. They say, '*We judge other peoples' customs as crude, but they feel the same about ours.*'"

5) But postmodernists *refuse* to say "There is absolutely no God." In fact there is belief and interest in all kinds of gods and religious experiences. Preacher Dick Alexander observes that for post-modernists, "The reality of the spiritual realm is a given. In the age of Oprah there are many paths to spirituality."

Those are only 5 of the various ideas and attitudes that post-modern people take. Such beliefs have become common and assumed -- in books, the mass media, almost all public schools and especially in higher education.

Defending the Faith

To defend our faith, we Christians till a few decades ago could answer critics by quoting Bible verses. That's "because there still was enough influence of Christianity within our culture to make most people respect the Bible as an authoritative book." But as time passed, that kind of respect disappeared to a great extent "and vast numbers of people began to ask, 'How do you know the Bible is true?' and 'Why should we believe the Bible?'"

Yet "people who are longing for change are eager listeners when it comes to 'testimonials.' Only be careful not to sound too polished or rehearsed [i.e., too glib, canned and know-it-all]. Postmodernists have seen all the tricks the media use to sell, spin, and hype. What they look for is people who sincerely speak out of their heart."

We dare not "continue to answer questions no one is asking, continue to be up to date on all the old news, continue to have well-reasoned arguments among ourselves that no one else cares to hear."

Avoid Full Acceptance and Full Rejection

"We can neither fully embrace nor fully dismiss postmodernism. But there is great value in selectively adopting those aspects that prove most useful to Christian ministry."

"In the spiritual marketplace of postmodernity, Christians will have to accept the fact that our story will not be given any special status over other religious stories." But look at what Paul did at Athens (Acts 17). He knew he would have a hard time getting people to consider his message, much less accept it. So what did he do? "Without slamming his listeners' religions, he introduced Christianity as the overlooked religion and yet the religion with a difference. He *used one of their own altars*--'To an unknown god'-- for his starting point. And he *quoted their own poets*--'We are God's offspring'--to make another point. Thus he gained rapport with his audience, so he could gain their consideration.

But how had he learned these facts? No doubt he studied something about Greek religion and philosophy before he ever reached Athens. But in addition notice what he did once he got there. He "reasoned . . . in the marketplace day by day" with the people and philosophers. But even before that, he did something else--which sets us an example in our day. Note that in his address he said, "I see that in every way you are very religious. **For as I walked around and observed your objects of worship . . .**" Just as Moses sent men into Canaan to spy out the land before the pending invasion (which was aborted), so Paul spied out Athens before his invasion with the gospel. He "*walked around and observed*" so that he could communicate with them in a meaningful way. And we today need to do the same--which is why the Ky.-Ind. Fellowship committee last year chose to have two messages on "21st century cultures." To reach people we must first understand where they're coming from. Those who have insights into these matters should help the rest of us understand them, at least in a general way.

Chuck Smith Jr. writes, "Christians must remain loyal to the gospel as the one, true Story with a capital S -- handed down to us

from God through the Scripture. [We must fortify the faith of our youth on that point.--avw] But we must also respect the followers of other religions enough to maintain a dialogue with them, realizing that in *their* eyes our Story appears as just one more story. But *even to get our Story heard at all is a good start.*"

Think of Paul again: Study 1 Cor. 9:20-22. Also compare the content of his message to the Jewish Synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:13ff) and his message to an all-Gentile audience at the Gates of Lystra (Acts 14:15-17). There are several clear differences. He never diluted his message, but he *adapted* it to whatever audience he was addressing.

This leads us to the following question.

Who Are Those "Post-Modern People"?

Four generational groups are found in our country (and churches) today. The *Builders*: those born before and up to 1945. *Boomers*: the first generation born after World War 2, between 1946-64. *Busters (also called Generation X)*: born between 1965 and 1983. *Bridgers*: persons born in 1984 and later -- the newest generation, who are coming of age in two different centuries. Most of the post-moderns are Generation X, now in their early 20s to early 40s, plus the upcoming Bridgers. They are the church of the future, if the Lord tarries.

Here are some sad **Facts about the Gen-Xers** as they've been affected by their parents the Baby-Boomers: * The Gen-Xers were the most aborted generation in U.S. history. * Parental divorce hit that generation "harder than any other U.S. generation." * As a result, they have more blended families than any other generation—and thus many step-dads and moms, step-brothers and sisters. * Since many Moms joined the work-force, the number of 'latchkey kids' nearly doubled. * Teens among that generation committed suicide more frequently than any generation since the early 1920s. * AIDS and the use of hard drugs also mushroomed. * This present age has seen change occur with incredible rapidity: "Technology changes at a mind-boggling pace, music doesn't remain popular for more than a few weeks, values have become disposable like other commodities, friends are constantly moving, families are constantly morphing." *They "entered the job market just as salaries were dropping and taxes were rising."

No wonder hopelessness and despair are now so widespread — among many of the GenXers but even more among the Boomers and the senior-citizens among us! That list of glum and gloomy statistics brings to my mind what Paul wrote in 2 Tim 3:1-5. "There will be *terrible times* in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves,

lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful ...without love ...without self-control, brutal ...rash ...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God....”

To Reach People Today We Must --

First, understand where they're coming from, how they think, what they are worried about. *Second*, build bridges to them through love. *Third*, with all that widespread tragedy, sorrow, confusion and wreckage in our land today--what an opportunity we have to share with the hurting people around us Good News of Hope in Christ! After all, “man’s extremity is God’s opportunity”--and also *our* opportunity as His agents. That is, *if* we listen with real interest and concern to hurting people, in spite of their mixed-up ideas and messed-up lives. And *if* we show practical love to them in their despair. And *if* we humbly, prayerfully, boldly tell them the Story of Jesus and His love and transforming power.

In his message Julius Hovan shared an example of this approach. A Christian professor at a state university led a student to Christ. When the young man was asked how it happened, he replied, “The prof built a bridge of friendship, and Jesus walked across that bridge to me.”

Here’s another example. Dallas Willard is a Christian professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California. After he and his students study various philosophies, he challenges them to take “the Reality Test.” The following are not direct quotations -- but the best I can tell, it goes something like this: He tells them, “Don’t just learn theoretically about philosophers and philosophies. Commit yourself, act on your beliefs, test them, put them into practice. Otherwise, what’s the point? Personally, decades ago I committed myself to Jesus of Nazareth. I considered His character and claims, and the evidence He gave to back up those incredible claims. Convinced, I began seeking to follow His teachings and imitate His character. I put Him to the Reality Test, acting on my beliefs in Him and what you might call His ‘philosophy.’ And I’m glad I did.

“I urge you too to take a Reality Test. If you think you’ve got someone better than Jesus to follow—okay, that’s your choice: try that person and see if you find life to the full—whether his teachings fit the realities of life. You’ve studied *philosophy* now. Do you think it will solve our problems? Then decide whose philosophy you want to follow—and test it. Consider again the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Descartes, Nietzsche, or today’s Peter Singer at Princeton—or whoever your favorite philosopher is. Do they pass the test?

"If you think hope and meaning can best be found in *government and great leaders*, ask yourself if you want to commit your life and future to the ideals and example of Washington, Lincoln, Churchill, Kennedy, or someone else? Make a choice and try to follow it.

"If *science* is your hope, live by Freud's views, or Darwin's, or Einstein's. If *Communism* is your hope, put Marx into practice, or Lenin or Castro. Will *military prowess and success* solve the world's problems, and yours? Do you want to make Alexander the Great your example, or imitate Attila the Hun or maybe Douglas MacArthur? Is that what you and the human race in general (no pun intended) need most of all?

"Many make Hugh Hefner's *Playboy lifestyle* their goal---but examine the results in their lives over the long haul. Are his disciples and bunnies really happy 20-40 years later? Have they made contributions of lasting value to themselves and others?

"What about religion? Consider seriously if following the teachings and lifestyle of Muhammad, Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Joseph Smith, or some other teacher will satisfy your conscience, meet your spiritual longings and give you assurance for life after death.

"And don't forget Jesus. Does He offer true hope and purpose? Choose carefully, then commit yourself realistically."

Yes! Jesus can stand being compared with others, for "He Himself will come to have first place in everything." (Col. 1:18b, NASB.)

[The above is condensed from a message at the Ky.-Ind. Fellowship Week 2006. CDs and DVDs of *all* the messages are available from Donald Stump, 1720 Plum Creek Road, Taylorsville KY 40071. Phone: 502: 477-2252.]

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Bennie Hill, BHill40482@aol.com

Locust St. Church of Christ (Johnson City, Tennessee) Richard Ridgeway held our Homecoming meeting the first of November (2006). He presented wonderful messages and the church was blessed by his presence. Since he is now in Knoxville his wife Brenda and daughter Trenda were able to be present for part of the time. The

joint Thanksgiving service with the Mt. View church received an offering of \$500.00 that was shared equally with three different local ministries that serve the homeless and underprivileged. In December the ladies prepared 22 boxes to be sent to other countries with the Billy Graham ministries. The church also bought clothes and toys

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for the preschool children who attend. The 4 and 5 year old children led by Nancy Campbell, Debi Brewer and Gail Whistine did a fine job with their pageant. We praise God for His blessings and look forward to sharing more and growing more in 2007. --Dick Lewis

Church of Christ Worldwide (Lexington, Kentucky) would like to take this opportunity at year's end to thank many of you who have been faithful givers throughout the year to various mission works around the world. Many "laborers" on the field have expressed to us numerous times how they look forward to hearing from us each month and the encouragement it brings to them. Upon receipt of designated gifts, the mission office sends an acknowledgement letter with a monthly financial report. The same is sent to all churches for the purpose of sharing this with the whole congregations. We realize that many give through their church and may not necessarily receive a personal letter. Please look for it on your church bulletin board and if not there, please ask the minister. For financial information or other matters you might be interested in please contact us here at Church of Christ Worldwide, P.O. Box 54842, Lexington, KY 40555. (859) 269-1312.
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School of Biblical Studies (SBS) is located at the Buechel Church of Christ (Louisville, KY) where it has called home for a couple of years. The school is planning its annual Spring Lectureship for the weekend of March 2-3, 2007. Speakers this

year will include: Sonny Childs, Ervin Denkins, and Elmer Pacheco. Make plans now to attend this important meeting on "Reaching a Diverse Community." The nature of this meeting will center on Evangelism and will address evangelizing minority communities and bridging the age gap between the younger and older generations. Now, who hasn't wondered about that? Encourage your church leaders to attend and learn many valuable things that could enhance the work of every one of our congregations.

15th Annual Christian Crusade has been announced for the week of March 26-29, 2007 and will be held at the Oak Grove Church of Christ in Independence, Louisiana. The theme will be: "When Leaders of God Stop Being Leaders For God." Speakers will include: Frank Preston, Louis Schuler, Danny Broussard, Joe Stone, Harry Coultas, Robert Gill, Bennie Hill and Sonny Childs. For additional information contact: Dale Zeibarth. (985) 878-8343.

Ladies Inspiration Day is tentatively set for April 28, 2007. The theme will be "Inspiring Joy." The day will include special singing and workshops including one for teens. It was very encouraging to see five Central Kentucky churches take part in the first planning meeting (Parksville, Bohon, Salem, Belmont, and Cramer). The next meeting is scheduled for January 27th, Saturday at 10:30 a.m. It will be at the Cramer church in Lexington. Pray for God's anointing over all aspects of the day.