

"Holding fast the Faithful Word . . ."



The *Word and Work*



"Holding forth the Word of Life."

APRIL, 1993

HE RULES LIFE'S WINDS AND WAVES

Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past,
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake
All now mysterious shall be bright at last
Be still, my soul: **the waves and winds still know**
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

--Katharine von Schlegel;
translated by Jane Borthwick;
may be sung to "Finlandia."

The Church Must Overcome Future Hurdles

Howard W. Norton

The challenges faced by the church in this decade are as staggering as those being faced by society at large. Here are some of the principal challenges the church faces in the 1990s. [We include only 3 of his 10 points --AVW]

The church must deal with the growing influence of the baby boomer generation (people born between 1946 and 1964). It appears to this observer that many of the problems now existing in Churches of Christ center in a power struggle between the older generation and this younger group. Unless we open a meaningful dialogue between the older and younger generations, we can anticipate several decades of turmoil in the church.

Then, besides a generation gap, the church faces a cultural gap. While many of the older members come from rural and conservative backgrounds, younger people in the church often have little contact with rural America and are instead urban and open to change. Procedures in the local church that once seemed perfect to everyone now suffer sharp criticism from men and women who were born and reared in urban surroundings. They believe that the church doesn't grow as it should because we appear to be rural in outlook and methodology. Older people often fear that adaptations to urban demands will compromise the truth.

Also the church faces the challenge of a growing identity crisis. A part of this crisis has been caused by people on the inside who have lost confidence in our message. Another part of the crisis stems from the fact that many in the religious world (e.g. Community Bible Churches) have become increasingly Bible oriented in their doctrines. We will survive this crisis if we can learn to define ourselves primarily in terms of what we *do* believe--not in how different our beliefs are from those of other groups. We are different, to be sure; but others are adopting restoration themes and moving in our direction both organizationally and doctrinally. We may be more like them than we ever imagined possible.

[Reprinted from *Christian Chronicle*; greatly condensed.]

THE WORD AND WORK

"Declare the whole counsel of God"

Alex V. Wilson, Editor

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THEME:

HE RULES LIFE'S WINDS and WAVES

Alex V. Wilson

Sometimes the winds and waves of life nearly capsize our small boats. Sunny skies suddenly turn black, and calm seas begin to roll: The tumor is malignant. Your job is terminated. Your spouse wants a divorce. "Help, help! -- S.O.S.!"

But storms strike churches as well as individuals, threatening to destroy them. The one godly elder dies and the other two become more cantankerous than ever. Rumors circulate that the treasurer is having an affair. Those four touchy families are about to explode over some trivial matter again. "Help, help! -- S.O.S.!"

Our major article this month speaks to such crises. If it does for you half of what it has done for me since I discovered it years ago, you will be amply repaid for reading its ten pages. Yes, it's another long article, such as we ran last month. We know that many readers may be scared off by its length, but I urge you to make time to feed on it. We do not plan to run such long articles often, but occasionally we'll offer them if they are truly significant. Think of them like the book condensations featured in *Reader's Digest* -- something special.

The author, J. C. Ryle, was a church leader in England a century ago. Life dealt him several hard blows. Though born into a fairly wealthy family, a bank failure wiped out all their financial resources. Later, during a period of 15 years, his first wife and later his second suffered chronic illness and then died. So Ryle writes from experience, not just theory, when speaking of hardships. Also the church of his day sailed through stormy seas. "Modernist" preachers claimed Scripture was full of mistakes and Jesus was only a great example. Educators predicted that Christianity's days were numbered. But Ryle kept preaching Christ and His word. Only Charles Spurgeon exceeded his influence as a writer to the masses. More than 12,000,000 of his tracts, which numbered over 200 titles, were sold in over a dozen languages. (Our article this month was such a "tract"!) And he wrote twenty books as well.

So read his article. Its profound simplicity will hearten you amid personal struggles. And also amid church problems such as "Future Hurdles" and "The Tyranny of Opinionism." These terms refer to other articles this month. And be sure to read the exciting news from Jennings, as well as "Something New and Good." Our Lord does rule, and is working.

PEACE! BE STILL!

J.C. Ryle

A great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said, "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?"

And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" --Mark 4:37-40.

I wish Christians in this day studied the four Gospels more than they do. I know that all Scripture is profitable. I do not wish to exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another. But I think it would be good for some who are very familiar with the epistles, if they knew a little more about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Now why do I say this? I say it because I want Christians to know more about Christ. It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity. It is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself. It is well to be familiar with faith and grace and justification and sanctification. They are all matters pertaining to the King. But it is far better to be familiar with Jesus Himself, to see the King's own face and to behold his beauty.

Ought not the sheep to be familiar with the Shepherd? Ought not the patient to be familiar with the Physician? Ought not the bride to be familiar with the Bridegroom? Ought not the sinner to be familiar with the Savior? Beyond doubt it ought to be so. The Gospels were written to make men familiar with Christ, and therefore I wish men would study the Gospels.

Surely we cannot know the Christ too well. Surely there is not a word, nor a deed, nor a thought in the record of His life, which ought not to be precious to us. We should labor to be familiar with every line that is written about Jesus.

Come now, and let us study together a page in our Master's history. Let us consider what we may learn from the verses of Scripture which stand at the top of this page. You see Jesus there crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat with His disciples. You see a sudden storm arise while He is asleep. The waves beat into the boat, and fill it. Death seems to be close at hand. The frightened disciples awake their Master and cry for help. He arises and rebukes the wind and waves,

and at once there is a calm. He mildly reproves the faithless fears of His companions and all is over. Such is the picture. It is one full of deep instruction. Let us examine what we are meant to learn.

Troubles will come

Learn first of all, that following Christ will not prevent your having earthly sorrows and troubles.

Here are the chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus in great anxiety. The faithful little flock which believed when priests and scribes and Pharisees were all unbelieving, is allowed by the Shepherd to be much disquieted. The fear of death breaks in upon them like an armed man. Peter, James and John, the pillars of the Church about to be planted in the world, are much distressed.

Perhaps they had not reckoned on all this. Perhaps they had expected that Christ's service would at any rate lift them above the reach of earthly trials. Perhaps they thought that He who could raise the dead and heal the sick and feed multitudes with a few loaves and cast out demons with a word--He would never allow His servants to be sufferers upon earth. Perhaps they had supposed He would always grant them smooth journeys, fine weather, an easy course and freedom from trouble and cars.

If the disciples thought so they were much mistaken. The Lord Jesus taught them that a man may be one of His chosen servants, and yet have to go through many an anxiety, and endure many a pain.

I have the privilege of being one of Christ's ambassadors. In His name I can offer eternal life to any man, woman or child who is willing to have it. In His name I do offer pardon, peace, grace, glory, to any son or daughter of Adam who reads this article. But I dare not offer that person worldly prosperity as a part and parcel of the Gospel. I dare not promise the man who takes up the cross and follows Christ, that in his following he shall never meet with a storm.

I know that many do not like these terms. They would prefer having Christ and good health--Christ and plenty of money--Christ and no deaths in their family--Christ and a perpetual morning without clouds. But they do not like Christ and the cross--Christ and tribulation--Christ and the conflict--Christ and the howling wind--Christ and the storm.

Reader, is this the thought of your heart? Believe me, if it is, you are very wrong. Listen to me, and I will try to show you that you have yet much to learn.

How should we know who are true Christians if following Christ was the way to be free from trouble? How should we discern the wheat from the chaff, if it were not for the winnowing of trial? How should we know whether men served Christ for His own sake or from selfish motives, if His service brought health and wealth with it as a matter of course? The winds of winter soon show us which of the trees are evergreen and which are not. The storms of affliction and care are useful in the same way. They reveal whose faith is real, and whose is nothing but form.

How would the great work of sanctification go on in a man if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning knife which the great Vineyard-Keeper employs in order to make us fruitful in good works. The harvest of the Lord's field is seldom ripened by sunshine only. It must go through its days of wind and rain and storm.

Reader, if you profess to be a child of God, allow the Lord Jesus to sanctify you in His own way. Rest satisfied that He never makes any mistakes. Be sure that He does all things well. The wind may howl around you and the waters swell. But fear not, "He is leading you by the right way, that He may bring you to a city of habitation" (Psalm 107:7).

Jesus Himself

Learn in the second place, that the Lord Jesus Christ is truly and really man.

There are words used in this little history, which, like many other passages in the Gospels, bring out this truth in a very striking way. You are told that when the waves began to break on the ship, Jesus was in the rear part, "asleep on a cushion." He was weary, and who can wonder at it? After preaching in the open air to vast multitudes, Jesus was fatigued. Surely if the sleep of the laboring man is sweet, much more sweet must have been the sleep of our blessed Lord!

Reader, I ask you to settle deeply in your mind this great truth, that Jesus Christ was truly and indeed man. He was equal to the Father in all things, and the eternal God. But He was also man, and took part of flesh and blood, and was made like us in all things, sin only excepted. He had a body like our own. Like us, He was born of a woman. Like us, He grew and increased in stature. Like us He was often hungry and thirsty, and faint and weary. Like us, He ate and drank, rested and slept. Like us, He sorrowed and wept and felt. It is all very wonderful, but so it is. He that made the heavens, went to and fro as a poor weary man on earth! He that ruled over principalities and powers in heavenly places, took on Him a frail body like our own. He that might

have dwelt for ever in glory which He had with the Father, amid the praises of legions of angels, came down to earth and dwelt as a man among sinful men. Surely this fact alone is an amazing miracle of condescension, grace, pity and love.

I find a deep mine of comfort in this thought, that Jesus is perfect man no less than perfect God. He in whom I am told by Scripture to trust, is not only a great High Priest, but a feeling High Priest. He is not only a powerful Savior, but a sympathizing Savior. He is not only the Son of God mighty to save, but the Son of man able to feel.

Who does not know that sympathy is one of the most precious things left to us in this sinful world? It is one of the bright seasons in our dark journey here below, when we can find a person who enters into our troubles, and goes along with us in our anxieties--who can weep when we weep, and rejoice when we rejoice. Sympathy is far better than money, and far rarer too. Thousands can give who know not what it is to feel.

I see a marvelous proof of love and wisdom in the union of two natures in Christ's person. It was marvelous love in our Savior to condescend to go through weakness and humiliation for our sakes, ungodly rebels as we are. It was marvelous wisdom to fit Himself in this way to be the very Friend of friends, who could not only save man, but meet him on his own ground. I want one able to perform all things needful to redeem my soul. This Jesus can do, for He is the eternal Son of God. I want one able to understand my weakness and infirmities, and to deal gently with my soul. This again Jesus can do, for He was the Son of Man, and had flesh and blood like my own. Had my Savior been God only, I might perhaps have trusted Him, but I never could have come near to Him without fear. Had my Savior been man only, I might have loved Him, but I never could have felt sure that He was able to take away my sins. But, blessed be the Lord, my Savior is God as well as man, and man as well as God--God, and so able to deliver me--man, and so able to feel with me. Almighty power and deepest sympathy are met together in one glorious person, Jesus Christ my Lord. Surely a believer in Christ has a strong consolation. He may well trust, and not be afraid.

Your soul's business is in the hand of a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. You have to do with Jesus, who was a man upon earth like yourself. He well knows that world through which you are struggling for He dwelt in the midst of it thirty-three years. He well knows the hostility of sinners, which so often discourages you, for He endured it Himself. He well knows the art and cunning of your spiritual enemy, the Devil, for He wrestled with him in the wilderness.

Are you poor and needy? So also was Jesus. The foxes had holes, and birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head. He dwelt in a despised city. Men used to say, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" He was only a carpenter's son. He preached in a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Are you alone in the world and neglected by those who ought to love you? So also was Jesus. He came unto His own, and they received Him not. He came to be a Messiah to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and they rejected Him. The princes of this world would not acknowledge Him. The few that followed Him were publicans and fishermen. And even these at the last forsook Him.

Are you misunderstood, misrepresented and persecuted? So also was Jesus. He was called a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of publicans, a Samaritan, a madman and a devil. His character was slandered. False charges were laid against Him. An unjust sentence was passed upon Him, and, though innocent, He was condemned as a criminal to die on the Cross.

Does Satan tempt you, and offer horrid suggestions to your mind? So also did he to Jesus. He bade Him to distrust God's fatherly providence. "Command these stones to be made bread." He proposed to Him to tempt God, by exposing Himself to unnecessary danger. "Cast yourself down" from the pinnacle of the temple. He suggested to Him to obtain the kingdoms of the world for His own, by one little act of submission to himself. "All these things will I give to you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Do you ever feel great agony and conflict of mind? Do you feel in darkness, as if God had left you? So did Jesus. Who can tell the extent of the sufferings of mind He went through in the garden? Who can measure the depth of His soul's pain when He cried, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

Listen not for a moment to the wretched argument of the Roman Catholic, when he tells you that the Virgin Mary and the saints are more sympathizing than Christ. Answer him that such an argument springs from ignorance of the Scriptures and of Christ's true nature. Answer him that you have not so learned Christ, as to regard Him as an austere Judge. Answer him, that the four Gospels have taught you to regard Him as the most loving and sympathizing of Friends, as well as the mightiest and most powerful of Saviors.

The weakness of Christians

Learn, in the third place, that there may be much weakness and infirmity, even in a true Christian.

You have a striking proof of this in the conduct of the disciples here recorded, when the waves broke over the ship. They awoke Jesus in haste. They said to Him in fear and anxiety, "Master, don't you care that we perish?"

There was *unbelief*. They forgot that they were in the keeping of One who had all power in His hand. "We perish!"

There was *distrust*. They spoke as if they doubted their Lord's concern for their safety and well-being. "Don't you *care* that we perish?"

Poor faithless men! What business had they to be afraid? They had seen proof upon proof that all must be well so long as Christ was with them. They had witnessed repeated examples of His love and kindness towards them, sufficient to convince them that He would never let them come to real harm. But all was forgotten in the present danger. Sense of immediate peril often makes men have a bad memory. Fear is often unable to reason from past experience. They heard the words. They saw the waves. They felt the cold waters beating over them. They fancied death was close at hand. They could wait no longer in suspense. "Don't you care," said they, "that we perish?"

But after all, let us understand this is only a picture of what is constantly going on among believers in every age. There are too many disciples, I suspect, at this very day, like those who are here described.

Many of God's children get on very well so long as they have no trials. They follow Christ very tolerably in the time of fair weather. They fancy they are trusting Him entirely. They obtain the reputation of being very good Christians.

But suddenly some unlooked for trial assails them. Their property takes wings and flies away. Their own health fails. Death comes into their house. Tribulation or persecution arise because of the Word. And where now is their faith? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope? Alas! they are not found. Fear and doubt and distress break in upon them like a flood, and they seem at their wit's end. I know that this is a sad description. I only put it to the conscience of every real Christian, whether it is not correct and true.

Reader, the plain truth is that there is no absolute perfection among true Christians, so long as they are in the body. The best and brightest of God's saints is but a poor mixed being. Converted, renewed and sanctified though he be, he is still compassed with infirmity. There is not a just man upon earth that always does good, and sins not. A man may have true saving faith, and yet not have it always close at hand, and ready to be used.

Reader, do you have faith in Christ? Do you feel such love and confidence in Him that you cannot understand being greatly moved by any event that could happen? It is all well. I am glad to hear it. But has this faith been tried? Has this confidence been put to the test? If not, take heed of condemning these disciples hastily. Be not high-minded, but fear. Say not, because your heart is filled just now with a strong sense of Christ's mercy, "I shall never forget Him as long as I live." Oh! learn to deflate this flattering estimate of yourself. You do not know yourself thoroughly. There are more things in your inward man than you are at present aware of. The Lord may leave you as He did Hezekiah, to show you all that is in your heart (2 Chron. 32:31). Blessed is he that is clothed with humility. Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Reader I beg you to remember this. It is a lesson worth attention. The apostles believed in Christ, loved Christ and gave up all to follow Christ. And yet you see in this storm the apostles were afraid. Learn to be charitable in your judgment of them. Learn to be moderate in your expectations from your own heart. Contend to the death for the truth that no man is a true Christian who is not converted and is not a holy man. But allow that a man may be converted, have a new heart and be a holy man and yet be liable to infirmity, doubts and fears.

The power of the Lord

Learn in the fourth place, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have a striking example of His power in the history which we are now considering. The waves were breaking into the ship where Jesus was. The terrified disciples awoke Him, and cried for help. "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, 'Peace, be still.' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." This was a wonderful miracle. No one could do this but one who was almighty.

Make the winds cease with a word! Who does not know that it is a common saying, in order to describe an impossibility, "You might as well speak to the wind!?" Yet Jesus rebukes the wind, and at once it ceases. This was power.

Calm the waves with a voice! What reader of history does not know that a mighty king of England tried in vain to stop the tide rising on the shore? Yet here is one says to raging waves in a storm, "Peace, be still," and at once there is a calm. Here was power.

Reader, it is good for all men to have clear views of the Lord Jesus Christ's power. Let the sinner know that the merciful Savior in whom he is invited to trust, is nothing less than the Almighty. Let the anxious inquirer understand that if he will only rely on Jesus, and take up the cross, he relies on one who has all power in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). Let the believer remember as he journeys through the wilderness of life, that his Mediator and shepherd, and redeemer, is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and that through Him he can do all things (Phil. 4:13).

What though your conscience is lashed by the recollection of countless transgressions? What though the memory of hideous evils grieves you intolerably? What though your heart seems full of evil, and sin appears to drag you wherever it wants like a slave? What though the Devil tell you it is vain to struggle against him that there is no hope for you? I tell you there is One who can give even you pardon and peace. My Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, can rebuke the Devil's raging, can calm even your soul's misery, and say to you, "Peace, be still!" He can bid despair depart, He can drive fear away. He can remove the spirit of bondage. Oh! if any troubled reader wants calm within, let him go this day to Jesus Christ, and all shall yet be well.

But what if your heart be right with God and yet you are pressed down with a load of earthly trouble? What if the fear of poverty is tossing you to and fro, and seems likely to overwhelm you? What if pain of body be racking you to distraction day after day? What if you are suddenly laid aside from active usefulness, and compelled by infirmity to sit still and do nothing? What if death has come into your home, and left you alone crushed to the ground with sorrow? What if all this has happened? Still there is comfort in Christ. He can speak peace to wounded hearts as easily as calm troubled seas. He can rebuke rebellious wills as powerfully as raging winds. He can make storms of sorrow abate, and silence tumultuous passions as surely as He stopped the Galilean storm. He can say to the heaviest anxiety, "Peace, be still." The floods of care may be mighty, but Jesus is mightier than the waves of the sea. The winds of trouble may howl fiercely around you, but Jesus holds them in His hand. Oh! if any reader this day is broken-hearted and care-worn, let him go to Jesus Christ, and he shall be refreshed. "Come to me," He says, "all that labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Reader, I invite you this day to realize the greatness of Christ's power. Doubt anything else if you will, but never doubt His power. Christ is able to save to the uttermost, and will save you if you will let Him.

The patience of Jesus

Learn, in the last place, how tenderly and patiently the Lord Jesus deals with weak believers.

You see this truth brought out in His word to His disciples, when the wind ceased and there was calm. He might well have rebuked them sharply. He might well have reminded them of all the great things He had done for them, and reproved them for their cowardice and mistrust. But there is nothing of anger in the Lord's words. He simply asks two questions: "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

At no time in our Lord's ministry did the disciples seem to comprehend fully the object of His coming into the world. The humiliation, the atonement, the crucifixion were hidden things to them. The plainest words and clearest warnings from their Master of what was going to befall Him, seemed to have no effect on their minds. They understood not. Once Peter even tried to dissuade our Lord from suffering: "Never Lord," he said, "this shall never happen to you" (Matt. 16:22, Luke 18:34; 9:45).

Frequently you will see things in their spirit and behavior which are not all to be commended. One day, we are told, they disputed among themselves who should be greatest (Mark 9:34). Another day, they considered not His miracles, and their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52). Once, two of them wished to call down fire from heaven upon a village, because it did not receive them (Luke 9:54). In the garden of Gethsemane, the three best of them slept, when they should have watched and prayed. In the hour of His betrayal, they all forsook Him and fled. And, worst of all, Peter, the most self-confident of the twelve, denied his Master three times with an oath.

Even after the resurrection, you see the same unbelief and darkness of heart clinging to them. Though they saw their Lord with their eyes, and touched Him with their hands, even then some doubted. So weak were they in faith! So slow of heart were they to believe all that the prophets had written! So backward were they in understanding the meaning of our Lord's words, and actions, and life, and death!

But what do you see in our Lord's behavior towards these disciples all through His ministry? You see nothing but unchanging compassion, gentleness, patience and love. He does not cast them off for

their stupidity. He does not reject them for their unbelief. He does not dismiss them forever for cowardice. He teaches them as they are able to bear. He leads them on step by step, as a nurse does an infant when it first begins to walk. He sends them kind messages as soon as He is risen from the dead. "Go," He said to the women, "Go tell my brethren to go into Galilee, and there they shall see me" (Matt. 28:10). He gathers them around Him once more. He restores Peter to his place, and bids him feed His sheep. He descends to sojourn with them forty days before He finally ascends. He commissions them to go forth as His messengers and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He blesses them in parting and encourages them with that gracious promise, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world"(Matt. 28:20). Truly this was a love that passes knowledge.

Let all the world know that the Lord Christ is full of mercy. As a father pities his own children, so he pities them that fear Him. He cares for the lambs of His flock, as well as for the old sheep. He cares for the sick and feeble ones of the fold, as well as for the strong. Only let a sinner come to Christ by faith; and then, however feeble, Christ's word is pledged to him, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." He may correct him in love. He may gently reprove him at times. But He will never, never give him up. The Devil shall never pluck him from Christ's hand.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble, and ignorant. And the Lord Jesus Christ does not cast off poor sinners, who have committed their souls into His Hands, because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, No! It is His glory to pass over the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings--to make much of their weak efforts and to pardon their many faults.

Consider, I beg you, the tenderness and patience of the Lord Jesus, and be afraid no more. Fear not to take up the cross and come out boldly from the world. That same Lord and Savior who bore with the disciples, is ready and willing to bear with you. If you stumble, He will revive you. He will conduct you safely into glory. Only commit your self to His guidance, and, I assure you, He shall carry you safely home.

THE DISCIPLINE OF DISAPPOINTMENT

George B. Duncan

"Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

I wonder how many who read this article have been facing disappointments in their lives, and have discovered a tinge of bitterness in their Christian experience. It may well be that our attitude toward our failings is rather like that of the person who says, "Yes, it is all very well for So-and-so, but you do not know how I have suffered, and what I am up against." It is very tempting to think that our lot is harder than the lot of another; to say, "It is easy for him to be so radiant, to be victorious." I have now travelled far enough to realize that that attitude can be quite unjust. One of the lessons I have learned has been through the unexpected discoveries of the secret sorrows of God's people. Again and again the wind of circumstance has blown aside the outer trappings to reveal the sackcloth within upon the flesh. Behind the most radiant life there is often the most bitter trial, and that life which is so wonderfully used of God is at the same time most violently assailed.

Here in the pages of Scripture the great apostle draws aside the veil, and lets us gaze upon his inner heart and experience. How often people must have said of Paul, "Oh, it was easy for him, with his experience, his understanding, his knowledge." But as we gaze upon the heart of the great warrior saint, let us learn the lessons that God can and does teach the willing heart in the discipline of disappointment. There are three simple words that sum up, it seems to me, the teachings of this passage--frustration, revelation, and transformation.

Frustration. "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me . . . For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Here we have revealed to us in the heart of the apostle *the pressure* of a sore trial. The exact nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh is not revealed, but the language he uses is enough to indicate that it was a trial too grievous to be borne. Was it some weakness in the realm of his temperament and personality, this thing which made him so acutely aware of the old nature, with its weakness and sinfulness? Was it something in the nature of a physical disability which seemed to threaten his usefulness in God's service, so that its origin could only be ascribed to Satan? Or was it some factor in his spiritual environment which seemed to be against him, beating

in upon his soul, opposing every step he took in obedience to the will of God? "A thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me." Whatever it was, it was something of which he was acutely aware, and something from which he longed desperately to be free; if only the pressure could be eased, if only the thorn could be removed, if only the health could be restored, if only the opposition would cease, if only . . . !

Let me ask, is there in your life the pressure of some sore trial? Has your thinking through the past weeks, months, and years, been along this line--if only . . . ? "If only the pain could be relieved, if only my husband were keen, if only my congregation were more responsive, if only I had better health, if only I had a different job, if only I were not so weak, if only . . . " I pray God that we may leave our "if only" behind us for ever.

Not only do I read here of the *pressure* of a trial, but of its *persistence*; and therein lay the disappointment--"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Paul did what I expect you have done, and perhaps are still doing. To face this tremendous pressure in his life, he started praying about it. In Paul's evaluation this thing had to go, it would be better if it went, God could use him far more without it. I do not claim to know anything of prayer in the measure that Paul knew it; all I know is that behind the phrase, "I besought the Lord," there must have been an intensity of desire about which most of us know very little. Have you been praying earnestly about your trial? Have you the same conviction as Paul about your thorn in the flesh, that you would be better without it? Have you started to pray that God would take it away? I want to learn with you as I notice this, not only that Paul started praying about it, but that he *stopped* praying about it. "I besought the Lord thrice." and then he did not pray about it any more. The prayer ceased, but the pressure continued; and although Paul never draws the veil aside again, as far as we know the pressure of that thorn remained right to the end of the road. And it may be, fellow believer, that God wants you to stop praying, to stop asking Him to take out of your life something that He has no intention of removing.

The second word is *Revelation*. We read that after Paul stopped praying "He said unto me." In our praying about our trial is it possible that we have been so busy saying things to God that it may be we have not had time to listen to what He wants to say to us? And it may very well be that what He wants to say to us will be rather like what He said to Paul. He talked to Paul about a gracious purpose in his trial. We can gather this from the fact that Paul speaks twice of this purpose--"Lest I should be exalted above measure." Paul was wrong in his evaluation of this thorn in the flesh: It seems to him not only useless,

but worse than useless, a positive hindrance; and here he discovers that it is intensely important and valuable as God sees it. As long as the pressure of the thorn persisted, Paul could never be a proud man. As long as he was made aware and kept conscious of the old nature dwelling within he could be none other than "the chief of sinners." We may ask, why was it necessary? Surely a man of Paul's insight knew his one weakness--this man who could say, "In me . . . there dwelleth no good thing." Then why this trial? All I can say is that God must have known best what Paul needed, just as He knows best what you and I need. With such a man as Paul--I say it reverently--God could not afford to take any risks. Too much was at stake, and God wanted to make it as sure as He could that Paul's usefulness was not lost, and that he was kept for ever the humble, meek soul that God could beautify with His salvation, and use in His service. It was not enough that Paul's mind should give assent to the truth; God wanted it burnt into his very soul that without Christ he was nothing.

I cannot begin to think what may be God's purpose in the trial He permits in your life. I believe He will tell you. It may be a purpose concerning you and your character; or it may be a purpose that God is interested in through you; but, child of God, there *is* a purpose behind the pressure.

The second revelation that God made to Paul was that of His glorious provision for the trial--"My grace is sufficient for thee." Have you been praying that God would take something out of your life, that He would change your circumstance? and God is speaking to you, and is now telling you that this thing is going to remain; it is not going to be taken away, the pressure is going to remain. Are you ready to believe that God has made adequate provision for your need?

If you are, then I want to suggest to you that the third word will come into your experience--frustration, revelation, *transformation*. And what a glorious transformation we find in him! It is a double transformation--of weakness into strength: "for when I am weak, then am I strong"; and of sadness into joy: "Most gladly therefore will I rather *glory* in mine infirmity."

The transformation of weakness into strength. Is not your heart filled with a desire and eagerness and expectation that God will transform your weakness into His strength? Would it not be wonderful if that place which has seen again and again the breakdown of our faith and experience should be the scene of the building up of His strength, and that where we have been weak in the past we are going to be strong in the future? Would you not give a great deal for that experience to be yours?

How was it that this transformation came? I wish that Paul could be here to tell us; for we can only grope after the truth behind the words. I suggest that the transformation of his weakness may have had something to do with a kinship that Paul found between the thorn God gave to him and the thorns God gave to his Lord. Was the pressure of the thorn an immediate reminder of the power of the Cross? Was it that the pressure of this trial made him aware of the existence and persistence of the flesh, the old nature within--making him desperately aware of his weakness and sinfulness and helplessness? And was it his experience that at the very moment in which he was made aware of "the flesh," he was reminded of the way of deliverance from its power in the Cross of Christ? It would almost seem to me as if the weapon that Satan had planned to use to overthrow the apostle had been seized by the apostle out of the very hands of Satan, and had been turned into a weapon to overthrow the enemy. When Satan sent this trial, so that the old nature might be stimulated and aroused to life and sin, he found that all he did was to enable Paul, the moment he was reminded of its power and presence in his life, to hand it over once again in identification and faith to the Cross of Christ. The pressure of the thorn and the power of the Cross were bound and welded together in the heart of Paul, so that he could say, "When I am weak, then am I strong," as I know the power of His resurrection within me, being made conformable unto His death.

Would it not be wonderful if that experience could become ours, as we face that trial which is to remain in our lives! We are going to stop praying that it may be removed, and the pressure of that thorn is going to be for us transformed into the power of the Cross. Then, of course, the other transformation follows, the *transformation of our sadness into joy*--"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory--take pleasure--in my infirmities."

Has the sun gone out of your Christian experience? Has the joy gone, and has it become a desperately hard, dreary, drab drudgery? God wants to bring back the joy. He wants us to live what Bishop Taylor-Smith used to call "the life of continual rejoicing." In our experience of His overcoming power we shall find a new joy. There was nothing lovely about the crown of thorns which God gave to Christ; there may be nothing lovely about the thorn He has given to you. The cross was a harsh and cruel thing, an unjust thing, a hurtful thing, a dreadful thing. Your thorn and your trial may be all of that; and when today you look forward into the future, and you think that that thing is going to be in your life to the end of the road, it almost seems more that can be borne. Yet it will be transformed!

May I add just one more word? Did you notice that Paul said his trial was given by God? "There was given to me." You and I may

have been trying to thrust something out of our lives which all the time God is holding out toward us, saying: "Take it, My child, it is My Gift."

I do not know what sort of Christmas present you used to like when you were small. There was one kind of Christmas present I never liked; it was what we called as children a "useful present"--a pair of gloves or even money. A pair of gloves alongside a Hornby engine seemed a dull, an almost unwanted gift. May I say very reverently that the thing which you and I want to be rid of out of our lives is in all probability in the mind and counsel of God a "useful gift." It comes from Him. Will you take it from Him, and almost tremblingly and in fear give thanks to the Giver for the gift? The Savior took the gift that God gave Him. He faced the thorns in Gethsemane, and it was a costly thing for Him to say "Thank You" to the Father, but He did. And maybe God wants some of us to say, "Thank You, Lord, for Your gift to me."

Some years ago a Sunday school class was told the story of Gethsemane. One child was perplexed to understand why, after the failure of the disciples to accede to the request of the Savior to watch and pray, the third time He came back to them Christ said to the disciples: "Sleep on now, and take your rest." The small child asked the teacher why it was that Jesus said this. The teacher could not at moment think of an answer --Sunday school teachers are often placed in that position--when the child himself suddenly said, "Oh, I think I know why He said, 'Sleep on now'; it was because He had seen His Father's face, and did not need their help any more."

Oh, that you and I might see the Father's face, and not need the prayers and the help and the sympathy of others any more! Disappointed, spiritually tired child of God, may the pressure of the thorn in your life bring flooding in the power of the Cross of Christ, the power of His resurrection!

QUESTIONS ASKED OF US

Carl Kitzmiller

How responsible are society, schools, homes, and others for the wrong lives that many people lead? Doesn't a lot of crime and perversion begin with broken homes and the failure of parents and others?

There are two powerful influences in the life of every human being. One is heredity, the other environment. Heredity speaks those things handed down through our genes from our ancestors. Environment speaks of external conditions which come to bear in our life from birth--the action of parents, the influences of others, the teaching that one receives, the events that help form decisions, the circumstances under which we live, etc. There can be no sensible denial that these both affect very much what we are.

Heredity is often evident in physical features and even in mental ability. Children may look very much like a parent or a grandparent. Certain traits and characteristics, both good and bad and indifferent, are quite clearly passed along. While this is not totally predictable it is nevertheless certain. Even mannerisms--the toss of the head, the way one holds an object--betray heredity. In a store recently I saw a person who was a stranger, yet I kept thinking, "I must have met or known that person at some time." After a few minutes it occurred to me that mannerisms and certain physical features were those of someone I did know. I have no doubt that they are very close relatives. Some of us are by heredity more optimistic or pessimistic, more or less active, more or less brilliant than others. No doubt some of our likes and dislikes trace back to this source. Twins reared separately under very different circumstances show great similarities. Ancestry does leave some very marked characteristics on us. And don't forget that by heredity we are descendants of Adam, with fleshly desires which are very strong.

If heredity is powerful, so is environment. Very very early we begin to be formed by the forces that bear on our lives. Many of our reactions are learned. The love, or lack thereof, from our parents, their discipline, their standards and values are factors which help to form our personality and character. It is the fact that children are teachable which makes us emphasize the importance of Christian homes and beginning very early in teaching them God's word. We learn to respond in certain ways. We learn values. This can work for us or against us, depending on what is taught.

Generally speaking, our environment may be complex, consisting of both good and bad influences, ever changing as we move from

place to place or enter into different periods of our life. The forces of God and the forces of Satan are both to be found in most places. We begin very early to choose which influences we will most allow to affect us. Our heredity seems to have some influence on how we will react to our environment, on what portion of it we allow to influence us; but the teaching we receive, both by example and by word, has a greater effect on the choice. Environment is not limited to childhood but goes on affecting us all our lives in some measure.

All of which is to recognize the strong effects from these two forces. Those children who grow up exposed to violence, hatred, drunkenness, crime, etc., in homes where selfishness rules or where little influence for good is presented, certainly stand a good chance of being criminals, drunkards and dopers, etc. It would be foolish not to recognize this. Surely every Christian needs an awareness of these powers in a life so he does not lose his compassion. There are those who have "never had half a chance." We sorely need to be able to look at those in sin, crime, and ignorance with the realization of that except for the grace of God we might be in their situation. Those who have come from good homes and who have been deeply influenced by Christian values must beware of taking too much credit for what they are.

There is another side to the coin, however. While heredity and environment are both powerful, they are not mechanical and fatalistic. Their control in a life is not so absolute as to rob mankind of the freedom of choice. None of us are merely victims of these forces in our lives to such an extent that there can be no changing. (We all recognize that there are a few people who lack the mental capacity for making choices and who are not responsible for their actions, so we are speaking here of those who are responsible beings. And--we might add--responsible before God, not according to mere human sociological theory.) There is a force still greater than either that we have mentioned. It is the power of the Spirit of God to create new life within the believer. The whole Bible, and especially the New Testament, recognizes the power of people to make a choice for God and declares the personal responsibility of those who sin.

There is a strong effort in our day to excuse sin on the grounds that it is the result of disease, or social conditions, or something over which the individual had no power. The attempt is to put the blame somewhere other than on the individual. But God's word holds the sinner responsible for his sin. Without denying the influence of parents or others, Jehovah declared that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezck. 18:4). He went on to declare that ultimately we are all responsible for our own sin. Those who come into judgment are going to give account to God for their own sin.

Poverty is sometimes blamed as a reason for crime and for sin. But some of those who grow up in poverty are the finest examples of manhood to be found anywhere. The same environment does not always produce the same type of character. This is because of the power of choice. Broken homes are not the nursery that we would willingly choose for a child, but there are those who serve God in spite of this bad influence. They made a choice to do so. One of the glories of the gospel is its power to reach into the lives of those who have been fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners and such like, to change those lives. At Corinth there were those who had come out of just that kind of background: "And such were some of you: but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

Sometimes there are those who grow up in good homes, who have been under the right influences during much of their life, who have been taught the word of God from infancy, and yet they throw it all aside and choose sin and rebellion. They have made a choice. The good environment can be rejected as well as the bad. Human beings are not robots.

Surely we ought to do what we can toward changing those things that "hinder the truth" (cf. Rom. 1:18ff). We are not putting any premium on the wrong, negative things. By all means we must be diligent in teaching God's word and in bringing this great positive influence to bear. But let the individual face up to his own responsibility before God for the choices he makes. The guilt of his sin is his, not another's. Sin never has such power in a life but that in the power of Christ and by the grace of God the direction of that life can be changed.

Revival, Our Greatest Need --

THE FIRST OBLIGATION OF THE CHURCH

A. W. Tozer

The first look of the church is toward Christ, who is her Head, her Lord and her All. After that she must be self-regarding and world-regarding, with a proper balance between the two.

By self-regarding I do not mean self-centered. I mean that the church must examine herself constantly to see if she be in the faith;

she must engage in severe self-criticism with a cheerful readiness to make amends; she must live in a state of perpetual penitence, seeking God with her whole heart; she must constantly check her life and conduct against the Holy Scriptures and bring her life into line with the will of God.

By world-regarding I mean that the church must know why she is here on earth; that she must acknowledge her indebtedness to all mankind (Rom. 1:14, 15); that she must take seriously the words of her Lord, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" and "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The task of the church is twofold: to spread Christianity throughout the world and to make sure that the Christianity she spreads is the pure New Testament kind.

Theoretically the seed being the word of God, should produce the same kind of fruit regardless of the spiritual condition of those who scatter it; but it does not work that way. The identical message preached to the heathen by men of differing degrees of godliness will produce different kinds of converts and result in a quality of Christianity varying according to the purity and power of those who preach it.

Christianity will always reproduce itself after its kind. A worldly-minded, unspiritual church, when she crosses the ocean to give her witness to peoples of other cultures, is sure to bring forth on other shores Christianity much like her own.

Not the naked Word only but the character of the witness determines the quality of the convert. The church can do no more than transplant herself. What she is in one land she will be in another. A crab apple does not become a Grimes Golden by being carried from one country to another. God has written His law deep into all life; everything must bring forth after its kind.

The popular notion that the first obligation of the church is to spread the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth is false. *Her first obligation is to be spiritually worthy to spread it.* Our Lord said "Go ye," but He also said "Tarry ye," and the tarrying had to come before the going. Had the disciples gone forth as missionaries before the day of Pentecost it would have been an overwhelming spiritual disaster, for they could have done no more than make converts after their own likeness, and this would have altered for the worse the whole history of the Western world and had consequences throughout the ages to come.

To spread a degenerate brand of Christianity to pagan lands is not to fulfill the commandment of Christ of discharge our obligation to the heathen. These terrible words of Jesus haunt my soul: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." To win men to Judaism from among the Gentiles was altogether a good thing to do. Thousands of happy converts were won to the religion of Moses during the years of Israel's spiritual ascendancy, but at the time of Christ, Judaism had sunk so low that her missionary efforts wrought actual harm instead of good.

It would appear logical that a subnormal, powerless church would not engage in missionary activity, but again the facts contradict the theory. Christian groups that have long ago lost every trace of moral fire nevertheless continue to grow at home and reproduce themselves in other lands. Indeed there is scarcely a fringe sect or heretical cult these days but is enjoying amazing success among the backward peoples of the world.

The evangelical wing of the church has in recent years become world-regarding to a remarkable degree. Within the last twenty years evangelical missionary activity on foreign fields has been stepped up tremendously. But there is in the whole thing one dangerous weakness. That weakness is the naive assumption that we have only to reach the last tribe with our brand of Christianity and the world has been evangelized. This is an assumption that we dare not make.

Evangelical Christianity is now tragically below the New Testament standard. Worldliness is an accepted part of our way of life. Our religious mood is social instead of spiritual. We have lost the art of worship. We are not producing saints. Our models are successful businessmen, celebrated athletes and theatrical personalities. We carry on our religious activities after the methods of the modern advertiser. Our homes have been turned into theaters. Our literature is shallow and our hymnody borders on sacrilege. And scarcely anyone appears to care.

We must have a better kind of Christian soon or within another half century we may have no true Christianity at all. Increased numbers of demi-Christians is not enough. We must have a reformation.

[Though written around 1960, this article still accurately describes many Christians. Next month the other side of the coin.]

VOICES FROM THE FIELDS

Robert Garrett

P.O. Box 30, Ruwa, Zimbabwe

RAIN: When we arrived back in Zimbabwe 3rd November, everything was dry; the yard and garden just a dustbowl. But the Lord sent rain beginning the middle of that month and the world began to turn beautifully green. Our wells were dry until this month and we have been hauling water from a kind neighbor. We have had a lot of rain since Christmas and there is enough water in the wells for us to pump into our storage tanks. It is so good to be able to take a shower again! Fervent thanks to our Heavenly Father who has heard and is answering prayer; also appreciation to all of you who have remembered us and this land in your prayers.'

KUWADZANA: We are now digging the foundation trenches and hope to pour the footings in February. Because of the type of clay soil on the site we are forced to dig down to a depth of four to five feet to find a proper bearing surface (even though it is not a large building - sufficient to seat 200). That deep foundation will add quite a bit to the cost.

The City wrote us a warning letter that unless we have made considerable progress by April 23 this year they could cancel the agreement of sale and take the site back!

THIEVES BREAK THROUGH AND STEAL: The last couple of weeks have been terrible. The alternator was stolen off the tractor. Then an attempt was made to break into the garage through both a door and a window and then through the garage roof. I repaired the roof and no sooner had I done that than they returned another night and made an entrance through a different part of the roof, crawled through the narrow crawl space above the printing room, dropped 10 feet down into the garage, and stole my welding machine. It is a heavy transformer weighing about a hundred pounds. They managed to hoist this up into the crawl space, drag it along and out through the hole they had made. We only discovered it was missing this morning. At first I thought someone must have a key that fitted as there were no visible signs of breaking in; until in the afternoon we discovered the hole in the roof over the printing room. Our neighbor told us that thieves had actually chiseled out the mortar around the concrete blocks of his garage to make a large hole through which they removed a number of valuables and a wheelbarrow. But they dropped something which made a noise. He went out to investigate and they ran off leaving the barrow behind.

Our Monthly Saturday-afternoon Bible Study (held in the Arcadia building) is well attended with the building full of adults and the classroom jammed with little kids.

CAMPS: Three Bible camps are planned for the April/May school holiday period.

**Nakahara Mission c/o Piedmont Church of Christ
7110 Bruton Road Dallas, Texas 75217**

In our last newsletter to you in November, we told you of Teruko Nakahara's decision to come to the states to live. We would like to give you additional information concerning her move so that you will be up to date on plans as we know them. She will live in the Dallas area and be near her daughter, Annette, and her family. She plans to worship the Lord with us at Piedmont. Family and friends will see to any additional needs she may have. Lord willing, Teruko will arrive in late April or early May.

Teruko's letter to me a few weeks ago stated that "the work here is about the same in numbers, but the spirit is very good. . . Bad cold and flu are going around now and we all suffered and I can't get rid of it completely yet." Continue in prayer for the Nakahara Mission.

Hollace and Ila Sherwood

March 4, 1993

The High Lysine Corn Project of the Bryantsville Church of Christ and of Rosehill Farms, Inc. is going great. The growing season of 1992 was excellent for growing corn in southern Indiana and we had 8300 bushels of high lysine corn from Rosehill Farms. Another 440 bushels of high lysine corn was grown by a young man of the Highway Church of Christ in Pekin, IN and added to the high lysine corn bin. We usually send up to 700 sixty pound bags in a semi-truck load which amounts to 770 bushels of corn. Mathematics tells us that we should anticipate sending 11 loads from the 1992 crop. We have already sent from the 1992 crop the following: One load of 636 bags to Mexico; A second load of 701 bags to Somalia; A third load of 700 bags to the Byelorussian Children's Fund, Minsk, Belarus; A fourth load of 600 bags to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

For those who may not be familiar with the term "high lysine corn" we would point out that lysine is one of the essential amino acids that a person's body uses in protein synthesis. Lysine is low in all the cereal grains -- corn, wheat, rice, etc. This variety of corn, developed by Purdue University over 30 years ago, is higher in lysine and

in total protein than "ordinary" corn. The additional protein and lysine makes it valuable in the diet of individuals in Third World Countries where protein is very limited.

Of course, we still need help both in financial and in physical ways. The large corn crop in the United States this year made the corn cheaper so that we can provide a sixty pound bag for \$3.25. (It has been \$3.60 for the last three years.) Donations can be made to the Corn Fund, Bryantsville Church of Christ, Bill Hopkins, Treas., R. R. 1 Box 271, Mitchell, IN 47446.

We need physical help in bagging the corn and in loading it on trucks. This help usually comes from the Bryantsville neighborhood and from church groups in the area. However, there are other possibilities. In August of 1992, the Southeast Christian Church of Louisville, KY brought a small group of young people to the Mitchell area. They camped over Wednesday and Thursday nights at Spring Mill State Park which is about 20 minutes away from us. They bagged corn on Wednesday and Thursday mornings and had the afternoons to explore the trails, caves, swimming pool, and the old village at Spring Mill. Then they helped load a semi-truck of corn on Friday morning. We all had a great time. This was possible because we could plan ahead and make the necessary arrangements for camping and for a truck to be here. Would you have a group that would like to participate in such an activity? We would be glad to work with you and try to schedule such an event.

Some church groups want to participate in another way. They like to provide written material to go into the bags with the corn. We have had two church groups who have provided New Testaments in Spanish to go in bags of corn going to Mexico and Honduras. We have included the Gospel of John in Spanish in some of the bags. One individual has provided funds to print bags to read "Presented in the name of Jesus Christ" in English and in Spanish. There are many opportunities to help in physical, in financial, and in spiritual ways. However, of greatest importance is your prayerful concern.

Ila and I often visit churches and speak about this project. We come free of charge and can adapt our talk to a variety of groups. We have slides of Haiti, Honduras, and Mexico where we have visited. We also have a 20 minute video tape which shows the storage, the bagging process, the loading process, and the fellowship that results. We would be glad to send it to you if you request it.

Our address is: R.R. 1, Box 408, Mitchell, IN 47446; phone, (812) 849-2640.

THE TYRANNY OF OPINIONISM

Leroy Garrett

Believing an opinion never saved anyone, and disbelieving an opinion never damned anyone. --Alexander Campbell

That pungent quotation sets the stage for some things I want to say about opinion. I also want to make use of Campbell's reference to "the tyranny of opinionism."

It may appear at the outset that we are disparaging opinion, which, of course, we must not do since much of our presumed "knowledge" is opinion. Most of what we believe is really opinion, or so it would seem from Webster's definition: "a belief not based on absolute certainty of positive knowledge but on what seems true." How much do we believe or know with "absolute certainty"? Webster says that all else is opinion. He adds this to his definition: "opinion applies to a conclusion or judgement which, while it remains open to dispute, seems true or probable to one's mind."

Opinions are not tyrannical they are opinions, but when they are elevated from "what seems true" to being "absolute certainty." Tyranny is also due to an unyielding attitude of "You have to see it my way or else," which makes tyranny of opinionism a behavioral problem more than a doctrinal problem. There is a big difference between having an opinion and being opinionated. Tyranny begins not with an opinion but with being pushy about an opinion.

Opinions grow out of facts. We will all agree that George Washington was the first president of the United States, for that is a matter of fact, what Webster calls absolute certainty. No opinion here, for we are dealing with a fact. But when one concludes that Washington was the greatest president he has drawn an opinion. He may be able to make a strong case for his conclusion, and he may be right, but he must realize that his conclusion is an opinion and not a fact, and therefore open to dispute. Others may believe that Lincoln or Jefferson was the greatest president, or someone else, and make just as strong a case.

Facts are truth, something said or done. Opinions are judgements drawn from facts. This means that opinions are necessary for the living of these days. It is in drawing opinions that we make life work -- deciding whom to marry, what career to pursue, what food to eat, clothes to wear, books to read, friends to make, and all the rest of life. We make the best "educated guess" we can, which is what a good opinion is, about a thousand things in life. We seldom have the luxury

of dealing with what Webster calls "absolute certainty." All else is opinion -- deciding the best we can with the facts available to us.

Since opinions are not highly esteemed we sometimes call them by some euphemism, such as convictions. It is the other guy that has opinions, while we have convictions. But convictions are no more than deeply-held opinions. So with matters of faith or things we strongly believe. They are still matters of opinion --as distinguished from matters of fact (knowledge).

This means that theology and most all thinking about religion is opinion. That is why we have to give careful thought to the old motto that all parties accede to: "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of opinion, liberty; in all things, love." While we all accept the merit of this motto, we cannot agree on what are matters of faith over against what are matters of opinion. What is a matter of faith to one is a matter of opinion to another. We might solve this dilemma by recognizing that most all of our thinking about religion is opinion.

That is why the motto would be better if it said: "In essentials (or matters of the faith), unity; in non-essentials (opinions, methods, and personal preferences), liberty; in all things, love."

This implies that only the basic facts of the Christian faith are essential, which could be described as matters of the faith, as distinguished from matters of faith (scruples or opinions).

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Lord of glory is a fact of both Scripture and history. It is not an opinion. It is a statement of fact that one either accepts or does not accept. It is an essential part of the faith. To delve into the deeper dimensions of that proposition and draw deductions about the meaning of the Sonship and Lordship of Christ would be theology -- opinion -- which might or might not be true. Such theology is important and we should theologize. But we should not tyrannize!

There is a vast difference in the understanding of "Jesus is Lord" of a derelict off the street and a sophisticated theologian. But when both believe that proposition and take it to heart they believe the one essential thing. The derelict may never be able to theologize about Jesus Christ, except to share his faith in very simple terms, but he doesn't have to. It is not essential. And yet we value the conclusions of the theologian, for he deepens our faith and improves our understanding. The basics of the faith are essential to being; theology and doctrine contribute to *well-being*.

Our pioneer father Thomas Campbell dealt with this distinction in his *Declaration and Address*. One proposition reads as follows:

That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet they are not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

By inferences and deductions Campbell means opinions (theology!). He grants that such theological opinions may well be true, but even so they cannot be imposed upon others until they come to see for themselves that they are true.

Campbell goes on to say, "Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church."

This is the context in which Alexander Campbell came to refer to the tyranny of opinionism. It is tyrannical to bind our opinions upon others as terms of communion. But both men held that well-studied opinions or deductions have their place. They belong to the "after and progressive edification of the Church." They are a matter of education in the school of Christ where those enrolled are in different grades. Our former derelict brother may not get beyond the first grade, and that is all right. No deduction or opinion of someone at an advanced level will be imposed upon him. That is Christian grace.

It remains to be said that in all our parties in the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches we have been less than faithful to Thomas Campbell's charge. We have imposed our opinions upon others as tests of fellowship, whether in reference to such methods as missionary societies and instrumental music or such doctrinal issues as the millennium or inerrancy. Churches, like individuals, may differ in their opinions and preferences. We can have churches that support the agencies and those that do not; churches that have Sunday schools and those that do not. Some may be premillennial and others amillennial. All these things are opinions on which we may and will differ. So long as we "hold forth the head who is Christ" we are united in the one basic essential.

This does not mean that a church or an individual might not hold a destructive opinion or practice, and that others should not be concerned when this is the case. But still we accept each other on the ground of general loyalty to Jesus Christ, and we deal with error within an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

Finally, we do well to remember that we can all agree on what the Scriptures actually say. We differ and come up with varying opinions over what we think the Bible *means* by what it says. That Jesus said,

"The kingdom of heaven is within you: is a fact of Scripture, a truth that all believers can accept. Just what our Lord meant when he said that is a matter of interpretation, an opinion. Leo Tolstoy wrote an entire book on that one statement of Jesus. He might have been right in his interpretation or he might have been wrong, or partly right and partly wrong. We might agree or disagree with Tolstoy's opinion, but we can all agree that our Lord did indeed say that the kingdom of God is within you. Facts or truths, therefore, are what the Bible actually says. Opinion is what we think it means by what it says. It is wrong for us to tyrannize people with what we think the Bible means by what it says, and thus form sects and factions.

So, Alexander Campbell was right when he said that believing an opinion never saved anybody, and disbelieving an opinion never damned anybody. We are saved by eternal truth, by a Person. The marvel of it is that when it comes to the great truths of the faith and to the fact of the Person of Christ we are more united than we are willing to admit. --*Restoration Review*

Something NEW, Something GOOD

By the Editor

It may seem dangerous for a magazine editor to warmly praise another magazine, but that's what I'm about to do. For *Wineskins* has appeared, and it's exciting. I hope a number of you will subscribe to it, and I've already arranged to reprint articles from it occasionally. Leroy Garrett's *Restoration Review* is published no more, as I reported in our February issue. But *Wineskins* is here (it actually began in May '92) to carry on a similar sort of probing, prodding, yet hope-instilling ministry especially to the Churches of Christ.

Here are excerpts from its initial issue: Co-editor Phillip Morrison says,

Wineskins is about change--bold and responsible change. Historically, we have responded to change either by refusing to acknowledge the need for change or by accepting uncritically whatever change someone proposed. One reaction produces slavery to form and tradition while the other produces slavery to one's own wishes and desires. Neither is acceptable . . . We have not always taken kindly to change, yet change has continued to come. Rather than fight change, *Wineskins* seeks to direct it in biblical channels.

Co-editor Rubel Shelly further explains, "This is not a call to change the gospel. [That] is a once-for-all endowment from God, and

the message of the cross meets the deepest need of broken lives. The changes needed are in the areas of our identity . . . our mission . . . and our methodologies for worship, ministry, and outreach."

And co-editor Mike Cope writes, "We want to provide a well-aimed forum for church renewal among Churches of Christ. And true church renewal means a refocusing on the God who has redeemed us in Jesus Christ. It means a fresh awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit." He goes on to tell of various themes the magazine will emphasize: worship, lessons from our past, testimonies from the present, stimulation toward needed changes, understanding current issues in our world, and creative writing of various kinds.

The editors are from the new breed of leaders in the mainstream Churches of Christ. They gladly acknowledge and act on the fact that God's great family on earth is *much* bigger than "us," and yet they are grateful for the valuable insights of our "Restoration Movement" heritage too. (See "Thank God for . . . Your Legacy," by Allen and Reece in our Jan. issue; also "Nashville Jubilee." last month.) Their goal is to move "the Church of Christ born of the American Restoration Movement . . . closer to the church of Christ revealed in Scripture. Restoration is a never-finished project, and we hope to stimulate its pursuit in our generation. Our list of writers will not be limited to our own heritage, for one of the most helpful things to a clear vision of ourselves will be to hear others' perspective on us and receive their counsel-rebuke humbly."

They are committed to "a Christ-centered magazine," and intend "to write practically for a broad audience and not technically for a handful of academics. We promise to undergird our efforts with earnest prayer. And we covenant . . . to be positive rather than reactive in tone."

In addition, the first issue had an article by Max Lucado. If you aren't reading his books, you are missing so-o-o much!

Write for a sample magazine to Wineskins, P.O. Box 129004, Nashville TN 37212-9858. A one-year subscription costs \$14.95.

NEWS and NOTES

Edited by Jack Blaes

Young People Eager to Serve

Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 9:37-38, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest fields." Among our churches we have read these words and prayed that God would send them forth. Now it is time for us to move on faith and put things in motion so that we will not be held accountable for inaction.

Through the Christian Youth Encampment and the direction of the Denham Springs church, a week was devoted to studies of mission work both in 1990 and 1991. Bro. Victor Broaddus told of needs of missionaries, how to get involved, and what was necessary to go. Here are three good results of that effort:

Kent Bowers, son of David and the late Jackie Bowers of Welsh, is now preparing for mission work at Johnson Bible College in Tennessee. The Jennings church sent Kent to Japan summer of 1992 to work with Bro. Moto on an internship. He came home wanting to return to be used of God and is now making ready.

Leckey Gough, son of Tommy and Sheila Gough, worships at LeCompte Church of Christ and has been very faithful and willing to work for the Lord. He is currently attending LSU-E but would like to attend Harding University to be better equipped to work for the Lord. He would like to join Bro. Broaddus in June for the 6-week trip to the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan. The LeCompte and Jennings churches have each committed

\$1000 toward Leckey's trip but an additional \$1200 is needed.

Amy LaSage, daughter of Hardy and the late Harriet LaSage, is a member of the Jennings church and has been very active in the children's program. She will graduate with honors from high school this year and wants to attend a Christian college, majoring in nursing, to prepare for mission work. The Jennings church will help her go to Mexico to work with Carlos and Manzinita Rincon-Inglesias this summer. The cost will not be so great as the others, but some \$500 is needed. She will be using this summer as an internship to better understand what mission work will involve.

Can you see God preparing His workers for the future? Isn't it wonderful how He answers prayers! Don't you want to get involved? The Jennings church will oversee these young folks as they go out. We wanted to share this news with you for several reasons.

First, we solicit your prayers for Leckey and Amy as they go forth and for Kent as he continues his studies. Pray that God will use them mightily in the vineyard. Second, we know that some of you have a concern about our young people and their wanting to be used of God. One of the best ways is to put them in the field under capable leadership to experience what it will require of them. Pray that they will have the stamina to endure. Third, we extend to you the privilege of joining us financially to see that both of these young people get to go in 1993. If you wish to help, you may send your financial gifts to Jennings

Church of Christ, P.O. Box 36, Jennings, LA 70546, and mark it "Missions '93."

--Douglas Broyles, Elder at Jennings Church of Christ

Antioch Christian Camp

Teen Week June 13 - 19

\$40.00

Registration: 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Close of Camp: Saturday 10:00 a.m.

Ages: 13 - 18 years old (boys and girls)

First Chance Week June 20 - 22

\$20.00

Registration: 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Close of Camp: Tuesday 7:00 p.m.

Ages: 6 - 8 years old (boys and girls)

Girls Week June 27 - July 2

\$40.00

Registration: 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Close of Camp: Friday at Noon

Ages: 9 - 12 years old

Music Week July 11 - 18 \$45.00

Registration: 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Close of Camp: Sunday Night
(announced)

Ages: 13 - Young Adult (boys and girls)

Boys Week July 18 - 23 \$40.00

Registration: 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Close of Camp: Friday at Noon

Ages: 9 - 12 years old

Teen Retreat September 17 - 19

\$20.00

Registration: 7:00 p.m. Friday Night

Close of Retreat: 12:00 Noon

Ages: 13 - 18 years old

--Joe Strunk, Minister.

Eighteenth Street

The Eighteenth Street Church continues to grow. Bro. Ball feeds us with Spirit-filled messages. A family of six has placed membership with us. Also two new children are attending from the neighbor-

hood. We have several adults worshipping with us from other churches. The brethren are working well together and growing in spirit. A regular visitation to some of our people in the neighborhood has started. We hope they will return to worship with us again. We are having good Bible studies on Wednesday nights. Our congregation still meets once a month in our fellowship room for a meal together and lots of good fellowship.

We enjoy reading the W&W magazine very much. I especially like the articles on church history.

--Hazel Vibbert, Reporter.

Tell City Church of Christ

Activities Ministry: The Activities Ministry met for the first time last Wednesday evening after church. The members of this ministry are Jim Heeke, Jancy Lawalin, Brenda Lloyd, Darlene Elaman, Loretta Harrison, Larry Bryant. The members of this ministry want your input. We are planning many things for the 1993 year. Let us know if there is something that you would like for us to look into. -- Tim Hill, Minister.

Words of Life

Words of Life Broadcasting Outside of the U.S.A.: Philippines . . . Northern Italy (reaches Western & Eastern Europe), with a short-wave frequency, this particular station has been heard in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, USA, Russia, Finland, Ukraine . . . Radio Africa, reaching W. Africa . . . Radio Africa II, covering the southern part of the continent of Africa . . . Lebanon, covering the Middle-East with short wave and AM and FM broadcasts . . .

At present, we have seven empty rooms on the Residential Self-Care wing. If you know of someone who would benefit from this, please let them and us know.

On this wing we do all laundry and housekeeping, all meals are furnished, and medicine is administered for them. The cost of this is \$845.00 per month. Each resident is responsible for purchasing medicine and paying for a phone in the room. Cable hookup is also available for TV. The nursing department does a room check every two hours from 11:00 pm - 6:00 am each night.

We have some needs: the drapes in the dining room and in the nursing wing rooms are fast needing to be replaced. They must be of fire retardant material.

There are two other projects that are not quite as large: (1) we could sure use some songbooks; new or good used ones; (2) and a new sound system would be a definite plus. Let us hear from you concerning the project you are willing to complete.

Another every-once-in-a-while occurrence is the need to replace equipment. That has happened today, February 1993, to the tune of over \$800.00! It is necessary to keep the equipment in good operating condition.

The equipment repair brings to light another subject - Money! Praise God we are able to meet all expenses at the present time. However, I have noticed that we budgeted for gifts and contributions of \$6,250.00 a month for this year

Naugle, Administrator

Gallatin Church of Christ

Congratulations to Woody Summers who was recently presented a plaque and pin for 23 years of perfect attendance during our Bible Study hour! AND to Walter and Linda Allen who have been chosen National Foster Parents of the Year! They are in Washington to receive this much deserved award. -- Julius Hovan, Minister.

Linton Church of Christ

We are working on spring and fall revivals. We need to begin plans for VBS this summer. There are other repairs that need to be done to the church building that we hope to begin as soon as the weather breaks. The church decided to purchase a computer and accessories for use by the minister and for keeping records. A new flannelgraph set will be purchased for use with all of our children's teaching programs, especially for use in Children's Worship.

Alexandria Church of Christ

There are three types of Christians who respond to the call to service.

1. Rowboat Christians - have to be pushed.

2. Sailboat Christians - always go with wind.

3. Steamboat Christians - make up their minds where they ought to go and go there regardless of wind and weather.

--David Johnson, Minister.

Church of Christ, P.O. Box 36, Jennings, LA 70546, and mark it "Missions '93."

--Douglas Broyles, Elder at Jennings Church of Christ

Antioch Christian Camp

hood. We have several adults worshipping with us from other churches. The brethren are working well together and growing in spirit. A regular visitation to some of our people in the neighborhood has started. We hope they will return to worship with us again. We are hav-

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