

The Heartbeat of 
The Remnant

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A ministry of
The Berean Voice



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“The Berean Voice” is an outreach ministry of Faith Christian Fellowship, a church located in Holmes County, Ohio. It is operated by a board of directors, which ultimately answers to the elders of the church.

As a non-profit ministry, we desire to work with the Lord, for without Him we can do nothing. We are trusting God to provide for the ongoing work of this magazine and our other outreach projects through the free-will offerings of His people. Would you join us in prayer for this work and ongoing need?

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~ The Berean Voice Board

It is our goal that the content of this magazine bring honor and glory to God. All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted. In the event of discovering any errors in content or detail, please count it to our oversight and kindly bring it to our attention.

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The cold, grey days of winter are being transformed into the warm, sunny days of spring. The first flowers of the year are persistently pushing their way up out of the cold earth towards the warmth of the sun. It never seems to get old—this exciting feeling in the springtime air. There’s the warmth and light of sunny days. There’s the cheery, lilting music of the song birds as they once more take up housekeeping with seemingly boundless energy. And we are again blessed with another season to plant seeds with the expectation of another crop of food to enjoy.

This year I will turn 48 years of age. My how that sounds old to me. I remember that as a youth I thought that folks who were 50 were old. Now I am almost there. For me, this is a clear reminder that we all are getting older and that we will not live forever. Next, comes a number of sobering thoughts: “What have I done for the furtherance of God’s Kingdom? Am I remaining faithful to Him in all that I do? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do—this year?” Let’s, each one, prayerfully seek the Lord about His present and future will for our lives. Let’s encourage and exhort each other to remain faithful in relationship with, and in service for, our Master.

In this issue we have an excellent article on marriage,

which we felt can take the place of an article on Discipleship this time. When we meet with couples who have struggled with extreme marriage problems for years, we usually find that something is not working in a godly way at a foundational level. We feel that this marriage article is quite thorough in its evaluation of building and maintaining a Biblical foundation. Lord willing, we plan to have ongoing articles relating to this subject.

We are scheduled to share a series of meetings in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, this coming July. Several churches in that area are working together to facilitate this event and have reserved the **Fairview Reception Center**. Please pray for these meetings for the following: that God’s will would be accomplished; that God would guide the speakers as they prepare; and that God would strengthen the church through this effort. Please pass this on to others who may be interested. Also, mark your calendar to save the date.

If you wish to receive updated information once all details are finalized, please contact “The Berean Voice” by phone at (330) 439-9547 or by email at subscribe@bereanvoice.org. Due to providing meals and due to seating limitations, **registration will be required** for this event. Below are the tentative titles for the series and the messages, but they are still subject to change.

“A Biblical View of Mental, Emotional, Marriage, and Sexual Abuse Issues”

1. Understanding the Heart—The Root of ALL Problems
2. The Gospel—God’s Answer for ALL Issues of the Spirit & Soul (psyche) of Man
3. How Psychology & Worldly Philosophies Affect Us Today
4. Practical Discipleship—Effectively Helping People Change
5. A Biblical View of Mental Disorders
6. Biblically Evaluating Adoption & Fostering Issues
7. Understanding Placebo Effect & A Safe Use of Psyche Meds
8. A Biblical Understanding of Moral Failure, Pornography, and Sexual Abuse (Adults only)
9. Purity—From the Cradle to Conversion, then on to Marriage or Singlehood (Parents only)
10. Preventing & Addressing Problems Through Godly Homes
11. Preventing and Helping ALL of Life’s Struggles Within the Local Church

July 26–28, 2019

Location: Fairview Reception Center | 141 Jackson Rd | Lebanon, PA 17042

To Register contact Rudy Yoder: (717) 450-8640 or email: theyoders@yoderhome.net

The Mystery of Marriage

Donald Brechbill
Chambersburg, PA

Many of us, in our youth, have fantasized about the ideal marriage. We have envisioned being married to someone who loves us unconditionally and who cheerfully accommodates our every peculiarity. In Ephesians 5:22-33 we find just such a marriage. Here the Apostle Paul compares the husband and wife relationship with that of the intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church. He transitions so easily from the relationship between husband and wife to that of Christ and His bride that we are left wondering which one his primary focus was. In verse 22, he instructs wives to ... *submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.* Then in verse 25, he instructs husbands to ... *love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church....*

Paul summarizes this passage by stating that *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. –Eph 5:32.* This striking parallelism leads us to believe that marriage is intended to fully reflect the intense, self-sacrificing relationship that Christ demonstrated in securing a bride for himself. This imagery is so powerful that we can only believe that from the time of creation, God designed marriage to reflect his passionate love for us.

Paul wrote, *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; –Eph 5:25.* As we observe the life of Jesus during his brief stay here on earth, we see nothing but self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. We find not a hint of self-serving. It is this selfless laying down of His life that makes the Gospel so powerfully attractive to so many.

In 2 Cor 5:14, Paul wrote, *For the love of Christ constraineth us....* This is the nature of the Gospel. We are compelled by Christ's great love for us to love him in return. This reciprocal love results in a life of devoted service that we sometimes call obedience. If you as a husband desire to have a wife that delights in devoted service to you, learn to love like Christ loved.

I. Christ loved with a “sacrificial love”

Philippians chapter two is sometimes referred to as the “great kenosis” of Christ. The Greek word *kenoo* found in verse seven (*But made himself of no reputation*), means “to pour out”. In coming to earth, Jesus laid aside his position

with the Father and entered life on planet earth through a questionable conception (humanly speaking) as the son of a humble, virgin, peasant girl. That is the reputation that he adopted. He chose to identify with fallen humanity although he had every right to claim equality with God.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus demonstrated “sacrificial love” when he ... *prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. –Mat 26:39.* Through His life and sacrificial death, he showed us that intimacy in relationship can only be found by losing ourselves in that relationship. The great bane of our day is self-love and self-absorption. Paul wrote to Timothy ... *that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves... –2Ti 3:1-2*

We see this prophecy being fulfilled with the advent of social networking. While it claims to be a platform where individuals can connect, it actually is a platform for **the promotion of self**. This obsession with self is “perilous” because it militates against intimacy in relationship and can be fatal in a marriage relationship. Intimacy in marriage is contingent upon two individuals being willing to **relinquish their personal identity and assume a new joint identity**.

II. Christ loved with a “faithful love”

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. –Joh 13:1. Christ demonstrated faithful love, even in the face of rejection. John wrote that *He came unto his own, and his own received him not. –Joh 1:11*

Matthew wrote, *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. –Mat 26:56.* It is one thing to love those who love us in return. Jesus said that even the publicans do that much. Jesus demonstrated love to those who hated him, to those who betrayed him, to those who denied him, and he even prayed for those who crucified him. His love was sustained by a covenant commitment. He was ... *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. –Rev 13:8.* He allowed nothing to deter him from his eternal purpose.

Our society has lost an understanding of **covenant**; hence we have so many broken marriages. Even many churches that embrace “covenant theology” in regard to salvation fail to apply those same covenant principles to marriage. Malachi clearly states that marriage is a covenant—...*yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.* –Mal 2:14. Biblical covenant love is a love that is enduring whether or not it is reciprocated.

The most dramatic disclosure of covenant love is found in the Prophets. The message of the prophets is primarily that of a passionate lover “God” calling out to his unfaithful wife “Israel” to return to him—...*turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* –Eze 33:11. Isaiah wrote: *Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* –Isa 55:6-7

Although Israel rebelled against the Lord again and again, yet we see God’s love to her as constant and unaltered. God was faithful to his covenant promise even though His bride bowed the knee to pagan altars. It is this quality of faithful covenant love that brought about the coming of a Redeemer. God made a promise in the Garden of Eden—*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* –Gen 3:15. This promise was fulfilled in Christ some four thousand years later.

On our wedding day we promise to love “till death do us part”. This is a promise made in faith. No one can know on their wedding day what that promise may cost in the span of a lifetime. The cost is irrelevant to the commitment if there is an abiding, enduring love, rooted in the eternal faithfulness of God as our witness.

III. Christ’s love embraced suffering

One characteristic of our self-focused generation is the idea that I should not need to suffer in a relationship. This is a product of our hedonistic, pleasure-seeking society. It finds its way into our Anabaptist culture as we become increasingly affluent and as the lines of separation between us and the world become increasingly obscure. The product of this mind-set is that we have young people going into marriage thinking that “my partner will serve me, and I will be able to live like a prince or a princess.”

Our Anabaptist faith and heritage has been preserved to our day by men and women who understood that a relationship with Christ involves cross-bearing. Stories abound of families who abandoned their homeland and all that they had for the sake of the Gospel.

The concept of embracing suffering in relationship is clearly taught in Peter’s epistle. Peter was writing to a church

that was enduring the raging fire of persecution. He was encouraging them to consider Christ’s example of suffering for a cause outside of themselves. *Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind...* –1Pe 4:1. In chapter two, Peter writes: *For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.* –1Pe 2:19. Several verses later he states: *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:* –1Pe 2:21.

After calling us to be willing to emulate Christ’s example of suffering in chapter two, Peter moves into chapter three by saying, *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.* –1Pe 3:1-2. This suffering for well-doing has been regarded as a high honor with Christians of all ages. Only in recent years has suffering for well-doing been regarded as “abuse”. There are at least three forces are shaping our understanding of suffering in a negative way.

1. A Selfish, Pleasure-Seeking Society

One has already been described above, which is the hedonistic (devotion to pleasure as a way of life) society in which we live.

2. The Health, Wealth, and Prosperity Gospel

A second one is the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel of many evangelical churches. The implication is that if we choose to follow Christ our lives will be overflowing with physical well-being and material abundance. This understanding is based on the promises to ancient Israel in the Old Testament of a land flowing with milk and honey. We believe this promise is fulfilled in the church age with a life that is overflowing with the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, etc. It is possible for these fruit can to abound in the midst of suffering. In fact, when others observe fruit amid another individual’s suffering, that is when it is the most noticeable and the most appreciated.

3. The Feminist Movement

The third influence that today shapes our perspective on suffering comes from the feminist movement that boldly declares that no woman should suffer or experience privation of any kind in a marriage relationship. Hence, we have a society of women with their own careers, drawing their own salary, and maintaining their own bank account. How very different from the testimony of women of faith like Sarah who ...*obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.* –1Pe 3:6

Suffering for the benefit of relationship has been initiated

by Christ and emulated by thousands of faithful Christians throughout the church age. We are challenged by the words of the Apostle Peter and by the witness of faithful Christians to embrace suffering as a badge of the authenticity of our faith.

IV. Christ loved with a sanctifying love

God's plan in creating us was that we would be holy as he is holy so we can experience intimate fellowship with him. But mankind rebelled against God, so he promised a redeemer. In the interim he introduced a contingency plan that was intended to prevent mankind from destroying themselves, and that was "the Law".

However, it was never God's intent that our relationship with him should be governed by law. He desires a love relationship with us, so he sent his Son to us and overwhelmed us with his love. We now reciprocate his love, not through fear of judgment, but as a love response to his compelling love. This concept is most clearly stated in Romans *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh [limited to what could be accomplished in the flesh], God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh [satisfied the righteous demands of the law]: That the righteousness of the law [the full and complete fulfillment of the law] might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. –Rom 8:3-4*

Jesus accomplished through love what could never be accomplished through the strict demands of a penal code. He raised the bar on righteousness. *For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. –Mat 5:20.* He showed us how to live and how to love. His sacrificial death satisfied the penal demands of the law. Through his resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit he has empowered believers to live and to love as he did.

Paul admonishes us to relate in marriage in this same way: *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. –Eph 5:27.* Jesus came to earth to secure a bride for himself. She was not a beautiful, radiant bride that was eagerly awaiting his arrival. She was defaced by sin and living in rebellion against him—*He came unto his own, and his own received him not. –Joh 1:11.* Through his patient, persistent love he transformed his bride into a glorious radiant bride that stands in awe of him and joyfully worships and adores him.

Does your wife have spots and wrinkles? Are there some

attitudes that you wish were different? Or are there fears and insecurities that hinder her freedom and joy? You could demand that she change and berate her for not living up to your expectations. This approach would be comparable to that of the law. It would serve to amplify her limitations and increase her anxieties. Or you could love her in spite of her spots and wrinkles. With words of compassion and encouragement you could motivate her to rise above her fears, just like Christ sanctifies his bride by his word. Jesus demonstrated that love can accomplish what harsh demands never can. Paul taught that this is a fundamental principle of marriage. It is intended to be a relationship in which the compelling force is love.

V. The great mystery

Paul concluded his treatise on marriage by saying: *This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. –Eph 5:32.* A mystery in Biblical language is not something that cannot be comprehended, but rather something that can only be understood by those who by faith receive and embrace the Truth. It is revealed to sincere Christians; it is veiled to others.

As believers in Jesus we are privileged to understand a perspective of marriage that many cannot begin to comprehend: that sacrificial love opens the door to intimacy, that covenant love is the key to life-long fulfillment, that our willingness to suffer for the relationship proves the authenticity of our love, and finally, that the most effective way to expedite change in our spouse is unconditional love.

These principles are time-proven and Biblically-based. They are foundational to the Gospel and are a fundamental part of our Anabaptist kingdom-based theology. Where faithfully applied they will transform any marriage.



A Quiet and Peaceable Life?

Barry Grant
Arcahaie, Haiti

Before I was converted, I had never heard the term “Anabaptist” and the concept of someone sharing their faith in Jesus with others was foreign to me. After I was converted, I remember thinking about all my friends who didn’t know anything about what had just happened to me. One thing kept going through my mind, “I need to tell them!” When something good happens to someone, they usually tell others. Some people tell one or two, while others feel like telling everyone. That’s what I wanted to do, not for my sake, but for theirs.

Whenever I would see an old friend, I would tell them what had happened to me. They usually said they had heard about it and then tried to get me to settle down and relax. I will be the first to admit, I made mistakes those first years. I noticed that many people didn’t appreciate what I had to say, but what astonished me the most was that the people who claimed to be Christians seemed to be the most offended.

One day I was visiting with an older man who said that he had been a Christian for most his life. During the discussion he pointed up to a lightbulb and said “Do you see that lightbulb? It’s not speaking.” I was shocked. He was telling me that, yes, Jesus says we are the light of the world, but that lights are quiet. They don’t speak. I went home to do a personal Bible study on the matter. Was this true? It wasn’t long before I found verses like, *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.* –Mat 4:23. Also, in Matthew, Jesus says that He was moved with compassion because the people with Him were tired and scattered about. Further on, we read, *Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.* –Mat 9:37-38

It seems to me that wherever Jesus went, He was talking to people about the kingdom. I have seen people witnessing about God but doing it in an ugly way. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t witness. If you read the book of Acts, that’s about all you see—believers sharing the Gospel message with others! In one account the authorities captured the disciples and said they could go free if they would be quiet! The disciples, though, said they could not—*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* –Act 4:20. Eventually, they were permanently silenced—by death.

I later heard about these people called Anabaptists. I began to read about them, and how they, too would not be silent. I ordered the Martyr’s Mirror and was astounded at what I read. These dear people lived like the disciples that we find in the Bible. They fulfilled the things Jesus said,—*And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.* –Mat 10:22. And in Romans, *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.* –Rom 8:36. After some time, I found a church with an Anabaptist vision.

So why am I writing this? Dear brothers and sisters, I believe the fire is going out. I keep hearing some of our Anabaptist people talking about living a quiet and peaceable life. Jesus tells us in the parable of the sower, *He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.* –Mat 13:22. Could that be where some of us are at? We live in a western culture where money seems easy to obtain, and we become focused on our own wealth and the cares of this world. Let’s be careful that we don’t become like the world, to avoid being persecuted by the world.

One group of Anabaptists was fleeing persecution and moved into a country not yet persecuted. They began a

furniture shop to support themselves, but they couldn't sell any furniture because they were the dreaded Anabaptists. Soon the situation got desperate because they needed money for food. One day a wealthy man walked into the shop. All the workers stopped working. "Maybe this man will buy something, and we can eat!" They thought. An old brother approached the possible client and asked him if he knew Jesus. After a short chat the man stormed out of the store in a fit of anger. Soon some hungry workers asked the old man why he had to scare away their only chance at a sale. He explained that for this man to know Jesus was far more important than them worrying about making a sale. That was the mindset of the early Anabaptists—the Gospel was number one. They couldn't but speak of the things they'd seen and heard and they, too, were killed all the day long.

I've read numerous accounts of early Anabaptist Christians who had been arrested for their faith. The authorities would plead with them to just be quiet! But they refused, just as the disciples did. They too chose death, rather than the quiet life. One young man was arrested that left behind his dear wife expecting their first child. The authorities waited for the child to be born then brought the newborn infant to the new father in prison. They told him he was now a father and could go home and be with his wife and son. They said he could also continue to believe the same way, but he had to keep quiet, and not speak out against sin in the church. The young father refused, so they burnt him at the stake. Being quiet was not an option.

So, what do the Scriptures mean about a quiet and peaceable life? Paul writes to Timothy, *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; **that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life** in all godliness and honesty.* –1Ti 2:1-2. *For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty?* Yes, the apostle Paul says this, but what did he mean? Could he have meant that we should be quiet about the Gospel? Or that we should never confront a sinner? Paul is not telling us to do something that he never did, or something that Christ himself never did. In fact, the Scriptures, reveal something quite the opposite.

It seems that the New Testament Christians in the Bible and in the early church were actively spreading the Gospel and were excited about the Church of Jesus Christ. They went about preaching the Gospel: holding meetings in the mountains, in the woods, or anywhere people would come. That was their life. Paul here is saying that we should pray that if we are obeying God by doing things the authorities don't like, that they will leave us alone as we go about our normal day-to-day activities. As Christians, we should be

spreading the truth of God's Word, and being active for the furtherance of God's Kingdom. Our prayer should be that the authorities will let us live in peace, while serving the Prince of Peace.

Some Christians try to be the world in their efforts to win the world. Trying to get people to live a happy life, join our club, be free in Christ, go on an exciting mission trip, live life to the fullest, be everything you can be. It's all about "loving Jesus," not obeying Him.

What about us? Are we excited to tell people about Jesus even if it will cost us something? For many of us it is quite easy to talk about farming, construction work, deer hunting, and many other things, yet when it comes to the things of God, we don't have much to say. Are we that scared of persecution? Do we fear the world hating us? Remember what Jesus said, *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own...* –Joh 15:18-19. *And, Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* –Mar 8:38

It's easy to be a Christian, where you settle down and live a quiet and peaceable life, never challenging a sinner, never correcting a brother, or never stepping on Satan's toes, but who said it would be easy? Here in Haiti we, as a church, are trying to follow Jesus no matter what the cost. Just yesterday we had two members tell us they are about to lose their jobs because of the Gospel. Another sister in the church reported that the school where her children attend require uniforms and that the girls must wear pants. She sent her daughter to school in a modest dress, but she was sent home with a note from the principle saying she was not to return to school wearing "that thing." *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.* –1Pe 4:14

Happiness comes from suffering for righteousness. Biblical suffering comes from obeying Jesus in the face of opposition. Are we too busy arguing over personal opinions of doctrine and being politically correct while the world laughs at us and goes to hell? Let's be like Jesus and faithful Christians down through the ages, living in a manner so that those around us cannot deny that the power of God is in us. We have something that everyone needs. So, what are we waiting for? Let's reunite, gather back together, deny ourselves, pick up our crosses and follow him!

As a man was dying, his thoughts went back.
Will I leave a good mark, that none can attack?

I forsook all, on the alter I went
Keeping nothing back, not even a cent.

I wanted to do, all that was right.
I sometimes prayed, all through the night.

It was easy? I cannot say.

But rather a battle, I fought everyday.
Few understood why I lived this way.
Giving up everything was foolish they'd say.

They couldn't have seen the peace inside.
A peace that I thought, no one could hide.

A life on the run, was not my desire.
But they wanted my body, to put in the fire.

From cave to cave, I would call home
Knowing one day, I'd never more roam.
As I look back, I wouldn't change a thing.
It has been a great honor serving my king.
But I must go now, the smoke is too thick.

My body to ashes, as the flames lick.

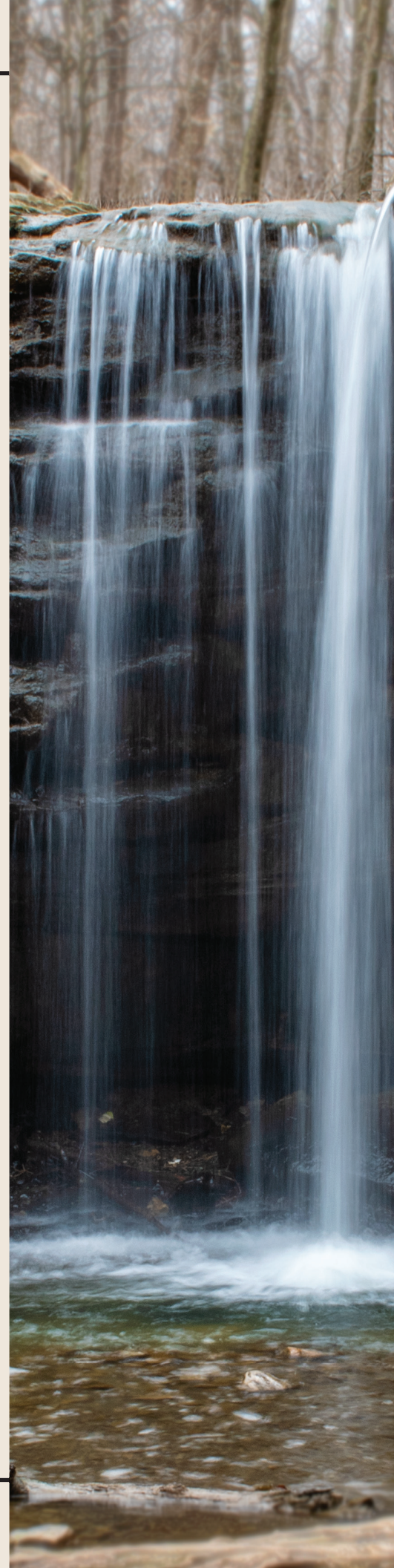
There is one thing, I need to ask.
Will I die in vain, or will you take up the task?

Jesus is looking for A people today
That will stand the test, and not go astray.

Giving our life is part of the cost.
Will you make that decision, before time is lost?
The church is struggling, the world has come in.

They killed our Jesus, and love their sin.
Let's not give in, there's too much at stake.
But rather let's fight! There's a kingdom to take!

-Barry Grant



Mothers and Prayer

Regina Martin
Huaral, Lima, Peru

It was 2:30 p.m., Tuesday afternoon. “Señora!” a chorus of voices hollered from outside our property hedge. “Open the gate!”

“Just wait,” I called back. “It’s not three o’clock yet.”

Disgruntled murmurings sounded from the other side of the hedge. I turned to my wailing baby. Sinking into the rocker to feed her, I closed my eyes to relish each quiet moment before the coming tumult.

We had scarcely settled onto the farm when the neighbor children found us. They appeared—uninvited and unannounced, any time of day—to stay as long as they wished. The first ones soon brought more friends along to join in their play with the foreigner’s children and toys. Play-Doh and table games entertained them but oh, what a commotion ten children could make in a concrete house.

After much exasperation, Ernest (my husband) and I finally came up with a plan.... They could come two afternoons a week, arriving no earlier than three o’clock in the afternoon. On Tuesdays they could stay for supper, but on Thursdays they must leave by 6 p.m.

We also had other rules.... Our children needed to stay within my eyesight and earshot when playing with neighbor children. And NO closed doors. Still, questions niggled my brain. *Is this a good thing or a bad one? Will we live to regret it? What if they are a bad influence on our children?* My questions formed a prayer, one which God had been hearing from me quite a bit these past months. *Lord, give me wisdom and patience with these children today. And if they are a bad influence on our children, Lord, please reveal that to us before our children are harmed.*

But what an opportunity! This was one way I could reach the world while being a stay-at-home mom... I read them Bible stories. I taught them the need to respect and obey

grownups. I told them they needed to obey me, just as my children were expected to. Transgressors, I warned, would be sent home.

Zinnia did not believe me, until the day she disobeyed and was expelled. I grin now, remembering the little troublemaker perching on the neighbor’s wall, peering over into our farm where her cousins were happily playing. Once had taught her; after that Zinnia obeyed.

“Señora!” Zinnia’s voice interrupted my reverie. “Is it three o’clock yet?”

I opened one eye to peek at the clock—2:47.

“Not quite!” I hollered out the window. Placing baby into the walker, I headed to the kitchen. What would I feed them tonight?

“Zinnia, I need to look in your purse before you go home.”

It was Tuesday evening again, several months later. We had been missing various small things after Zinnia started bringing a purse along on her visits to our house. Tonight, we would see if our suspicions were correct.

Zinnia’s terror-filled eyes met mine. “Just a minute, Señora. I need to use the bathroom.”

“You can use the bathroom after we look in your purse.”

“No, Señora, I can’t wait...”, her voice trailed off as she rushed to the bathroom.

I sighed. Of course, her purse would be empty when she came back out. Searching the bathroom later that night revealed treasures hidden here and there.

“Let’s chat a little, Zinnia,” I invited the following week. Zinnia sat on the bed, twisting yarn knots on the comforter, her eyes defensive, fearful. My heart yearned for the dear



girl. Her mom had left years ago to work in another country, leaving the girls with their Grandma.

“I don’t care about those things you stole, Zinnia,” I began. “But it’s a habit you don’t want to start. God cares about you...”

That was the last time Zinnia, her sister, and their cousins showed up at our place. “Our Grandma doesn’t let us come anymore,” they explained.

Maybe it was Grandma; I think it was God. We had prayed much that He would make it clear if their visits were harmful to our children and if they should stop coming. My heart was torn between love for the neighbor children and protection for our own. This was the way God chose to answer.

“Thank you, God,” I prayed. “We’ll take this as your answer, and not invite them back. Send them over if you want them to come again.”

Several years passed. Now it was Jon, a neighbor boy, frequenting our home.

“Could he come to your house every day after school?” his parents had wondered. “We want him to learn good things, instead of playing with boys in our neighborhood.”

Hmm. So, we’re to raise the boy while both parents work?

“He can come Tuesday and Thursday afternoons,” Ernest

decided. “Those are the days I’m more often at home.”

Jon showed up faithfully on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Problem was, Ernest couldn’t. Other responsibilities and obligations kept coming up, hindering him from being there like he wanted to.

I did not want to nag my husband... He really wished he could be at home, working with the boys. Should I say something, or not? It didn’t seem ideal to have an unconverted boy working for hours with our son, a new Christian.

I did mention my questions to Ernest, but mostly I made it a matter of prayer.

Jon stopped coming. I was amazed. I felt for Jon, yet once again I thanked God for His answer.

“How can I reach out to my neighbor children without compromising my own?” a friend asked recently. Moving to a new area, she faces the challenge of neighbor children coming over.

There are no simple answers. I have discovered the urgency of prayer, and God’s faithfulness in answering when we cry out to Him for wisdom. His answer to others may well be different from what He worked out for us.

Another sister granted me permission to share their experience in relating with neighbor children:

Alex and his mother live across the road from us and began attending church soon after we moved here. Alex came over almost every day and taught our boys Spanish in short order. The boys dreaded his visits at first, but they soon became great friends. After a while another neighbor boy, Nilton, started coming at times and we thought he seemed decent enough. Then one day a third boy, José, came along. I got a distinctly uncomfortable feeling. I gave them a time limit, but just couldn't shake the uneasy feeling. So, though I thought I didn't have time, I decided I would work outside the whole time while they were here. I worked close to them and kept an eye on things and thought everything was fine. They seemed to just be playing together nicely, so I was surprised when they went home before the time was up.

It wasn't long before my boys came in crying; they felt so bad about what had happened. Alex had asked them to deliver a note to his girlfriend because his mom wouldn't like it if he did. One of the other boys told them what he does out behind bushes at public school, so he doesn't get caught. They tried to get my boys to promise not to tell me. They didn't promise, and I was so thankful! But they were very torn up because they thought Alex would not be their friend anymore.

My husband and I talked with the boys and assured them that they had handled the situation correctly by not promising to keep secrets. Within the hour, Alex's mom came over to visit and we told her about it. She was very alarmed that her son had tried to pass a note and later took care of the situation with her son. I was glad that the budding relationship he had with the neighbor girl was stopped before it went any farther. Alex's friendship with our boys has continued but the other two boys discovered that our boys had told us about them and didn't come over for years after that.

José recently asked our eight-year-old son if he could come over to his house and play. I said no. His grandma came over several days later, offended, and said that José was very sad about it. I explained that I feel I must always be with my boys if he would come over because one time, he had tried to get our son to play an electronic war game with him. The grandma understood and was sad that her grandson was a bad influence. She wanted the best for him. We have invited him to Sunday School, but he doesn't want that. I just hope that we can always have the type of relationship with our children that they will feel free to come to us and not keep these situations to themselves and feel guilty.

Wise parents seek to remove danger, but not difficulty, from their children's path. I was recently amazed while reading Judges 3, to discover that God wanted some enemy nations to remain in the land of Canaan. Why? He wanted parents to teach their children war (v. 2). Instead, the children of Israel made friends with the enemy nations and began to intermarry. "It seems we live closer to the world here on the mission field," one sister shared. Our children are growing up on the front lines, as it were. This can be positive. They have frequent opportunities to "speak with the enemy in the gates," where they are asked what we believe, and why. But when parents are lax, or their children are rebellious, this closer association with the world can prove tragic.

As we connect with God in prayer for our children, we must also connect with them. *No strict safety guidelines will substitute a close relationship with your child.* The mother of a child who was abused shared, "The only way your child will tell you what is going on is if you have a close relationship."

I stagger as I consider our enemy and my own inadequacy as a mother. Suddenly I am seized with urgency to pray for things which never entered my head when our children were still young. Abuse cases exist around us; at times in our very midst. I pray for our children's protection from the evil which surrounds them and that which rises in their hearts. I pray they will never mar another's purity. I pray for purity at the marriage altar, both for them and their future spouses.

I pray with urgency, yet with confidence. Because this I know: God loves our children—He cares about their purity and protection even more than we as parents do—He longs for us to partner with Him in raising them to be faithful servants of His—And He wants to show Himself strong on behalf of humble parents who cry out to Him as they train soldiers in enemy territory. *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him...*
-2 Chronicles 16:9.



A MAN IN THE GAP

Lee Rufener
Athens, WI

And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. –Ezekiel 22:30

The account of the little Dutch boy who heroically stuck his finger in the hole in the dike comes to mind as we consider such a verse. He couldn't leave the spot for fear of erosion, so he waited the long night through until someone came along in the morning to rescue him from his plight. Many men have performed astounding feats on impulse when the moment so required. Lives were rescued, towns were saved, and enemies defeated because someone filled a role that was needed. Books are written, and monuments erected in honor of those whose benefaction has touched us. These are considered the heroes of history and they are remembered for their staunch bravery and steadfast faithfulness.

But the gaps in life are not always so obvious and the results not always measurable. Solomon informs us of the account of *...a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. –Ecc 9:14-15*. Though we have many thorough descriptions in the Bible of pious men

who stood in the gap for God, there are, no doubt, hordes of others who overcame tremendous odds on a spiritual level yet received no recognition in this life.

The problem lies not so much in that, standing in the gap is beyond our capabilities or finances, but in the reality that often the job bears no title, ordination, or recognition. It is to be filled by volunteers with enough vision and care to sacrifice their own agenda for the sole cause of filling the hole in the hedge. It often does not lie within the realm of the physical, but within the borders of the spiritual. While the poor we have with us always and spiritual nobility will stoop to help them, we must consider that God probably has more in mind here than needing someone to organize bread lines and soup kitchens. He is looking for a man clad in a robe of "purple principles" that won't be shed when the temperatures get hot.

King Darius signed the fateful decree that was designed to escort Daniel to a luncheon with the lions. *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and*



Daniel seen praying

gave thanks before his God, as he did aforesaid. –Dan 6:10. What a slight thing it would have been for Daniel to close the shutters before he prayed. But Daniel was not filling the gap by his presence in the high governmental position that he held. The gap lay in the dearth of godly witnesses in Babylon. Thus, the hole between heaven and earth was to be fulfilled by prayer at the open window while sacrificing his “seat in the senate.”

The underlying reason that so many gaps exist and there are so few men to fill them is because we often get our personal, earthly vision of circumstances confused with the eternal purposes of God. We are busily occupied with good things and feeling quite useful. Martha was zealously active in filling what she perceived as the imminent gap in the household, while Mary was sitting in the eternal one. It is incredibly easy to get caught up in the activity trap of a busy life. We may give intensive care to efficiently climb to the top of the ladder, only to discover that it is leaning against the wrong wall. Many people are very busy, but not very effective. Many have labored industriously for years in the Lord’s work, only to arrive at the finish line and realize that the things, which mattered most, had eluded them. Some, while giving their lives to serve others, allowed their marriage to suffer, or their children to disrespect them. Others have given “Corban” to their church while neglecting their relationship with their own parents.

The man in the gap must be wise, and wisdom must understand wherein the true gap lies. In this we must be driven by a purposed, biblical vision. Life will afford many opportunities to abandon our course. If we actively seek to live the expectations handed to us by our family, friends, associates, church agendas, and life’s circumstances, we will be driven by people rather than biblical principles. While this may seem legitimate on the surface, we may reap the bitter disappointment of finding ourselves dangling at the end of the wrong rope.

So, what does the gap of God’s concern look like? Some would say that this gap consists where any need arises. The poor we have with us always and certainly herein is an opportunity to do good. But the *better part* chosen by Mary had nothing to do with helping the poor or feeding the hungry. Likewise, the woman with the precious *alabaster box of ointment of spikenard* could have sold it and supplied the poor for quite a while with the sum of its value. But the **real** gap could not be filled by caressing the cripple, but by crowning the Christ. In the Garden of Eden there was no gap, for man walked in perfect harmony with his Creator.

It was sin that created the gap and rankled the relationship. Also, there will be no breach at the end of time when the Lamb receives His bride. Until then, we have a large gap that exists because this earth refuses to glorify its Creator. To stand in that gap must be the chief purpose of all who aspire to bear His name.

This calls for a complete transformation in relationship to our God. The atonement of Christ’s blood makes it judicially possible. The comfort of the Holy Spirit makes it emotionally satisfying, but it is in the realm of our surrender and glorification of God that animates the scene. The Prodigal Son is a prime example of a soul who had brought a world of trouble upon himself by forsaking the position that he held as a son of his father. At the bottom of his restoration was nothing more than a re-establishing of the father-son relationship which had existed from his birth.

It appears to me that God is not so much looking for souls with their hands waving in the air shouting, “Here am I send me!” Rather His eyes search for the humble souls who bow their wills before the Almighty and recognize *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. –Revelation 4:11.* There is no lack for **Sons of Sceva** who imagine they are filling an important role in their willingness to broadcast the “Jesus” that they have heard of. In 1997, some 800,000 men arrived at a Promise Keepers rally in Washington D.C in response to the theme of “Standing in the Gap.” These men may have had good intentions of representing God to a nation in swift departure from spiritual underpinnings, but it takes more than just a willing heart. God doesn’t need of a large mass of bodies to stuff into a hole. He is looking for qualified men, and few have been promoted to such a position.

If all God wanted was men to show up at a rally or publicly proclaim their faith on the streets, He, no doubt, could have found many desiring such a good work.

But to stand in the gap between God and the world will only be sanctioned by God for those who deserve to be there. It is the universal pride of man that drives man to believe that he must only desire to be useful and then he will be used. In God’s house there are some vessels to honor and some to dishonor, yet to **deserve** an honorable place is much more difficult than to **desire** one.

It is very common in our day to receive mail bearing the message, “Get the credit you deserve.” It is no secret that the credit that many deserve is zero credit. But we have all been impacted by the subliminal message that everybody

The man in the gap must be wise, and wisdom must understand wherein the true gap lies.

deserves credit. Our society is promoting that all immoral, imprudent, and improvident people deserve the same care as the moral and industrious. If the slothful individual deserves a good wage and the spendthrift deserves financial security, then the Apostle Paul certainly has no right to lay any qualifications upon the widows who should receive support from the church. Neither has he any right to reject any sincere soul who desires the office of a Bishop, just because he does not meet the qualifications. But God noticed a few souls ... *in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* –Rev 3:4

These are men in the gap. Not because they had energy to burn, but because they had a vision for purity. This was no mere accident, for men who wish to attain to preeminence with God must do it by...

...Purpose

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. –Heb 11:24-27

A true vision for the work of God will come with a price tag. The rich young ruler would have loved to be a ruler in the kingdom of Christ as well as on his estate, but he couldn't hold both. This principle provided the first hurdle for him and for everyone else who would desire such a noble work. As a young man, Moses made his decision and chose his loyalties. He was prepared to be rejected by Egypt, but he never dreamed he would also be so flippantly discarded by his own people.

It was forty years in the lonely furnace that purged his pride and pruned his prowess. There he graduated from the seminary of silence, equipped and prepared to stand in the gap as the meekest man on the face of the earth. He became an intercessor for men to God. As an advocate of men and of God, he preached and prayed, he walked and wept, he lived and loved his God and his brethren. All this while, he deemed himself inadequate for the position. While the children of Israel were at the very core of his heart, his fear and focus never left his God. When we seek to be respected by men, our purpose is clouded over and our position in the gap forfeited. Many good pastors, parents, and pilgrims have made this mistake and received their script from their wife, their children, their friends, or their church. Perhaps it seems like the loving, caring, and most respectful thing to do. But God requires absolute fidelity and there can be

no compromise. What a man “wants to be” is driven by his visionary purpose, but what he “turns out to be” rests upon his...

...Priorities

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; –1Ti 3:1-4. Our purpose forms our destination, but our priorities pave the road to get us there.

Unfortunately, some men are promoted to the ministry by popular opinion, but God chooses his men based upon their priorities and eternal qualifications. Men who are governed by their possessions, passions, or position will be useless to serve for God's purpose. They love to be called Pastor, Reverend, or Father. They love to be esteemed as zealous, knowledgeable, steadfast, or compassionate. *For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.* –Gal 1:10 ASV

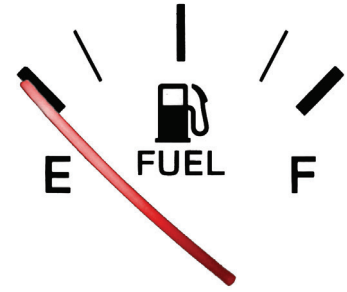
Fortunately, God is not a respecter of persons, and a stone fit for the wall will not be left in the way. The aged, the poor, the maimed, and the halt are all prime candidates for the position of filling the gap. Those with broken dreams, broken bodies, and broken hearts can stand unhindered in the hedge beside Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Esther, Ruth and a countless battalion of others. These are all stellar representatives of God to this world. They all have turned their back on frivolity, fame, familiarity, and fortune and have become the heroes of heaven. They stand shoulder to shoulder in the hedge and form the “Embassy of the Eternal.” They loved, while others hated. They gave all, while others received. They were mocked and misunderstood, reviled and ridiculed, weary and weeping.

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? –2 Co 2:15-16. Those whose sole purpose and priorities are governed by God.



Trust—Be Not Afraid

Louella H. Burkholder
Myerstown, PA



Mile after mile sped by as Carol drove the old Chevy along the busy interstate highway toward home. Between intervals of silence and conversation, Carol and her two sisters, Elaine and Gloria, lifted their voices in song, giving thanks and praise to their Creator. How thankful they were for the opportunity to spend the evening with their friends at Pine Creek Church and to receive another inspiring message from God's Word.

Suddenly their smooth travel was interrupted by signs of trouble. "Now what can be wrong with this car?" Carol worried out loud as she guided the stalled car to the side of the road. "Oh, no, girls, we're out of gas! I was in such a hurry this evening that I forgot to check the gauge. I thought the tank was almost full when we left home, and... Oh no!" wailed Carol again. "Dad put the cell phone on the counter for me to take along, and I forgot that also!"

"Whatever are we going to do now?" exclaimed Elaine. "Here we are, stranded in the dark, no gas, no phone, and seven more miles to our exit! And another thing, people just don't stop very quickly these days and offer help. They know that most everyone carries a phone. This seems almost impossible to me!" she mournfully uttered from the back seat.

As the girls lapsed into silence, the old Chevy seemed to shake in protest as a long row of trucks whizzed by. "You know," said Gloria, "I was just remembering Brother Lester's message this evening. How can we forget so quickly! Maybe God has allowed this to happen to us so our faith might be increased as we place our trust in Him.

Let's take this to the Lord in prayer. Let's look for a miracle from God's hand."

Together the girls bowed their heads and pled for the Lord's protection and help.

"You know, I feel better already," smiled Elaine. "I was so worried and fearful, but since we prayed and committed everything to God, I have confidence that He will watch over us. I'm so glad we have a God who hears all of our cries. What would we do without His comforting Holy Spirit? Let's sing again."

"Joys are flowing like a river,
Since the Comforter has come;
He abides with us forever,
Makes the trusting heart His home.
Blessed quietness, holy quietness,
Blest assurance in my soul!
On the stormy sea Jesus speaks to me,
And the billows cease to roll!"

-Manie P. Ferguson, 19th century

As the girls sang song after song, their hearts were deeply stirred. How quiet and peaceful they felt, even though they were stranded on a dark highway thirteen miles from home. Car after car, and truck after truck sped by without stopping. Then they noticed a pickup truck, with two dirt bikes on the back, slowing down. It pulled off the road several hundred feet ahead of them, and slowly began to back up. The girls' voices were stilled in silence as they desperately cried out to God from the bottom of their hearts. When the truck came to a halt, two husky, long-haired



men jumped out. Carol rolled her window down as a man wearing a red-checked flannel jacket approached.

“What’s the trouble here, girls?” he asked, glancing over the car.

“We’re out of gas,” Carol quickly replied.

“Well, I’d say we’re pretty lucky. We have a can of gas with us. How far do you need to go yet?”

“About thirteen miles.”

“Good. We’ll just pour some of our gas into your tank and you can be on your way again. No payment necessary.”

“O thank you so much,” responded Carol. “We were praying that God would send us help, and He did more than we could ever have thought! Thanks so much.”

“Yes, yes”, replied the man gruffly, “You’re pretty lucky we came along. We’re just glad to help you out.”

Several minutes later, the girls were on their way again. “You know,” said Carol, “when I saw that truck pull over, I was scared and glad at the same time. I began to scold myself again for not having that cell phone with me. But then I asked God to help me completely trust in Him and not be afraid. After all, isn’t He much more dependable than any cell phone? This has been such a faith booster for me. How different this may have turned out, if we had depended solely on our cell phones or

“good luck” as those men called it. It must grieve our Father’s heart tremendously when we do not place our trust in Him.”

“It’s just as Brother Lester preached this evening”, added Gloria. “Remember some of those verses? *I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry ... And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God... Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies. –Psa 40:1-4.* This makes me so happy I just want to keep singing and thanking the Lord!”

Again, the girls raised their voices in song:

“His eye is always watching,
His ear is keen to hear;
His love is all-sufficient
To calm the gravest fear.
Then trust Him in shine and shade;
Trust Him, be not afraid:
He’s walking close beside thee;
His hand will safely guide thee;
His wings securely hide thee;
Then trust! Be not afraid.”

-Charles H. Gabriel, 1856-1932



Youth at the Crossroads

Lamar Stoltzfus

Lititz, PA

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The onset of adolescence lies behind you, and you are journeying on a path toward manhood or womanhood. You are filled with a zest for life, a quest for knowledge, ambitious goals, and dazzling dreams. Yours is a thrilling age! Life lies before you. You are developing new skills, advancing in knowledge, and growing toward maturity. God has blessed you with opportunity to possess ...*all things that pertain unto life and godliness...* –2Pe 1:3. Will you make right choices at the crossroads in your life?

Your parents have tried to instill godly core values into your life. Up to this point, your parents have largely guided your course, but as you continue through your youth, you will begin making more of your own decisions. This budding independence can be both exhilarating and frightening. You will encounter many options for good, godliness, and life. You will also see many paths of sin, self, and worldliness that lead to shame, ruin, and destruction.

You will begin to question many things that heretofore you accepted as truth and never fully processed in your own mind. This is an important stage in life. Proverbs 4:26 says, *Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.* This verse tells us that we should consider our path in life, weighing the options. The goal is to walk on a path of righteousness. This phase of life can give the devil an opportunity to plant doubt in your mind about truth, or it can give you the opportunity to replace an impersonal hand-me-down acceptance of truth with a warm embrace of Biblical truth in a very personal way. We call this “developing personal convictions.”

As you travel through your youth, you will see many paths that veer off the godly road. Indeed, some of these paths are so well traveled that they may almost seem to be the right road, but they are not. These are paths that deviate from respect and honor of your parents. Some of these trails may have names like Questionable Friends Freeway, Breaking Curfews Cul-de-sac, and Shady Truth Trail. The godly road is to *Honour thy father and mother...* –Eph 6:2, and *Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath*

commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left –Deu 5:32.

You will soon come (if you haven’t already) to the most important crossroad in your life. Matthew 7:13-14 says, *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* Have you met Jesus at this crossroad? Have you listened to His counsel to choose life? Are you walking in faith on the narrow way?

Each morning you stand at a crossroad. One path leads down a gentle slope to the busyness of the cares and pleasures of this life. It is convenient to take this road—you can coast! The other path leads uphill and can be a strenuous climb at times. It leads to a Bible, to fellowship with Christ, and communication with Him. Of these two paths, which will you choose?

In our modern evil society, sinful men and even the devil himself, have paved many beautiful roads that lead away from the narrow way of Christ. You will chance upon these crossroads sometimes when you least expect it. One such crossroad to be especially aware of is the Immorality Interchange. The Fornication Freeway may look free, but it will cost you your soul. Young men are exhorted to *Let not thine heart decline to her [the evil woman’s] ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death* –Pro 7:25-27.

- Young brother, are you free from pornography and impurity that will place you on the slippery slopes of sin? Has Christ transformed your mind? Are you open with your father and your ministry about how you use your cell phone? Have you made a covenant with your eyes not to behold evil? –see Job 31:1
- Young sister, do you realize that what pornography is

to a man, sensual romance novels are to you? Do you guard your mind and heart? Do you modestly clothe yourself? Do you have a sweet and open relationship with Christ, while practicing a godly reserve toward men?

You will also arrive at the Music Mega-Junction. This crossroad is vast and sprawling because there are so many different options. Some youth decide which road to take based on what their friends do. They would rather have the praise and acceptance of men than the approval of God. Unwholesome peer pressure controls their life. Others make their choice based on what pleases their senses. They settle for lyrics with shallow repetition and music with a lusty beat. Perhaps they reason that if the words are okay, the lyrics will sanctify the music. Still others remember that God's Word teaches principles about the music that honors Him. They recall that their parents and their church have given them guidelines to help avoid confusion and ruin at this juncture. They truly believe that disobeying their parents and rebelling against the church is sin. Rather than listening to Contemporary Christian Music, they pursue being a contemporary (modern-day) Christian who seeks Christ's values. Instead of feeding on Country Music, ...*they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly...* -Heb 11:16. Rather than listening to Rock Music, they decide to build on Jesus Christ, the Solid Rock. They are committed to completely shunning the devil's music, even on their cell phone ring tones. They choose the right path and edify themselves with ...*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...* -Eph 5:19.

And then there is the Communication Circle. This superhighway's traffic moves along at such a dizzying speed

that it is hard to stay on the sidelines of this road without being swept away with the deluge of traffic! Data—both good and bad—is at our fingertips. Our society bombards us with a barrage of information due to enhanced connectivity. Our tools easily become our toys. Our cell phones beckon us with their incessant ringing. Our thumbs become “calloused” with ceaseless texting. We have emails to catch up on and a web to surf. We are “in the know” and want to “stay in the loop,” but where are we going? We travel around on the Communication Circle all day long, only to repeat the loop the next day! Will we continue to whirl around faster and faster until we are sucked down the middle like swirling water going down a drain? How will you avoid going under spiritually? Let me share the secret with you. It is being in the Communication Circle with Christ. Don't let a day go by without being connected—not online, but to the Vine. The Bible doesn't say, “Text without ceasing,” but, “*Pray without ceasing.*” -1Th 5:17. The noble Bereans of Acts 17:11, did not “surf the web repeatedly” but “*searched the Scriptures daily.*” The blessed hope of the Christian is not in being “sucked under,” but in being “*caught up together ... to meet the Lord in the air*” -1Th 4:17.

If you haven't figured this out yet, many of the crossroads you are facing in your youth are also issues that adults face. Casualness Crossroads is no exception. Casualness is a difficult issue to discuss because it is impossible for us to see into people's hearts as God can. One can look right on the outside but inwardly have lost their first love for Christ. Or perhaps the way they dress starts to show what is going on in their hearts. Regardless of its form, the root of the issue is a lack of respect and of reverence for God, indifference toward spiritual things, and a failure to love God with all the heart.



Taking this road has destroyed many a youth, so I present to you a possible scenario to show how this can work. This road veers just slightly away from the path of godliness, so that for a while the two roads still seem like one. People going down this alternate path may seem unsure whether dress issues matter. Bold stripes and checkers show up on their shirts for Wednesday evening prayer meetings and Sunday evening services. Then after a brief delay they arrive on Sunday mornings as well. Light-colored pants follow suit. Walking hand-in-hand with them, though unseen, is an increasing tendency to embrace a casual mindset that erodes at the seriousness of the Christian life.

Now let's grab our binoculars and look farther down this same road to see what has become of others who stood at this same crossroad years ago. By now, after changing their church membership a few times to accommodate their ever-increasingly worldly desires, people on this road are wearing pants (or shorts) that bear every resemblance of the world. Their shirts have become brighter and bolder, with shirttails hanging out. Ornamental and recreational goatees, moustaches, and long sideburns adorn the faces of the men, following current fads. The lady's dresses—Wait! Did they use to wear dresses?—have given way to ill-fitting skirts and immodest blouses. Some even wear slacks. And on top of their heads is a minuscule mockery of what used to be an ample covering. As they ascend the steps into their church for Sunday morning worship, their lips profess that it is only the heart that matters, but their true colors will show when their girls cut their hair and increasing worldliness and departure from biblical doctrines mark the next generation. Don't allow *casualness* to make you a *casualty*.

Crossroads in your life will not always make you choose between good and evil. Sometimes the choices are between two things that are both good. Should I help the busy young mother in our church today, or should I go help package food for the poor? Should I teach school locally, or go into VS (voluntary service) in Honduras? If you listen closely, God's Spirit will direct you in making a wise choice: It may be the counsel from your parents that helps you decide, it may be circumstances that nudge you in one direction or another, or it may be God's still, small voice within your spirit that helps you know which path to take.

Does it appeal to you to "go into mission work somewhere"? Many of these same opportunities will regularly present themselves in your home community. Why not try serving Jesus locally first, before pursuing a role elsewhere? Would you be willing to visit your sick neighbor and show them Christ's love? Would you be willing to buy religious literature with your own funds and pass it out to your neighbors? Do you welcome and initiate spiritual discussions with those you meet? Do you willingly give of your paycheck to your local congregation's Sunday offering, the work of a Christian

publishing house, or a conservative relief organization? As you practice these things, you will be a real blessing to your own home and community, and you will be an even greater blessing in the future no matter where you end up serving the Lord. In reality, "serving the Lord" is an attitude of the heart and a willingness of the hands and feet, rather than a position to fill in an organization's program.

Never allow the materialism of the age or social relationships to hinder you from following the path God has for you. Sometimes the right-hand path may not necessarily be wrong but needs to be forsaken in order to choose the **left** path. When Peter and Andrew were fishing, Jesus met them and said, "Follow me." *And they straightway left their nets, and followed him –Mat 4:20. Mark 10:29-30 says, And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. Are you willing to choose the left path if God calls you to sacrifice in this way?*

Another intriguing crossroad in your life is that of marriage. Brother, if you feel led of God to begin courting and you have the blessing of your parents, move ahead. Sister, if you are asked by a godly young man, seriously consider his request. Six thousand years after Adam and Eve were created, it is still *...not good that the man should be alone... –Gen 2:18. And two thousand years after the Apostle Paul gave his instructions to Timothy, God is still interested in seeing ...that the younger women marry, [and] bear children... –1Ti 5:14. God may be more interested in your getting married and starting a godly home where children are loved and nurtured than in your going into special service for the Lord. In fact, a godly marriage and a godly home are ways of serving the Lord, where each humbly serves the other and where parents nurture their children. If you are sensitive to God's Spirit, He will direct you at this crossroad.*

Perhaps you have taken the wrong road at one of the crossroads in your past, and now you wish you could find your way back. From wherever you are, God's redemptive love has built a road back to the highway that leads to glory. At this crossroad you will see a cross. This road is the path of repentance and confession. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness –1Jn 1:9. God loves you and greatly desires your heart! Take Him with you on your journey, and He will guide your feet on the path that leads to the streets of gold. May God richly bless you!*



Walking in the Light

A Study of 1 John 1

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Did you ever wish you could have been with Jesus when He lived on this earth? Think of the wonderful fellowship Jesus' followers experienced as they talked with Him and listened to Him teach. Think of the blessedness of being in His presence like Mary experienced when sitting by His feet. Imagine the glorious feeling of being healed of an infirmity by His touch.

The Apostles brought us the message of the Gospel that we might experience the same fellowship they had with Jesus Christ. Our fellowship with God and others can be as real as theirs. Their senses of hearing, seeing, and touching Jesus made them credible witnesses that Jesus walked with them and had fellowship with them. We, by faith, are to believe that we can experience this same fellowship.

1. Fellowship Yields Fullness of Joy (1 John 1:3-4)

This message is meant to give fullness of joy (verse 4). Joy is an "evidence check" on our level of fellowship with God and with others. This chapter reveals the principles of fellowship which lead to joy. We tend to think that joy is based on what others will do for us. But true joy does not come from seeking our own fulfillment.

Our two highest callings in life are to love God and to love others. It is not about how I may feel loved. When our main perspective is "how may I feel loved" and "how may I be served" and "what will this do for me," our joy will never be full. This entitlement mentality says other people owe us something. With this mentality, we will always find more things that people owe us before we feel any obligation to love them. But this "me mentality" is simply not biblical. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Fullness of joy comes from true fellowship—close

relationships that grow out of our love for others. The highest fulfillment in life does not come in getting, but in giving. The Apostle John wrote these things so our joy may be full.

2. God Is Light (1 John 1:5)

God is perfect in character, motive, works, and in the exercise of His sovereignty. Everything He does or allows is for a wise and noble purpose. He asks us to believe this even when we cannot understand why certain things happen. God has no malicious intent in anything He does or allows. If we do not accept the sovereignty of God in our lives, we will never find fullness of joy. If we question God's wisdom in major disappointments, our whole life may become a disappointment. If we are angry at our lot in life and do not reconcile with it, we are ultimately angry and bitter at God. When we are angry at God, no one will be able to fix our problems to our satisfaction or help us find meaning in life.

If we harbor an attitude of anger at our lot in life, we are charging God with dark motives for allowing it. Do we really believe that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all?" This can be very hard to believe when no one can answer our "why" questions. Notice the commentary on Job: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22). In our darkest hours of grief and hurt we can still choose to believe that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

This understanding and choice of faith are essential for fellowship with God and others. It is normal to question God, and it is okay to ask God those hard questions, like Job did. But it is wrong to charge God with dark motives for anything He has allowed to happen. In spite of our charges, He will still be morally perfect; but we will drown in bitterness. We cannot have fellowship with Him when we charge Him with not coming up to our standards.

3. Darkness Within Prevents Fellowship (1 John 1:6)

We cannot have fellowship with God, Who is light, and yet walk in darkness. What does it mean to walk in darkness? Darkness is a description for hiding things that we know are wrong. The cover that we provide for our secret sins or our hidden motives is darkness.

Any attempt to circumvent the truth is a work of darkness. When the Word of truth makes something plain which requires a clear course of action, our sinful nature attempts to obscure the path by considering human reasoning and emotions. When the light of truth is diffused, all becomes gray; and in the gray, there is no definitive answer. Anyone attempting to circumvent the truth will try to lower the light to a shade of gray, producing indecision and confusion.

There is a difference between saying and walking. We may say we are in right relationship with God. We may say we have repented. We may say we have forgiven another. But when our lives continue to show our old habits of sin or unforgiveness, we are living a lie. If we tell ourselves and others that we have repented, yet we continue our same patterns of conduct, we are only deceiving ourselves. When we say we have forgiven another's offenses, but continue to degrade them for those offenses, we are deceiving ourselves and living a lie. When we allow a brother or sister to degrade another member of the body whom they say they have forgiven, we are helping them to live a lie.

4. Walking in the Light Brings Fellowship (1 John 1:7a)

The key verse of this passage is verse 7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." What does it mean to "walk in the light as He is in the light?"

(a) **Walk in purity.** The motives for our actions should serve the good of another and must not be deceitful and self-serving.

(b) **Walk in truth.** We must honor the clear truth of Scripture, especially when we are unsure of how to handle all the details of our circumstances. Many times, we allow uncertainty about details to obscure fundamental principles of conduct. When we are committed to following the life-principles of the truth, the details will be worked out step by step.

(c) **Walk in openness.** We need to commit ourselves not to hide our sin. Openness can hurt us when others use that information maliciously. When our lives are open epistles to others, we are also open to criticism. However, over time, the testimony of an open life of integrity will do more to dispel unjust criticism than secretive behavior. We should not share information with people who we feel certain will

use it for evil (casting pearls before swine); but even those people should know that we aim to live our lives honestly before all. If we want to have close fellowship with other believers, we must walk openly before them. Deception divides relationship, provokes mistrust, and creates far more difficulties than living openly before some who may unjustly criticize.

Until we choose to walk in the light, our problems may seem insurmountable. We can easily focus on how other people are going to solve them for us. But other people will always come up short of our expectations. To "walk in the light as He is in the light" is to dedicate our lives to loving God and others rather than demanding to be loved. There is a direct relationship between walking in the light and having fellowship. Whenever we do not walk in the light, we create relationship issues between God and the members of the church.

Now consider the promise in a positive sense. Relating to others with pure motives, truth, and openness promotes fellowship and close relationship. When we are all committed to seeking each other's good, we don't need to wonder if someone's words or actions are designed to degrade us. If we walk in truth together, truth is not offensive to our relationship. When we walk openly before each other, we build trust in each other. Walking in the light together brings close relationship and fellowship, which brings fullness of joy, which gives fulfillment in life.

The phrase "fellowship one with another" can be fairly interpreted to represent the relationship between us and God, as well as the relationship between us and others. John is making a general statement with a general blessing: walk in the light and you will have fellowship with one another—with God and with your brethren. Verse 3 clearly indicates that the intent of fellowship is between us and God, as well as between us and others. The two are linked together by design; we either have both or neither of them. Walk in the light to obtain both blessings of fellowship.

5. Confession Restores Fellowship (1 John 1:7b-10)

Although believers are already justified, they still need daily cleansing. Walking in the light keeps the cleansing process in place. All of us fall short of God's perfection daily, and that sin would always mar our fellowship with God—except for the fact that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The word "cleanseth" describes a present tense ongoing action for those who walk in the light. This truth is astounding: because of the continual cleansing of Jesus Christ, nothing can limit the closeness of our relationship to God—because we are cleansed from all sin. No relationship barriers remain to hinder fellowship if we walk in the light. We don't need to walk perfectly, but

we do need to walk purely, truthfully, and openly.

Walking in the light means we are open and honest about addressing areas of our life that need growth. When we have this attitude, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sins and shortcomings. Notice again the promise. If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus will take care of everything else: everything between us and God, and everything between us and our brother.

If we presumptuously assume that our lives do not need daily cleansing, but we are quite sure that some other people need it, we are surely deceiving ourselves. If we are sure that our lack of close relationships is due to issues in the lives of others, we are deceiving ourselves. Automatically assuming that there is nothing we can do from our end to improve a strained relationship is a sure indicator that we are deceived. Walk in the light, and you will see areas of your life which need further cleansing. Verse 8 is given in the present tense for those who say they have no sin or feel there is nothing further for them to do to heal a broken relationship.

In confession, Christ becomes our cleansing (verse 9). The light reveals those areas of our lives that need continual cleansing. The confessing and cleansing process humbles us and regularly reminds us of the need to forgive others as we are being forgiven. The person who cannot forgive another does not fully see their own sin because they are not walking in the light.

God's promised response to confession is to forgive our sins. If we confess our sins, and Christ has promised to forgive our sins, then by faith we must believe that they are forgiven. We should not let the Devil continually assault us with our failures and fail to forgive ourselves for what we have done. Let us not doubt the work of Christ. If He has forgiven us, we should move forward in "newness of life" (Romans 6:4). We dare not accept guilt for sins that Christ has effectually removed and canceled from our account. By not forgiving ourselves after we have confessed our sin and have been forgiven by God, we are expressing doubt and unbelief rather than humility and contrition. We should express our continued humility, contrition, and gratefulness to God by walking in the light.

God forgives us on two counts, in that He is faithful and just (verse 9):

Faithful: God is committed to forgiving us even before we commit the sin. Can we look our spouse or brother in the eye and say, "Before you offend me, I am committed to forgiving you, because that is part of my faithfulness to you; I will not go back on my commitment to you"? Jesus is faithfully committed to forgiving and cleansing those who walk in the light.


Just: God would be just in holding us accountable to pay the full penalty for our sin if Jesus had not died in our place and taken the full penalty for us. God cannot overlook our sin and cast it into a black hole of darkness, for "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Everything is open before Him, including our sin. He could continually declare us guilty and remind us of it—if Jesus had not died for our sins so that they are remembered no more. Because of Jesus, God is "just" in forgiving our sin because the full price for it has been paid. God cannot justly hold us accountable for confessed sin without diminishing the perfection of His grace toward those who confess their sin.

6. Fellowship Requires Forgiving Others

Perhaps you feel justified in holding someone accountable for some wrong that they have done. But you have no more reason to hold someone else accountable than what God has to hold you accountable for your sin. Indeed, God has innumerable reasons to hold you accountable for sin that you have committed against Him. As God can be just in forgiving your sin for Jesus' sake, so also you can justly forgive another for Jesus' sake. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32) Whenever we think we can justifiably hold somebody accountable for sin without forgiving them, we can be sure that others could justifiably hold us accountable for sin we have committed against them. We must forgive others their trespasses in order to experience the cleansing of forgiveness from God.

Sometimes even in professing forgiveness there can be a dagger of malice. Someone may say, "I forgive you of your sin against me," when they really mean to say, "I want you to know that you have trespassed against me." True forgiveness is evidenced in the words of Stephen: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Just as Jesus removes sin from our account when He forgives us, so also do we remove sin and offense from a trespasser's account against us when we forgive them.

How God deals with a trespasser's sin is in His hands. If we truly have forgiven a brother and are walking in the light, then from our side we are open for fellowship and relationship. Being open for fellowship is a test of true forgiveness. Fellowship may not be possible if the other person is not walking in the light. But if we are walking in the light and have forgiven, we will not withhold fellowship from a brother who seeks it. We do not have the right as individuals to discipline a brother whom we think has erred. Discipline belongs to the corporate body, even when the church is lax in exercising it. The church at Corinth was lax in addressing a serious sin, yet Paul told them to discipline



when they came together, rather than on an individual basis (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

The Apostle Paul would have been faced with the sins of his youth every time he met a family member of someone he imprisoned or put to death. Would the church forgive him? Could he forgive himself? For Jesus' sake, all was forgiven; not only forgiven, but the church extended to Paul "the right hands of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9).

In Soviet Russia there was secret persecution of the underground church. Sergei Kourdakov, a young KGB agent, led some raids against church services. One day he confiscated a portion of the Gospel of Luke. From his book, *The Persecutor*, we quote:

"I opened up those pieces of paper and began to read them again. Jesus was talking and teaching someone how to pray. I became more curious and read on. This certainly was no anti-state material. It was how to be a better person and how to forgive those who do you wrong. This was exactly the opposite of what I had expected. My lack of understanding, which had been like blinders on my eyes, left me right then, and the words bit deeply into my being . . . Through the days and weeks ahead, those words of Jesus stayed with me. I couldn't shake them, hard as I tried. I wished I hadn't read them. Everything had been so organized in my life, but those disturbing words had changed something. I had feelings I never had felt before. I couldn't explain or understand them."

The message of forgiveness eventually led Sergei to find peace with God, in spite of his cruelty against believers. He was also reconciled to the church and became a speaker for Underground Evangelism when he escaped to the West. Forgiveness and cleansing by Jesus Christ can bring us into fellowship with those we formerly considered our enemies.

In closing, consider these precepts: Walk in the light you have. Walk toward the light you see. Walk in and toward the light in order to receive more light. As you walk in the light given in God's holy Word, you will find that you are walking in close fellowship with God and others.





“Regeneration”

—Stem Cell Issues

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I have been told by many women folk here in Holmes County, Ohio, that we have excellent charity stores and second-hand shops, as is often the case where large groups of plain people are living. We have had people from all around come to visit, taking extra time to drop by these stores. Apparently, people here like to keep things in top shape, so at the first sign of wear, it’s “out with the old and in with the new.”

Likewise, no farmer would disagree that seeing all their machinery run like a top, and all their livestock stay healthy, is a satisfying feeling. Since the time of Adam, the Lord has always made us that way—to ...*have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.* –Gen 1:28

Having an opposite attitude is to be avoided. Jude exhorts us to beware of “certain men” who, within our midst, have “crept in unawares.” They live by the flesh and “despise dominion.” Two thousand years later, even in our overly casual society where “It’s all good” and we need to “Just chill,” the Lord still expects us to take seriously our calling to exercise God-given responsibility of dominion using Biblical principles in all that we do.

Does this dominion also extend to our own bodies? In Second Chronicles, Chapter 34, we can read of the wretched state of the Temple at the beginning of the reign of King Josiah, how he rebuilt it both physically with stone and timber—skillfully crafted by the artisans, and spiritually, by rediscovering and drinking in the Word of God. So too should we care for our bodies, as the Apostle Paul instructs us: *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore*

glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.
–1Co 6:19-20

It is safe to say that judging by the multitude of nutritional supplements, chiropractors, doctors, and other various ancillary (supplemental) health care people and products, we make a good effort at keeping our physical temples well cared for and healthy. However, since we are all born with the curse of Adam, unlike machine parts that can simply be replaced, or a new machine purchased once the old one has run the full course of its life, we are faced with the reality that our body parts also have a practical “shelf life.” The older we get, the more apparent it is that life is very limited. The Bible says 70-80 years (–see Psa 90:10). (In America, in 2018, the average was 78.7 years. How little things have changed over 3 millennia later!)

I think we can all agree that God is primarily concerned about the spiritual temple, even more than the physical temple of our bodies. One doesn’t need to think hard to find godly men and women of today, and our spiritual forefathers of yesterday, who sacrificed and endured the destruction of their bodies, glorifying God, resulting in the cleansing of their souls and the future glorification of their bodies. Their plea was this: *Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* –Psa 51:10

Christ himself endured the destruction of His physical body, stating, ...*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* –Joh 2:19. In the resurrection, his body was regenerated. We also read in scripture, about another physical regeneration, in which the earth will give birth to her dead; where those who dwell in the dust [will] wake up and shout for joy! (–see Isa 26:19)

Yet through this all, when our bodies break down or

wear out, we feebly attempt, with some limited success, a physical regeneration of our own. There is a whole field of study focusing on **Regenerative Medicine**. The actual word “regeneration” literally means to “redo genesis” by recreating a new body—quite a lofty goal indeed!

Is there anything wrong with replacing broken parts (knees, hips and elbows), patching up broken pieces (bones and skin), and maintaining health in general (through good nutrition and physical activity)? Certainly not—it is how I make my living, advising and treating my patients! Yet like most things, even the pursuit of “good health” should give us pause to “count the costs” and exercise moderation—*Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. –Php 4:5*. For while the pursuit of physical health is a good thing, it is a blind pursuit without regard to the spiritual costs (as we discovered in our series on vaccines), that can result in leading us astray and away from God.

There are two ditches on this road to physical health, spiritual health, and our overall well-being. In the ditch on the one hand, we can be reckless with our health, allowing our bodily temple to decay prematurely. Job said of man: *Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass; –Job 14:5*. So if we, through neglect, seek to cut those days short, are we not in defiance of God—seeking to short-circuit His perfect will for us? In the other ditch is the reckless and futile search for immortality—by seeking physical health at any cost. In doing so, is this not also an act of defiance? Paul reminds us: *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: –Rom 5:12*. In other words, due to sin, it is God’s plan for us to die physically (so that we may live eternally with Him).

Most readers, at this point would agree that both ends of the spectrum have this in common: they both neglect a person’s spiritual health, and they are both in a state of defiance toward God. So where am I going with this? Most Christians, who I know, do not pursue physical health at any cost. Bear with me then, as I would like to take the remainder of this article (and the next article) to give you a history of **Regenerative Medicine**—this “redoing of genesis.” Does it live up to its claims? Are there scams? What are the pitfalls? What does the future hold? Most importantly, how does it impact our spiritual health and our relationship with the Lord?

First, what exactly is **Regenerative Medicine**? As I mentioned previously, it literally means man’s efforts to “redo” genesis (origin, creation, or beginning). The term

was first used as recently as the 1990s and is defined as the study and practice of “the replacement or regeneration of human cells, tissue, or organs, to restore or establish normal function.” In its short history, any and all means necessary to do this have been used.

It is different from **Transplant Medicine** in which whole organs are replaced but are still viewed as “foreign” by the receiving body. That is why strong anti-rejection medicines are needed for the rest of the individual’s life. It is also different from **Orthopedic Medicine**, in which hardware, such as screws, and titanium knees, for example, secure and replace worn out parts. **Regenerative Medicine** draws on the natural occurrence of certain organisms such as starfish, lizards, and lobsters, which are able to “regenerate” missing limbs and tails. In essence, the regenerated tissue is indistinguishable from the original, having few to no complications or side effects due to the fact that it is wholly integrated into that specific species’ host body. Sounds good doesn’t it?

This is not a new concept. Prometheus, in Greek mythology, was a “minor god,” who was punished by the “head god” Zeus (for “giving” fire to man) by having animals feast on his body, only to have his body regenerate the next day. A couple of thousand years later, Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein novel was subtitled “The Modern Prometheus.” This book, written almost exactly 200 years ago, contains a strong warning about unrestrained science, and man’s reckless search for fleshly regeneration. Even so, it is easy to see that man has had a long history of desire to regenerate his body, just as a mechanic swaps out parts or a starfish grows a new arm.

Advances in anesthesia, pharmacology (antibiotics and anti-rejection medicines in particular), surgery and



sterilization techniques led to milestones in medicine, such as the first kidney transplant in 1954 and the first bone marrow transplant in 1968. But transplants had limitations—some injured and damaged tissues or complex organs, such as a brain, could not simply be replaced. Furthermore, due to an aging population and the sheer demands for the large quantities needed of some tissues, such as skin for burn victims, coupled with a chronic shortage of proper donors, alternatives were needed. Also, the dark shadow of tissue rejection was ever present and needed to be dealt with.

It has long been known that while an unborn child is a unique human being, it is rare for such developing children to be rejected by his or her mother's body. We have learned this is due to the fact that in developing fetuses, their cells do not have many unique identifiers. The older a person becomes, the more their cells have a unique look and identification—kind of like the same fingerprint on the surface of each and every cell in a person's body. A person's body "knows" what its own tissue's "fingerprint" looks like, and it "knows" that what isn't native is foreign and must be attacked. By using fetal tissue, there would be almost no chance of rejection, and no need for dangerous life-long anti-rejection medicine. The new tissue would be entirely assimilated—so it was thought. So, attempts were made at using fetal tissue to cure things like Addison's Disease (adrenal tissue) in the 1920s and Diabetes (pancreatic tissue) starting in the 1930s. While up to 24 fetuses were used per transplant, they eventually proved to be unsuccessful.¹

By the 1990s, there was a renewed interest in using fetal tissue. Wouldn't it be wonderful, some scientists thought, if, by simply inserting some fetal pancreatic insulin-producing cells under one's forearms, diabetes could be cured? The same goes for fetal thyroid transplants, adrenal transplants—simply an outpatient procedure, and done in a few minutes. What about things like brain tissue for Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's? The potential was seemingly limitless.

If that sounds somewhat macabre, there was an even more ominous side. It was shown experimentally in mice that one could successfully transplant fetal ovarian tissue.² The idea was to transplant fetal ovarian tissue into infertile women (for example, survivors of childhood cancer in which the chemo rendered the girl infertile). This would sideline any "need" for IVF treatments. Imagine being a child born of a genetic mother that was aborted!

With the cultural abortion battles, there was an intense push to find a "cure." Suppose there was a cure for Alzheimer's or Diabetes? How many people would reject that cure if it came from fetal tissue? If they actually refused

the treatment, how many of those people would voice their objection to abortion if a family member chose a curative (though unethical) treatment? If a parent of a diabetic child refused treatment, would it be considered child neglect, and would the state have grounds for forcibly treating the child or removing him or her from the home until treatment was received? In the end, one goal was that abortion would be justified in the minds of the population.

But something happened: The treatments didn't work as planned in a significant number of patients. The treatments in a large number of Parkinson patients were actually described by the providing doctors as "catastrophic," "absolutely devastating," and "a real nightmare."³ Instead of the classic muscle rigidity associated with Parkinson's Disease, came jerking heads, flinging arms, and writhing bodies. The tissue did not "know" enough when to turn itself off, overproducing neurohormones, even forming tumors of skin, hair, and cartilage.⁴ Moreover, the tissue that "took" eventually died out by the same process that caused the Parkinson's disease.⁵ The treatments were obviously stopped.

But at about this time, in the late 1990s, techniques were discovered that enabled researchers to isolate, and grow in great numbers, a certain cell called a "stem cell" from human embryos. Think of these rapidly growing stem cells as forming the stem of a plant. It is through them that the other types of cells are derived (leaves, flower, and fruit). These embryos, uniquely human, were obtained from "leftover" fertility treatments in which conception was initiated in a laboratory petri (glass) dish and allowed to grow to a cluster size. The desired cells were taken, and the rest destroyed. (In essence, these were "micro" abortions.)

Fetal tissue did not work as expected, partly because it was already too specialized and too "pre-programmed," but also too impure, too costly, and too labor intensive—necessitating the harvesting of tissue from numerous aborted babies with a microscope and tweezers. Some scientists thought, why not obtain these stem cells, "program" them into the desired type of cell, and grow them to however many are needed?

In the next issue, I will tell you where the research currently stands, where there have been successes and failures, and how Christians can ethically navigate the turbulent waters of these times. It is amazing how the Lord opens doors, using the wonders of science, to create ethical alternatives for those who remain faithful to Him and His ways. It will be exciting to explain to you, how these "alternatives" have become the main focus of research and treatment for believers and unbelievers alike.

But before I leave you, I'd like to mention that over the

years, I've had a number of people remark that these babies are being aborted anyway, so why not get some benefit from the tragedy, wouldn't that be redemptive in a way?

Here is my (short list) of reasons why it would be unbiblical for Christians to benefit from unethical vaccines—and now fetal tissue treatments:

1. The act of redemption cannot be separated from restitution and reconciliation. The very act of using fetal tissue only encourages further and expanded exploitation—just the opposite of restitution and reconciliation (where there needs to be a resolution to no longer repeat the sin). History has borne out that there is a multiplication of the sin, not the reduction. Where there was once one cell line, there are now dozens. Scientists are emboldened to do further, and even more unethical research, especially if there is no objection.

2. The very word “redeem” means to purchase back something which was originally was yours, but now has become lost. The body of the unborn child was never ours to begin with, never ours to give, and never ours to profit from.

3. Redemption always involves a sacrifice—of self. How can anyone sacrifice self by volunteering the body of another? (Heb 9:12) John 15:13 says, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* Some Christians are keen to use this verse to justify going to war. While there is definitely self-sacrifice in going to war, the goal is to make the enemy lay down THEIR lives. The utilitarian use of fetal tissue follows the same line of thinking, except that there is NO self-sacrifice in exploiting the body of an aborted baby.

4. While Jesus's redemption of mankind turned something horrid and ugly into something that glorifies God, it was an act of sanctification through holiness and righteousness. Regarding this issue, I can't think of an act further removed from sanctification, holiness and righteousness—only opportunism. –see Psa 111:9 and 1 Co 1:30

5. We cannot hope for the deliverance of God from evil—by participating in and benefiting from evil. We are forgiven our trespasses, only by forgiving, not by co-conspiring, only by repaying good for evil. –see Mat 5 & 6

6. God finds the shedding of innocent blood abhorrent (He *hates* it!). –see Pro 6:17. We can only please God and can only receive atonement by purging ourselves from any association with this guilt—not by participating in it. –see

Deu 21:8, 9. Can anyone imagine utilizing products such as soap and lamp shades made from holocaust victims who would have “died anyway”?

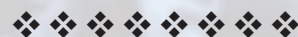
7. When Saul destroyed the Amalekites, he kept the best of the loot—ostensibly as an offering to God (at least he said so when he was challenged by Samuel). –see 1 Sam 15 Why did God utterly reject His anointed king over this? Could it be that he did not want His chosen to profit or benefit from evil—even in the destruction of that evil? Could it be that by bringing the bounty of the wicked into the midst of his chosen people, His people risked becoming desensitized to that very same wickedness, and so became corrupted themselves? Samuel simultaneously wept and grieved over Saul, crying out to the Lord. If it is not us, then who will weep for us and for a fallen generation?

8. The same could be said concerning the judgement of Achan's secreted treasure following the defeat at Ai. In summary, if there is any personal benefit to be had following a tragedy or a judgement of another, the best way to tell if it is legitimate, is if the details are not cloaked in secrecy. (*For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;*) *Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* –Eph 5:9-11

9. There are alternatives—why lend justification to unethical practices? On the issue of pursuing alternative vaccines, it is a difficult process, but not impossible to do. Following Christ often times follows the more arduous path, rather than the path of least resistance. The example of our faithful forefathers bears this out.

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The *Finished* Work of Christ

Larry Zook – Kalona, IA

Curvin L Wenger – Dalton, OH

*When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, **It is finished**: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. –Joh 19:30*

As we have been developing this article over the last year, we have become increasingly aware of a growing interest in this subject. Various papers and booklets have been, or are being, written about it. Some writings debate specific *theories* of the atonement, while others reason about various *terms* or *Bible verses*. What ideas and statements concerning the atonement are found in the clear teachings of Scripture, and which are misunderstandings or wrong interpretations?

I. The Atonement

The term atonement is usually understood to explain *all* or *part* of what happened spiritually (for the believer) when Christ went through His suffering, death, and resurrection. Sometimes the term atonement is used to define that which brings men and women to a place of “at-one-ment” (to be at one) with God. How does that event in history still affect us today, some 2,000 years later?

In these discussions, there is the tendency to forget that the finished work of Christ includes multiple aspects, with each one contributing to a different effect for the believer today. These different aspects include Christ’s Suffering, His Blood, His Death, His Burial, His Resurrection, and His Ascension.

a. His Suffering

His suffering covers the physical, emotional, and mental anguish He endured that culminated with His death on the cross. Here we see that *...it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day ... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name...* –Luk

24:46-47. The suffering servant, as portrayed in the whole of Isaiah chapter 53, gives a vivid picture of this aspect of the atonement. Isaiah describes Him as being *...wounded for our transgressions, [and] ...bruised for our iniquities*: –Isa 53:5. Here we also have the reality that *with his stripes we are healed*. –Isa 53:5. Finally, we see that *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted...* –Isa 53:7, and that he endured *... travail of his soul...* –Isa 53:11

Let’s note a few more of the many passages that speak of His suffering: *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God...* –1Pe 3:18; *Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered* –Heb 5:8; *For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings* –Heb 2:10.

A sometimes forgotten purpose of Jesus’ suffering is that, as believers, we are to identify with His suffering as given in the following passages: *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ* –2Co 1:5; *...if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together* –Rom 8:17; *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death* –Php 3:10.

b. His Blood that was Shed

The blood of Christ being shed for the atonement of sinful man needs some careful consideration as a specific vital aspect of the whole. Of course, it is included in points a. and c., but the Scriptures also give much attention to this particular part. It would perhaps require a whole book to

expound on this aspect, but we should note one thing on this point. It is with the shedding of the blood of Jesus that we have God's specific solution for the remission of our sins given here in Jesus' own words, *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins* –Mat 26:28.

In Hebrews chapters 9 and 10, we have very detailed explanation showing how the “blood sacrifices” of the Old Testament were not perfect in themselves, rather they were a “type” that pointed forward to the perfect sacrifice—Jesus, the Lamb of God. It is in this context that we have this—that *...almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and **without shedding of blood is no remission.*** –Heb 9:22. This is particularly important to remember when we consider that some people claim that God could just simply forgive sin without *death* or the *shedding of blood* if He so chose. These people use the story found in Matthew 18:23-35 as their proof text. It would do us well to consider that this story is revealing the “why” (compassion) of the outcome, **not** the “how” of the details. We cannot take this story out of context of Scripture and build a doctrine that undermines all the rest of Scripture. Thus, we conclude that in God's economy He has ordained that sin **must** be washed away with the blood of Christ—*And from Jesus Christ, who ... washed us from our sins in his own blood,* –Rev 1:5.

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God –Rom 3:23-25. Here we see that for anyone of us that has sinned (ALL of us), we have our propitiation made possible through faith in His (Jesus') blood.

c. His Death

Jesus said, *...I lay down my life for the sheep* –Joh 10:15, and again He said, *...I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again...* –Joh 10:17-18.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. –Heb 2:9-10. When you partake of communion *...ye do shew the Lord's death till he come* –1Co 11:26.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also

should walk in newness of life. –Rom 6:3-4

It is during this period of Jesus' time on earth that the earthly, mortal part of Him separated from that which was heavenly, eternal, and immortal.

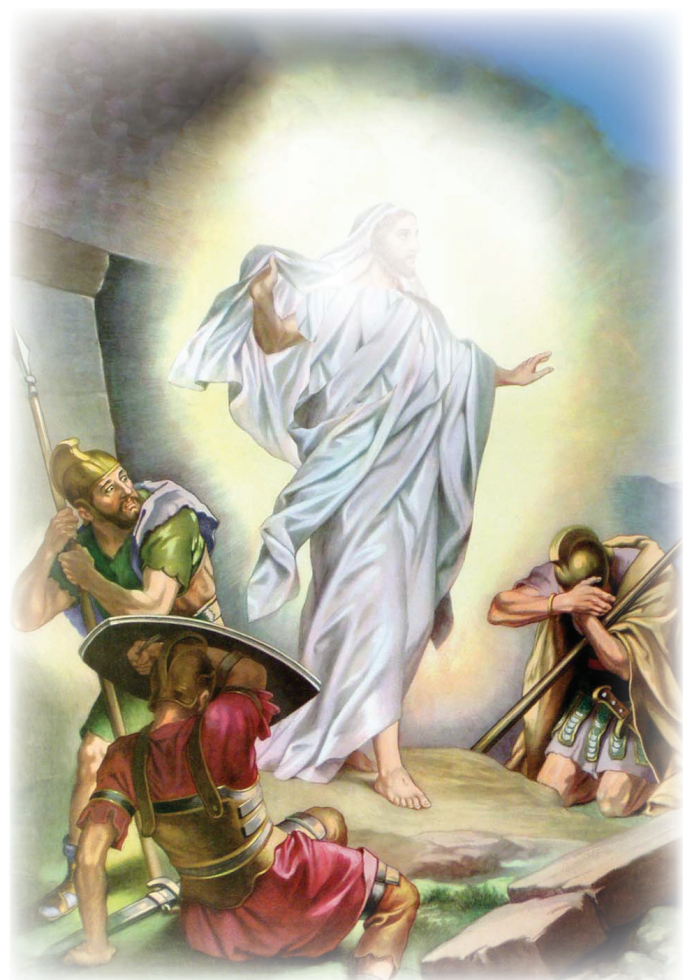
d. His Burial

We note again, as referenced above, the truth that *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death...* –Rom. 6:4. While all these aspects are a part of the whole, the burial represents *...a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die...* –Joh 12:24. First is the ending of life (pouring out of the blood), then death, then burial, then resurrection. The burial part is the confirmation that death has occurred. It brings finality, closure, and an end to the former. It is the necessary interval between death and resurrection.

It is also the time of Jesus' entrance into Hades, the place of departed souls, of which we are given only glimpses through several passages of Scripture.

e. His Resurrection

In His resurrection we are raised with Him in newness of life. (Romans 6:4) *...wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised*



him from the dead –Col 2:12. So, in His resurrection we are raised up with Him from death (if we were dead prior) and are provided the power to walk in newness of life (the power to have victory over sin).

f. His Ascension

In His ascension we understand that ...*he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.* –Act 1:9. It is due to His leaving this earth that we have many key aspects for the believer's life today. There is the provision of the Holy Spirit made possible once Jesus left this earth. We have the promise of His going to prepare a better home for us to someday join Him in everlasting joy. We have Jesus sitting at the right hand of the throne of God interceding for us. We have Jesus acting in the role of our sympathetic High Priest, one that knows and understands our every need and struggle, since He has the experience of living on the sinful earth inside a mortal body.

Herein, we start to see how each part of the Atonement achieves a different result for the believer and that each part is only that—A PART. A part of the whole. A part of the finished work of Christ. These lists could each go on and fill page after page of all the blessings and benefits each one enables for the believer. For the sake of space, we will stop on this part for now and continue with the rest of the article, but hopefully this will stimulate each of us to further meditation in God's Word on these matters.

II. Common statements that are not Biblically correct

There are some popular statements which we may hear concerning the atonement that do not accurately describe what the Scriptures teach. But because they are popular in our conversations, or perhaps they're even the words of a familiar song, they may skew our understanding of the finished work of Christ. For some examples, let's look at the following statements:

a. "Christ took my place on Calvary."

This may seem like a logical conclusion, because He died for us, ...*the just for the unjust...* –1Pe 3:18. and He died that we might live. There is no question that it was for us, but the preposition, *for*, can be understood several different ways. It can mean *in my place*, or it can mean *on my behalf*. Most of Scripture clearly emphasizes that He died on my behalf, but less clear is the idea of a direct substitution. Emphasizing substitution leads us to the following concept: He died in my place, so I don't need to. If this becomes the primary way of thinking about the atonement, we may miss what is equally important—that since He died, so I must also die with Him. See Rom 6:1-11

b. "The guilt of my sin was placed on Christ."

There are passages that speak of Christ bearing our sins. *So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...* –Heb 9:28 and, *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree...* –1Pe 2:24. But what is the proper understanding of what it means to 'bear (carry) our sins'? We do NOT find Scripture which supports the idea that the **guilt** of my sin was transferred to Christ. Christ offered Himself to be the **sacrifice** for sin (Heb 10:10-12), the **propitiation** for our sins (1Jo 2:1), to put away sin, even to be the forgiveness of sin. This great work of dealing with sin was accomplished without Him ever losing His condition as the Lamb without blemish.

There is one passage we should note on this topic, *For he [God] hath made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who [Jesus] knew no sin...* –2Co 5:21. When we look at the Greek word in this verse translated as "sin" and compare this passage with all the other Scriptures, it seems the intended meaning for this phrase **to be sin** is more clearly defined as **to be a sin offering**. Christ's soul was not blackened with the guilt of our sin, else He could not have retained His position ... *as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* –1Pe 1:19. A proper understanding of the sense in which He took our sins is that *He assumed the settlement for them*.

c. "He took the wrath of God upon Himself."

Concerning God's wrath, we know that ...*he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him* –Joh 3:36; ...*the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness* –Rom 1:18; ...*and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others* –Eph 2:3.

However, atonement was made, and then, in Romans, *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him* –Rom 5:9. So, it is clear that the wrath of God toward us on account of sin is now averted when we are justified by His blood. However, the Scriptures do not say that Christ suffered the wrath of God. It may seem like a logical conclusion that if wrath was averted, and atonement was being made, then God's wrath for sin must have fallen upon Christ, but that is not so stated in the scriptures. If we look at the picture of Abraham offering up his son Isaac, there was no wrath on Abraham's part. Finally, God was "in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" and here what is emphasized is that Christ's sacrifice to put away sin demonstrates to us the great love that the Father has toward us.

d. "God no longer looks at me; all He sees is Christ."

The atonement should not be viewed, as perhaps many do, as a cloak for sin (to cover it). It is also sometimes

stated this way: “Since Christ died on the cross for my sin, and I believe in Him, now Christ’s righteousness is all that God sees. When God looks at me, He no longer sees my sin; all He sees is Christ’s righteousness.” There is a great deal of error in this view, and the fruit of it is that many become complacent and tolerant of sin in their own lives. Through the atonement in Christ, God has made available to us everything needed for cleansing and to be made holy, but no, God does not credit Christ’s righteousness to our account. God’s purpose in the atonement was to make us righteous by purging our sin. We are to reckon ourselves dead unto sin, alive unto God. This does not mean that we have attained to a state of perfection, but we allow the atonement to be continually effective in our life.

For now, in section III, we are making summary statements, and in sections IV and V we are simply putting subheadings in place. Lord willing, we can take more time to flesh each one out in a future article. Until then, we encourage each one to do your own Bible study to more fully understand the whole of Scriptures’ teaching on the subject. Finally, it is our sincere desire that each of us would take heed that we are not deceived by the many voices from without and from within that Satan wishes to use to turn the church of Jesus Christ away from ... *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.* –Jud 1:3

III. What the Atonement does NOT do

a. Does NOT transfer guilt from one to another

As we stated above, our guilt did not blacken the soul of Christ. He provided atonement that our sins might be forgiven. He made, or was made, an offering for sin, and He was wounded for our transgressions, and by this act our sin is purged, and our guilt is taken away, without Him becoming guilty in our place.

b. Does NOT transfer righteousness from one to another—from Christ to us

Through Jesus our Lord we receive, given unto us, all things that pertain to life and godliness. We can say that our righteousness is only in Him, but we don’t say that His righteousness is somehow credited to our account when we are deficient. See also below on the issue of walking in the Light.

c. Does NOT protect us from harm/Does not build a hedge of protection around us

Our Sovereign Father provides our protection according to His will. Our protection does not come from the atonement, rather it comes out of our relationship with

God as we walk by faith in obedience and draw near to Him. God protects, according to His will, those who are His. There is no guarantee that bad things will not happen, rather God promises that He will be with His children through whatever He allows them to go through.

d. Does not keep Satan away from us

Our Father does that according to His will (see Job 1 and 2, also 1 Cor 10:13). We do not need to “plead the blood for our protection” as though the blood of Christ was a means to ward off evil powers. We have the armor of God, shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, with all prayer, to overcome the powers of darkness.

IV. What the Atonement DOES do

- a. It reconciles
- b. It prepares a sacrifice for sin
- c. It provides a sin offering
- d. It redeems
- e. It ransoms
- f. It provides forgiveness of sins
- g. It provides remission of sins
- h. It cleanses us
- i. It enables God to see us as blameless
- j. It makes us righteous in God’s sight
- k. It causes believers to become a part of God’s family
- l. It causes believers to become brothers and sisters

V. What ALL was finished

- a. His suffering
- b. His temptations
- c. His labors on earth—His preaching and teaching
- d. The sacrificial system—*sacrifices, which can never take away sins* –Heb 10:11
- e. The law—*was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ...* –Gal 3:24
- f. Limited access to God—*And the veil of the temple was rent in twain...* –Mar 15:38



One Christian’s Response

Ted Bierdeman
Three Rivers, MI

I am Ted. I was born a male and I know I am a male. My skin color is white, and I know I am white. My parents are white, my grandparents were white, and I have no reason to suspect my other ancestors were anything other than white. These are foundational, irrefutable truths about myself. I do not think I am anything other than what I am. Nor do I desire to be anything other than what I am.

I am a Christian. In order to better define my faith—as there are many who profess Christianity—I am a “biblical” Christian. I believe that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is to be taken literally, and that it instructs a pattern and way of life that all believers should embrace. At the age of 24—after having lived a life of my own choosing and while searching for God who, if He was real, I wanted to know—I turned to Him and I was *born again*. My transformation as *a new creation in Christ* began immediately and it continues to this day. My faith in and relationship to Jesus Christ are as foundational and irrefutable as my gender and race.

I am writing in response to that which had been extensively covered by the secular media during the Spring and Summer of 2015: a man who reportedly, throughout his life, had considered himself a female and who had been “transitioning” into a woman; a white woman who had insisted that race is “fluid” and that she is black; and the redefinition of marriage by the Supreme Court of the United States of America affecting, as well, the definition of “family” for an entire nation. These are topics which simply cannot be minimized or otherwise ignored.

The white woman lacked much public support for her explanation of race. In fact, she was significantly ridiculed for her stance. This was not true, however, regarding gender identification or “gay” marriage and family issues, and one must wonder why. If a “genetically/physiologically-constructed” male can be accepted by others as a woman simply because that’s what he thinks he is, and if a man can “marry” a man and a woman can “marry” a woman and be accepted as a married couple by others under the premise of equal rights and because that’s what they want to do, why

can’t a white woman be accepted as a black woman when she is convinced that she is black?

The question raised is one of **reality**. Even though I may think I am the greatest pianist and music composer of all times, the evidence simply does not support that conviction. Even though a white woman says she is black, the evidence likewise does not support that conviction. Also true is that of a man who says he is a woman. The genetic and physiological evidence does not support that conviction. Without the redefinition of marriage, two people of the same sex cannot be married. And regardless of definition, they cannot reproduce on their own, one of God’s primary purposes for marriage.

Without God, man does what is right in his own eyes. So-called “progressive thinking” is simply man’s attempt, given his rejection of God, at *better* understanding the world and *better* addressing and solving its problems. Essentially, “anything goes” based upon the latest of ideas.

A **biblical** Christian, however, believes that God has designed, has created, and is very much involved in the universe ... even in the individual lives of people who live in it. There are absolutes. There is a distinction between right and wrong. There are moral values and—something that we frequently forget in these modern times—there is an eternity ahead. As a result of progressive thinking, Darwinism now replaces Creationism, within much of our education system, students as well as teachers who profess faith in the God of the Bible are ridiculed and are otherwise discriminated against, millions of pre-born babies (the politically correct prefer calling them “fetuses”) have been legally dismembered, burnt, crushed, suctioned and pharmacologically murdered (aborted), and no-fault divorce has ravaged the families of our nation. Just look at those things that used to be considered **wrong** or **evil** which are now a normal part of our “progressing” society.

And what about eternity? Doesn’t that matter anymore, either?

In response to the Supreme Court’s ruling on gay marriage,

Truth or Mercy

A Clair Auker
Amelia, VA

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Adapted/Used with permission of the author

Like thousands of other Nigerian Christians in recent years, John Yakubu and his family fled their home to escape repeated attacks by Boko Haram terrorists. But, unable to feed his family in the refugee camp, John returned home to collect some of his livestock. There the terrorists seized him and demanded he convert to Islam. On his refusal, they tied him to a tree, cut his head and body with large knives, and left him for dead. However, he was later rescued and taken to a hospital for treatment. He testified, “I have forgiven the Islamic militants because they did not know what they were doing.”¹

In our hearts, we know John’s response is right. It mirrors that of Christ Himself when He said *...Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...* –Luk 23:34.

But also, when we learn of injustices or even observe them ourselves, we hear another voice in our hearts— “Father, forgiveness would be unjust. They deserve your wrath. Don’t

you see what they are doing? Don’t you care?”

Is this response wrong? After all, it mirrors that of the Psalmist: *O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth ... shew thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud. LORD ... how long shall the wicked triumph? –Psa 94:1-3*

Indeed, our innate desire for justice is a trait that God Himself imparted when He made us in His image. Why should we not be angry at injustice, when He is?

Yet God has also given us the capacity for mercy, and He calls us to be merciful as He is merciful. (Luke 6:36) He forbids us, as New Testament saints, to execute vengeance on the evildoer. He commands us to forgive. He tells us to bless and pray for our enemies. (Matthew 5:43-48)

So, how can we reconcile within our hearts, the *desire for justice* with the *call to mercy*? Since justice and mercy are

One Christian’s Response *...continued from page 33*

then-President Barack Obama, clearly one of our nation’s more powerful, progressive thinkers, indicated his desire that “religious people” respond accordingly by modifying their definition of marriage as well. Believing in the God of the Bible as the Creator of the universe and as the One who designed and ordained marriage as a life-long covenant between one man and one woman, I respectfully decline Mr. Obama’s request. As the world in its own fashion deviates from the design and will of God, a true believer in Christ is called to follow Him. Jesus said, *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. –Mat 7:13-14 NIV*

I am Ted. I am a white male. I am a Christian who desires not to belittle, mock, or otherwise mistreat those with whom

I may disagree, but there will be disagreements. I am called to love God and to love my neighbor as myself, regardless of who my neighbor might be. My ultimate hope is not found in this world. It is found in eternity with Christ. And my prayer for others is that they, too, may come to know Him, receive forgiveness of their sins, be transformed into the people God so desires, and spend an eternity with Him. This is not a popular message found in today’s liberal media. But for those who are interested, for those who are seeking something much better than what this world has to offer, God has an answer: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. –Joh 3:16*





both attributes of God, is He conflicted in His own heart? No, because He has provided a solution to the conflict. And His solution is key to resolving the conflict in our own hearts.

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other –Psa 85:10. Mercy and peace were at odds with truth and righteousness, but God has brought them together through the blood of Christ. Envision the scene when a sinner stands before God:

- Truth: “He is guilty!”
- Mercy: “Forgive him!”
- Righteousness: “His sentence is death!”
- Peace: “Let him be reconciled!”
- Jesus Christ: “Father, forgive him, because I shed my blood for him.”
- God the Father: “He is a sinner worthy of death, but because he has put his faith in the blood of my Son, I extend mercy; he is forgiven!”

Truth and mercy agree. Righteousness and peace agree. It is through the blood of Jesus that God can give the sinner mercy and peace without compromising His truth and righteousness. In fact, God declares His righteousness [truth] by providing remission of sins [mercy] through the blood of Christ, so He can be both ...*just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus –Rom 3:26.*

How does the blood of Jesus declare God’s righteousness? It tells the world that God views sin so seriously that for its remission He requires the highest price that could ever be paid—the precious blood of His only begotten Son—and He was willing to pay that price. “We often refer to Calvary as a monument to the infinite grace of God, and it is that. But it is equally a declaration of the great holiness and justice of God.”ⁱⁱ

Thus, mercy and truth are met together in the cross of Christ. This is how God has resolved the conflict. And it is how we can resolve the conflict in our own hearts.

This reconciliation begins with our own cleansing. When we come to Calvary, we see our exceeding sinfulness before our righteous God, and humbly acknowledge that it would be unjust for Him to forgive us apart from the blood of Jesus.

Then when we look at the sins of others, from the pettiest offender to the cruelest persecutor, we remember that the same price was paid for their sins as for ours. If only they would receive the blood, they could justly be forgiven, as we were.

“But,” we may say, “They have not believed on Jesus. They still deserve the wrath of God.” True. So, did we. But the blood of Jesus gave us space to repent. Were it not for the blood, God would have no reason to be longsuffering, because there would be no hope of ever justifying the sinner. But because of the blood, He is holding back the Day of Judgment, ...*not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. –2 Pe 3:9*

So, if God, to whom vengeance belongs, can hold back His wrath because He earnestly desires to cleanse the sinner, surely, we, to whom vengeance is forbidden, should be able to have the same desire. If we are going to hope and pray for something for the sinner, let it not be vengeance, but rather salvation through repentance and faith in the blood. In this prayer our desire for justice can find rest, because Christ’s blood provides a just way to erase the sin.

Yes, the day of vengeance will come on all who reject the blood. In that day, we will be ultimately satisfied that the Judge of all the earth is right, but until that day, let us forgive from our hearts, and let us proclaim the Gospel of Christ’s blood, pulling as many as possible out of the fire.

In this day of grace, because of the blood, our choice is not truth **or** mercy. Our choice is truth **and** mercy.

“The Lord is ris’n indeed,”
Then Justice asks no more;
Mercy and Truth are now agreed,
Who stood opposed before.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ “Facing Islamic Extremists,” The Voice of the Martyrs, Special Year in Review 2014, p.4

ⁱⁱ The Doctrine of Salvation (Eastern Mennonite Publications, 1995), p.28


ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Kelly, “The Lord Is Risen Indeed” (No. 128) in Church Hymnal



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*The grass withereth, the
flower fadeth: but the word of
our God shall stand for ever.*

Isaiah 40:8