



THE RESTORATION HERALD

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A Standard, A Strategy, and A Summons to Serve

A Sermon Delivered July 15, 2018 at the Memorial Service of the
National Congress of the Sons of The American Revolution

John Wakefield

You know the crucial moment in the story that I'm about to relate. Nathan Hale was hanged for his work as a spy during the American Revolution.

You may not know that, within the few hours before he was hanged, Nathan Hale asked to see a clergyman, and his request was denied by the British. He asked to have a Bible, and that request was denied.

Nathan Hale then went to his death by hanging, after uttering those now-famous words, "I regret that I have but one life to give for my country." Why do I begin with this story? Because Nathan Hale was a seminal example of our standard, our strategy, and our summons to serve.

Are these elements in scripture? Absolutely. Is there a standard? From Isaiah the standard is for us to reflect the spirit of the Lord, to conduct ourselves to please God in a nation that is often unlovely and disastrously broken—a nation in which good people are in dire need of the recognition and affirmation that we can give them. The standard of scripture and of Nathan Hale lives on in us.

Is there a strategy in scripture? Certainly. *"To bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,"* just as our forefathers did. To recognize those who represent a higher life, a higher calling, and a higher standard in these United States of America. Nathan Hale took that kind of strategy to his death.

Is there a summons to serve in scripture? Of course there is. Isaiah: *"the Lord has anointed me to proclaim liberty to the captives."* That is our cue to show our love of God by our recognition

and affirmation of those who live godly lives in the United States of America.

So, we are looking at a pattern that uses eternal values. But today, we're looking at that same pattern in the lives of those who have gone before us. In their lives we find our calling. They are destined for eternity. And we now take our cue from them. Looking back at their lives, we discover our future for our own lives in this challenging world.

Yes, there are ills in American life today: high rates of violent crime, high rates of teen pregnancy, decreased rates of literacy. Today we are "the Divided States of America." Gone is the idealism of *e pluribus unum*, "out of many, one." Today in "the Divided States of America" it is a badge of pride to find someone to hate or an injustice to protest. Cooperation just doesn't make it. It is "in" to be on the "outs" with someone.

Into that state of affairs we have an eternal pattern from God and that same pattern in the lives of these deceased compatriots: a standard, and strategy, and a summons to serve.

Did I, just a few months ago, publicly state that the National Society of Sons of the American Revolution was not a Christian organization? Oh, yes, I did. But if you believe there is a God, you and I had better find in that God the reason for our recognitions, for the medals we give, and for the awards we present to the world. If we don't, our work is short-sighted.

Christians influence every aspect of life with the truth of the Christian gospel. Followers of other faiths influence every aspect of life with eternal values. That means that our organization may

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EDITOR'S VIEWPOINT

Brother Against Brother

Brother against brother is really an oxymoron. The idea that a brother would go against a brother is meant to be hard to fathom; after all Proverbs 18:24 says that there is a friend "who sticks closer than a brother." The idea inherent is that brothers are close.

The truth is that brothers do sometimes feud and fight. There was Cain who killed his brother Abel. There was Jacob who stole from his brother Esau. There was Joseph who was sold on the slave market by his many brothers. Fights broke out among the tribes of Israel such as the tribe of Benjamin going against the other 11 tribes and killing 40,000 in a couple of days of battle. Later 25,000 men of Benjamin died at the hands of the other tribes. It was brother against brother.

In our country "brother against brother" took on special meaning in the war between the states. North against the South. Families were divided. Alexander Campbell lived in Bethany, VA (now West Virginia) and his son went off to fight for the South when the war broke out.

There is a story of another Alexander Campbell and his brother James who were born in Scotland but immigrated to America in the 1850's. James Campbell settled in Charleston and later joined the local militia. Alexander settled in New York and joined the 79th Highlander regiment.

The brothers corresponded when apart from each other. Only later did they discover that they had fought against each other at Secessionville.

James wrote to his brother and said, "I was astonished to hear from the prisoners that you was color Bearer of the Regmt that assaulted the Battery at this point the other day. I was in the Brest work during the whole engagement doing my Best to Beat you but I hope you and I will never again meet face to face bitter enemies on the Battlefield (.) but if such should be the case You have but to discharge your duty for your cause for I can assure you I will strive to discharge my duty to my country and my cause."

It is said that "the letter from brother to brother was carried across the bloody fields of James Island under flag of truce."

"The brothers corresponded with each other and were on good terms after the war."

My mother was 1 of 13. Two of the sisters feuded. They both came to an ordination "open house" that my mother gave in my honor. One came in the front door while the other came in the back door. They both knew that the other was in the house, but they would not go to where the other was. One stayed in the living room while the other stayed in the kitchen. My sister and I kept changing places trying to spend equal time with each of our aunts. This was "Sister Against Sister."

Jesus told of a time coming when "brother will deliver brother over to death" (Matthew 10:21).

That type of thing has happened and will happen again.

The Restoration Movement, of which we are a part, has had its share of "brother against brother." In 1906, our acapella brethren asked to be listed in the U.S. Census as a separate group from the rest.

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OUR PLATFORM

The Bible: God's revelation to man, its authority and finality, man's only rule of faith and practice.

The Christ: The only begotten Son of God man's only Savior and Lord.

The Church: The true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man.

The Gospel: The power of God unto salvation, its proclamation and defense.

The Unity of Believers: In the "unity of the faith" as prescribed in the New Testament.

The Fellowship: Of brethren of "like precious faith," in the furtherance of the gospel and the building of churches of Christ according to the Bible pattern.

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A Standard, A Strategy, and A Summons to Serve

not be fully Christian or Jewish or Muslim; but those of us who are, influence it with values of our faith.

And if you don't believe that there is a God, you had better determine that the reason for our standards, our strategies, and our service is in something beyond yourself, or you and I are doomed to create the same mistakes of our past. We have an eternal pattern for our behavior.

How can we put our lives in touch with eternal values? Those who have gone before us can help us to do that. And we find that our work is our greatest tribute to these deceased compatriots.

Dan Lloyd was a member of my congregation in Cincinnati. He was an SAR Compatriot. He was an upbeat and affable guy. Ol' Dan would call our home on many Saturday mornings and say, "Hey, hey, hey! Gentleman John, this is Dapper Dan. You had breakfast yet? You want to meet me at the Pancake House in a few minutes?"

Dan and Jean had no children. Jean had died a few years before, and I had her funeral. So ol' Dan latched onto our family as his family.

So, John and Vicki and the boys would pack in the car many Saturdays, and drive to the Pancake House. And of course, Dan would pay the bill.

Dan had a stroke. Vicki and I went to see him in the hospital. His nephew and the nephew's wife were there. Toward the end of my visit I said, "Well, let's have prayer before we go." And we gathered around Dan's bedside and prayed.

At the end of my prayer I said, "Lord, we believe that Dan has lived a good and full life. We believe that Dan is ready to be received into your arms. And so we commend Dan to your care." And in that moment, Dan died.

Did my prayer make a difference? I used to say no, probably out of caution to not appear to be playing God. But lately I have thought it really did make a difference.

One moment Dan was in the temporal world, and the next moment he was in eternity. And those of us standing around his bedside saw it happen. We stood at the precipice between time and eternity—with only a second's difference between the two.

What an experience! You and I are never far from eternity, its standards, its strategy for life, and its summons to serve.

We must embrace that pattern with selflessness and responsibility—forces beyond ourselves. Otherwise, where is the basis of our action if it is not in such eternal values?

Today we too often abdicate responsibility in favor of rights. Such abdication is tantamount to ignoring our standards, our strategy, and our summons to serve.

Our country needs to deal in personal responsibility more than in personal rights. Our organization needs to be in the forefront of that advocacy.

And we have that same pattern of eternal values from those whom we remember today. In the play *The Tempest*, Shakespeare wrote, what is past is prologue. A prologue, of course is an intro-

duction or preface, usually to a book. It explains what will come.

In our case, history writes the prologue for the book whose chapters we will write. History prepares us for what we will do in the future.

Our deceased compatriots have written the prologue to the book. We must look to what they have done and let what they have done shape our next chapter in the book. We are always dependent on our deceased compatriots for the inspiration for what we do.

David Brooks, in his recent book, *The Road to Character*, (pp. 115-116) wrote, "Life is not like navigating through an open field. It is committing oneself to a few of the institutions that were embedded on the ground before you were born and will be here after you die. It is accepting the gifts of the dead, taking on the responsibility of preserving and improving an institution and then transmitting that institution, better, on to the next generation. [It] almost always involves throwing yourself into a historical process."

And here I draw from my own experience with a deceased compatriot of 2017. And I must hope that his example spurs you on to greater service as it does me.

Dr. Sam McKinstry was a lifelong member of SAR. He belongs to us in Tennessee. He held my local SAR chapter together when an attendance of four was a good meeting. Some of you also knew Sam.

Sam was a political science professor at East Tennessee State University. He was a man of deep faith, winning personality, love of country, and fervor for SAR. If my life could be spoken of half as well as Sam's was, I would be very, very happy.

Sam had a statement that he cherished for life. It was from a poem of Henry Van Dyke. Here it is.

I have no joy in strife.
Peace is my great desire.
Yet God forbid I lose my life
Through fear to face the fire.
A peaceful man must fight
For that which peace demands—
Freedom and faith, honor and right,
Defend with heart and hand.

Among the lists of our deceased compatriots are men who gave us a pattern for standards, for strategy, and for a summons to serve. Sam was just one of them. He was mine. You have yours. Resolve to serve in their name as you never have before. Write your own chapter in response to their prologue that they have bequeathed to us.

Conclusion

Today, let us say with the prophet Isaiah, "Here am I, Lord. Send me" Into the battle; into the fray for liberty, freedom, and democracy; into a needful and costly world.

Elementary school children who produce a poster for us to remember our patriot ancestors, high school young people who touch our hearts with their patriotic oratory: when the Sons of the American Revolution recognize such people we offer the greatest tribute we can offer to the memory of these who have gone before us.

Scouts who achieve by a higher and inspiring standard, firefighters and crisis officers who put their lives on the line for America,

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civic leaders who clearly live by godly values: when the Sons of the American Revolution recognize such people we offer the greatest tribute we can offer to the memory of these who have gone before us.

Listen to this. “Let us rely on the goodness of our cause, and the aid of the Supreme Being, in whose hands victory is, to . . . encourage us to great and noble actions”—George Washington. Today his words and his actions speak to our hearts.

One of the dearest expressions of this attitude is a letter sent home by a Civil War soldier named Sullivan Ballou to his wife on the eve of the first battle of Bull Run, early in the war. Ballou, an orphan, knew the pain of growing up without a father. Nonetheless, he wrote to his wife, he was willing to die to pay the debt he owed to his ancestors:

“If it is necessary that I should fall on the battlefield for my country, I am ready. . . . I know how strongly American Civilization now leans upon the triumph of the government, and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and suffering of the Revolution. And I am willing—perfectly willing—to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this Government, to help pay that debt.

“Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield. . . . If I do not [return], my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you, and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield it will whisper your name. With my love, Sullivan Ballou.”

Of course, Sullivan Ballou did fight the next day at Bull Run, and he did die—for his country.

The memory of Sullivan Ballou—his standard and strategy and summons to serve lives on in our resolve to serve. The memory of Dr. Sam McKinstry lives on for me in my resolve to serve.

To live in the hearts of those we leave behind is to live forever. Memory restores life to those who are deceased. That is a wonderful phenomenon, and we have the opportunity today to resolve to restore the memory of these we have left behind by going home resolved to recognize and affirm as we never have before the good people in our country.

This week will have many highlights. But at no other event of this SAR Congress will we feel so united, will our hearts be so deeply touched, and will our sense of strength and courage be lifted so high to go home and serve as we never have before—in the name of God, and of those who served and died. (RH)

Scriptures quoted: Isaiah 61:1-3; Psalm 90; selections from 1 & 2 Peter; John 14

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EDITOR'S VIEWPOINT (CONT.)

Later in the century, as the Disciples of Christ leadership and scholarship continued its trip to the left of religious thought, another division came. As churches began to see what “headquarters” (Downey Ave., Indianapolis) believed and was up to, they wanted nothing to do with heresy. They began to withdraw, only to find that the DoC leaders would not allow it. The leaders wanted the church properties. Thus the infamous court cases that the CRA was involved in and won. Colleges often were involved in their own fights; faculty members were against faculty members, alumni were against alumni, and friends were against friends.

But back to the headline: it was often brother against brother. Families were divided in their allegiance.

Were all these fights wrong? Some that we have mentioned in this column were wrong; nothing good came from those fights. But often there is a right side and a wrong side.

When the United States went to war against the Fascism of Hitler and Mussolini, it was right. When our country takes a stand against tin-horned dictators who suppress and starve their people, it is right.

When churches and Christians take a stand against theological liberalism, it is right. A “thus saith the Lord” will always be favorable, even against a blood brother.

The problem comes when there is no one who will stand for right. World War 2 produced the following poem written by Martin Niemoller (1892-1984).

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me—
and there was no one left to speak for me.

As bad as it may be for brother to be against brother, let's make sure that if it is for a righteous cause, and if we find our brother on the other side, then let us stand.

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (Ephesians 6:13). (RH)

(To Be Continued next Month)

Mini-Messages...The dates have been set for the CRA Florida Bible Conference in Kissimmee, at the Kissimmee Christian Church. The dates are January 21-23. If you live in the mid-west, January is a great time to visit Florida. Start planning your visit now. Next month we will tell you who some of our speakers are going to be....If you are a preacher, and at some time in the past I asked you if you would be willing to write Bible School lessons for us and I didn't get back in touch with you, please email me. Thanks....Speaking of Bible School lessons, I really appreciate those who have written in the past and will in the future. Please pray for our Bible School lesson writers. Those lessons are used weekly by thousands of people. LM

“How Can Jesus Be Amazed?”

QUESTION: My King James Version says in Mark 14:33 that when Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His death, He “*began to be sore amazed.*” My 1901 American Standard Version likewise says He “*began to be greatly amazed, and sore troubled.*” How could Jesus, who is God the Logos as well as a human being, be AMAZED? Does not God foreknow everything? How could anything “amaze” Jesus?

ANSWER: This is indeed an interesting question. Mark is the only Gospel writer who puts it this way, but he clearly says that the amazement was a new feeling that Jesus experienced on this occasion: He *began to be amazed*. How can we explain this?

Someone might suggest that this is just an incorrect translation of the Greek word Mark uses here, which is *ekthambeō*. I looked up this verse on the Bible Gateway website, which will list together about 59 different English versions or translations of any verse. Only eight of them translated it as “amazed.” The greatest number (26) translated it as “distressed.” Other versions say Jesus began to fear, to be in despair, to be troubled or sad or upset. But – only eight said “amazed.” Could they be wrong?

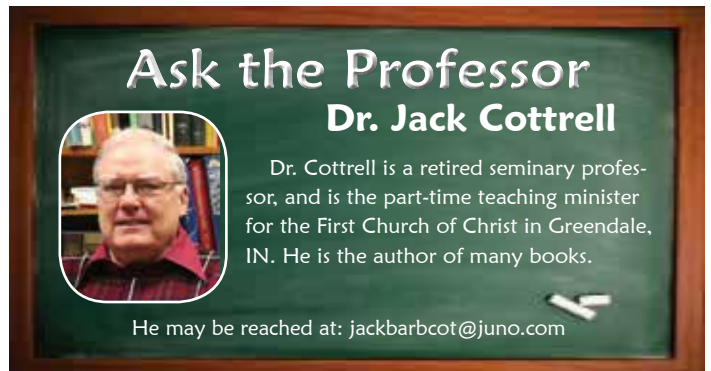
Mark uses this word three other times, all for just ordinary people (Mark 9:15; 16:5, 6). I looked these three verses up also, and found that *almost all of them translated the same word in these verses as AMAZED*, or with similar words such as startled, surprised, astounded, or astonished! Also, the New Testament uses at least five other Greek words in the same family as *ekthambeō*; they are *thambeō*, *ekthambos*, *thambos*, *ekthaumazō*, and *thaumazō*. Most of the time these similar words are translated with “amazed” or synonyms (e.g., astonished, surprised). These are referring mostly to ordinary people, also.

So, why would most of the translators be so reluctant to translate the same Greek word in Mark 14:33 with something else, especially a word (“distressed”) that is essentially the meaning of the verb that follows it? I think the hesitation to use “amazed” here is simply the fact that at this point Mark is talking about JESUS! The translators seem to be thinking the same thing as my questioner, above: “Surely, Jesus *as God* could not actually be *amazed* about anything! So we will have to find some other word that just fits the context, even if it does not fit the Greek word itself.”

If this was their thinking (and I am only speculating), it was certainly wrong, and unnecessary. The Greek word used by Mark here means *amazed*, and should be so translated here! When Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane, *He began to be amazed!* I will explain now how this was so.

I. JESUS WAS BOTH GOD AND MAN

The explanation begins with the fact of the INCARNATION, a word which literally means “enfleshment.” It is a word we have created to express the statement made in John 1:14, that the eternal Logos, the second person of the Trinity, “became flesh” and dwelt among us as a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. The idea is that Jesus, from the time He was supernaturally conceived in Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), had two



distinct natures: divine and human. This one person was thus both God and man.

A. The Divine Nature of Jesus. I will first say some things about Jesus’s divine nature. The eternal God has always existed as three distinct persons or centers of consciousness in one divine Being. In Old Testament times He was known as Yahweh, a name that could refer to any one or to all three of the persons of the Trinity. Ever since Jesus came, as recorded in the New Testament Scriptures, we have known that Yahweh is actually the three divine persons we know as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (e.g., Matthew 28:19). Here I will refer to them as the Father, the Logos (John 1:1), and the Holy Spirit.

All three persons of the Trinity are equal in existence, nature, power, and authority. However, they are sometimes distinct in their deeds, actions, and tasks. We call the former the “ontological Trinity,” since it has to do with their being or essence; and we call the latter the “economic Trinity” (from the Greek word *oikonomia*). I.e., though they have the same kind of essence, they do different things.

Here I will explain two aspects of their equality of essence. First, we speak of the *omnipresence* of God, which is the idea that He is present within our universe everywhere, all the time. This applies to all three persons of the Trinity. For illustration purposes, I will ask you to think of an entire created universe, not necessarily like ours, in whatever shape you like (cube, sphere, e.g.). Now think of that whole universe as being totally filled with three things. Every cubic centimeter of it is totally filled with water. At the same time every cubic centimeter is totally filled with a comfortable degree of heat. Also, every cubic centimeter is filled with electricity. All three of these things are occupying all the space of this imaginary universe at the same time. They are omnipresent within it.

The three persons of the Trinity are in a similar way omnipresent within our universe. I say in a “similar” way, since I think of them as being present TO every point in our space, rather than WITHIN it. The important thing for our purposes is that this applies to the eternal Logos, as much as to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is always existing everywhere TO our universe, both before AND after His incarnation as the man Jesus Christ. This does not mean that the man Jesus Christ is thus omnipresent, though.

The other aspect of the equality of God’s essence is His *omniscience*, or infinite knowledge. He knows all things, all the time. This is likewise equally true of all three persons of the Trinity. To

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Ask the Professor (cont.)

continue the illustration above, think of one more thing that is equally present along with the water, the heat, and the electricity of the imaginary universe, namely, light. The light is present to and within the water, the heat, and the electricity, filling it everywhere and always.

The light in this illustration represents *knowledge*, as in the concept of omniscience. All three persons of the Trinity, including the Logos, share the same infinite, unlimited, complete body of knowledge of all reality for all times—past, present and future. This body of knowledge also includes awareness of all possible realities, even if they never come into existence. The Logos Himself is, always has been, and always will be omniscient in His eternal essence. This does not mean that the man Jesus Christ is thus omniscient, though.

B. The Human Nature of Jesus.

How, then, does all of the above relate to the *man*, Jesus Christ, in His human nature? Here we begin with how Jesus fits into the eternal plan designed by God before any actual implementation of it had begun. We should think of the three persons of the Trinity drawing up a plan for the creation and completion of this specific universe.

Here we shall point out several key divine decisions that were part of this plan. First was the decision to create free-will beings with relative independence, making them capable of sinning or not sinning. This free-will nature of the universe means that its future is to a great extent in human hands. The second key aspect (not necessarily a decision) is that God in His foreknowledge knew from the beginning that His free-will human beings would become sinners. The next key aspect was the decision to work out a way to offer redemption to sinners, something that would allow them to have eternal fellowship with God despite their sin and unworthiness. The last key aspect was the decision that one of the persons of the Trinity—the Logos—would become a human being and do the only thing that could possibly save sinners from their deserved punishment. This is where Jesus of Nazareth enters the picture.

The implementation of this last aspect of the plan adds *human nature* to the divine Logos. The Logos continues to exist as the omnipresent, omniscient third person of the Trinity, but He becomes present within the human person, Jesus, at the same time but in a unique and limited way. The person Jesus thus has two natures, both divine and human. To use our illustration one more time, I think of Jesus as something like a unique, magnificent light bulb that is planted within our imaginary universe. The bulb itself is equivalent to Jesus's human nature, and the light that shines from it is (at least in part) equivalent to His divine Logos nature.

What is crucial for our purpose of understanding Jesus's amazement in Gethsemane is the fact that His consciousness or mental state operated like that of other human beings rather than like that of the Logos. Jesus did not have two separate minds or centers of consciousness; He was just ONE person, with one center of consciousness. I.e., like other human beings, He was limited to thinking about one thing at a time, with all other knowledge being stored as if within a computer's memory, to be recalled at will. The divine Logos still exists with full omniscience, but this divine consciousness is not shared with the human Jesus. According to the eternal plan of God, Jesus's consciousness is controlled by the limitations present in human beings.

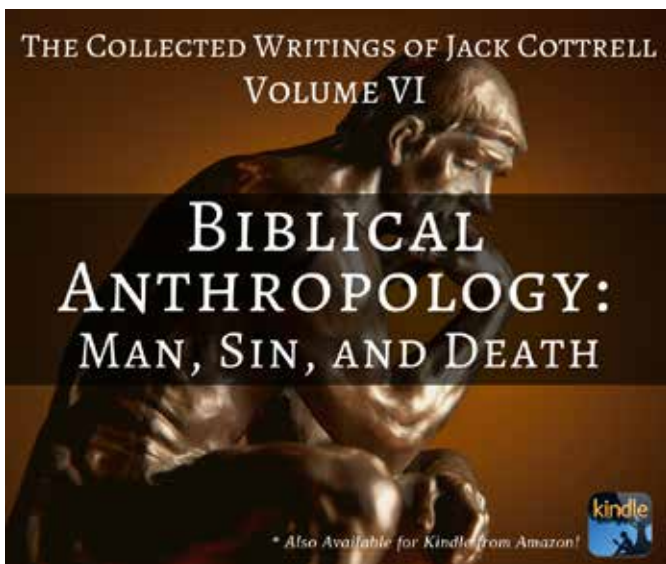
But God's plan also includes some exceptions to this general situation. For one thing, the reservoir (or computer memory) from which Jesus could *by an act of will* call up some bit of knowledge to His consciousness was *infinite*, i.e., by so willing it, He could tap into the omniscience of the Logos. Thus He at times had miraculous knowledge, such as being able to read the minds of people in His audiences. Such knowledge would not be present all the time, though.

More importantly, some bits of knowledge in the infinite reservoir of facts were, by the eternal pre-creation plan, not available to being called up at the human Jesus's will. For example, Jesus Himself tells us that He did not personally have knowledge of the time (day, hour) of His own second coming; the Father knows this, but not God the Son in the human consciousness He experiences as Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 24:36). The purpose for this probably is to prevent us from trying to use some recorded teaching of Jesus to determine the date and time of the second coming.

But another part of the plan to withhold knowledge seems to be equally significant, and it enables us to explain Jesus's amazement. This is the suggestion that during Jesus's earthly life, what He was supposed to know about Himself and His role in the plan of redemption was to be made available to Him only in stages, and not all at once. Think of the light bulb illustration again. The bulb is attached to a dimming-brightening switch. In the beginning of His life, it is on a dim setting; but as Jesus grows older and into His ministry, the switch periodically increases the brightness of the bulb in that more and more knowledge is poured into it.

How do we know this? I owe the bare bones of this explanation to my Professor of Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in the early 1960s. What he taught about this was one of the most interesting and most important things I learned throughout my seminary years. Teaching on the subject of "the obedience of Jesus," Professor John Murray explained his understanding of Luke 2:52,

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Digging a Little Deeper



by Gareth L. Reese

“Fishing”

Trout season in our state opened March 1. Thousands of men took off from work on opening day and went fishing. Fishing in ancient times in Galilee was not a sport or a pastime. It was an honored occupation by which men earned their living. The methods and means have changed little on the Sea of Galilee, save that modern boats are motorized, and electric lights are used instead of torches or braziers of fire for luring the fish when fishing at night.

Egyptian monuments show that a fishhook was quite commonly used for catching fish. The hooks had a single barb, rather than the multiple barbs found on some modern hooks. Lines and poles were used, but no rods because fly-fishing was unknown in the ancient world. The one reference to a fishhook in the New Testament is found in Matthew 17:24-27.

Every male Jew 20 years and over was required once a year to pay a yearly tax for the upkeep of the temple in Jerusalem. The tax collectors who collected the two-drachma tax (equivalent of two days wages for a working man) stopped Peter on the road and asked him if Jesus paid the temple tax. Peter said “Yes.” A short time later when Peter came into the house where Jesus was, Jesus asked Peter a question that indicates He was perfectly aware of what had happened out on the road. He used the occasion to teach Peter a lesson about how folk who are exempt from certain laws may nevertheless submit to them lest they leave a bad impression about what their religion teaches. He then instructed Peter to use a fishhook and go fishing in the Sea of Galilee. The first fish he would catch would have in its mouth a coin of large enough value to cover both Jesus’ and Peter’s temple tax for the year. We pause in awe as we think about how Jesus knew about the fish, the coin, and that it would be the first fish to be caught by the hook Peter was to use.

Two very different kinds of nets were commonly used for fishing. One was a casting net (*amphiblēstron*), and the other a drag net (*sagēnē*).

A casting net was circular shaped, from 18 to 24 feet in diameter, with lead weights on the outer edges, and a rope for retrieving the net attached to the middle. The fisherman could stand in a boat, or on shore, or in shallow water. He carefully folded and laid the bulk of the net over one arm and shoulder, while grasping an outer edge of the net with the other hand. Then with a side-arm motion the net is flung out over the water. If it is skillfully cast, the net spreads out into a circle as it falls upon the water. It then sinks swiftly by the weight of the lead sinkers attached to it, enclosing whatever is below it. The fisherman then begins pulling on the rope attached to the center of the net. The leads come together, dragging along the bottom. The net, surrounding

the fish, is then dragged into the boat, or onto the shore. This is the kind of net Peter and Andrew were using when Jesus called them to follow Him. The Bible says “they were casting their net (*amphiblēstron*) into the sea” (Matthew 4:18).

Dragnets were much larger than casting nets and were used for catching fish that swim in shoals. Such nets were 800 or 1000 feet long, 8 to 10 feet high at its wings, and 24 feet high at its center. The foot rope is weighted with lead sinkers, the head rope has cork floats. Dragnets require two teams of men to let them down into the water and to draw them to the shore. If they are fishing in shallow water, two boats will let the net down into the water in a line parallel to the shore. Ropes attached to each end of the long net are then pulled toward the shore. The net sweeps along the bottom of the sea and forms a U shape as the ends are pulled to the shore, catching everything in its path. On shore, 5 to 10 men or boys pull on each rope, until the whole net with its catch has been brought close to the beach. In deeper water, the ends of the net can be brought together into a circle. Men then dive down and bring the weighted edge together so as to form a bottom. Now there is no way for the fish to escape. The compass of the net is then narrowed, and the fish emptied from the net into the boat.

In the Old Testament, a dragnet was referred to twice; in Isaiah 19:8 where Egyptian fishermen will be lamenting when a punishment comes on Egypt, and in Ezekiel 26:14 where a dragnet is used to illustrate what will happen to Tyre when an invading army destroys that place. In His sermon in parables, Jesus used a dragnet for an illustration of how it will be at the end of the age. He said, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away” (Matthew 13:47,48). In everyday life, some fish were “good,” that is, edible for Jewish folk, and some were not (they had no fins or scales, Leviticus 11:9-12). One visitor to the land of Israel said he had seen fishermen go through their dragnet and throw back into the water those fish that were too small for the market or were considered unclean. We thus have a very vivid picture from Jesus Himself of how it will be at the final judgment. He worded it this way, “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:49,50).

Diktuon is a third Greek word for net. It can be a net of any kind, a fishing net, a hunting net, as well as a net for catching birds (Proverbs 1:17 LXX). In Matthew 4:20,21, *diktuon* is used for the casting nets with which that Peter and Andrew were fishing. Perhaps at Luke 5:2-5 when Jesus tells the fishermen in two boats to “put out into deep water and let down your nets (*diktua*) for a catch,” the word may refer to a dragnet. John 21:6-11 records one of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances at the Sea of Galilee. “But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. So, Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you do not have any fish, do you?’ They answered Him, ‘No.’ And He said to them,

(continued on page 8)

Digging a Little Deeper (cont.)

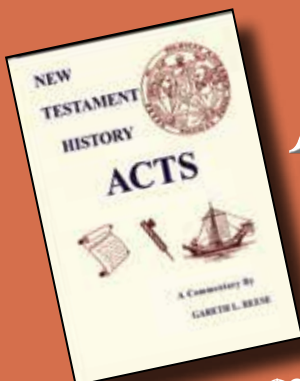
‘Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.’” A bit later, when the fishermen had come ashore, Jesus told the fishermen to bring some of the fish they had caught. It looks as though the net Peter went and drew to land, full of large fish, was a casting net.

Both hooks and nets are used by Habbakuk as he wrote about an oracle he saw concerning the Chaldeans coming to punish Israel. “The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook (*angkiestro*), drag them away with their net (*amphiblestron*), and gather them together in their fishing net (*sagene*). Therefore, they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they offer a sacrifice to their net (*sagene*) and burn incense to their fishing net (*amphiblestron*); because through these things their catch is large, and their food is plentiful” (Habakkuk 1:15-16).

As an occupation, fishing has been honored by Jesus when He selected some fishermen to be His apostles. Jesus showed special favor to fishermen on two occasions (Luke 5 and John 21), and He also used fishing as a type of earnest, skillful soul-saving (Mark 1:17; Luke 5:10). This venture into fishing in Bible times serves to remind us of the volume written by Homer Hailey, entitled “Let’s Go Fishing for Men!” Its aim was twofold: to inspire Christians to do that very thing, and to offer some practical and helpful suggestions toward a more thorough preparation to do the work. Is an emphasis on personal evangelism something we need to restore in 21st century life of the church? (RH)

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Ask the Professor (cont.)

which says, “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Luke made this statement in his narrative when Jesus was just twelve years old (v. 42), at the end of the account where His family was attending the Passover feast in Jerusalem and Jesus was separated from His parents for three days while engaging in discussion with rabbis at the temple. He made this impression on these teachers: “And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers” (v. 47 – “amazed”!). And so, Jesus kept increasing in wisdom, and in favor with God. After hearing what Professor Murray had to say about this, I have put it together like this.

How are we to think of the development of Jesus’s mental abilities and states from the time He was conceived in the womb? We must remember that in this regard, His human nature dominated. We must not think of the baby Jesus in the womb or at His mother’s breast contemplating the teachings of David or Isaiah, and planning the beginning of His ministry. In the early years of His human nature, His knowledge increased as that of any other child, but without the hindrances imposed by the absorbing of sin. He learned the things any other child of His time could learn, but no doubt with the highest intelligence and motivation.

But it would be necessary from somewhere in these early years for the Trinitarian plan to begin, for the bulb of knowledge to be switched more and more brightly, for the inauguration of the series of steps in which His divine identity and His messianic mission were gradually unfolded to His consciousness. This had probably begun before His twelfth year, and was probably reflected in His impressive showing before the rabbis (Luke 2:46ff.). More was probably revealed to Him periodically over the next eighteen years, but we have no data on that. In any case, as His consciousness of His identity and His mission increased, His acceptance of it and His commitment to be 100% faithful to it was noted by God the Father; and this is the point of the statement in Luke 2:52, that He increased in favor with God. The more He knew about the divine plan for Himself (Philippians 2:7-9), the more He perfectly submitted to it; and the more He submitted to it, the more He increased in favor with God.

I would suggest that main uploading of knowledge concerning His mission, probably to near the brightest setting, occurred at His baptism. The descending of the Spirit upon Him in the form of the dove symbolized His inauguration for the ministry years, and filled Him with the Spirit—see Luke 4:1. At some point, perhaps prior to this event but at least shortly thereafter, Jesus knew that His mission would involve His death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21). At each stage of His life, as His self-consciousness was increasing according to the pre-arranged plan, the Father was pleased and full of favor toward Him. (RH)

(To Be Continued Next Month)



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A Page from the Book

"It May Be Time To Tighten The Belt"

Don't you love it when you start losing weight to the point you can actually move the belt in a couple of notches? What a great feeling!! When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus it's because they were, as John Franklin in his book entitled *Spiritual Warfare* states, "seeking direction in regard to how they should prepare for battle each day." I constantly remind my congregation that as they leave the facility, they are not only entering the mission field, they are entering the battlefield. The constant struggle of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, takes place throughout our community every day. Christians are still called upon by Christ Himself to be the salt and light in a tasteless and dark world.



Jim Book

I find it interesting that the first piece of armor Paul admonishes the church to put on is the "belt of truth" Ephesians 6:10 Paul challenges the early church as well as those of us in today's church, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Perhaps this might explain why so many folks fall away from the church. They try to hard to fight the "signature sin" in their personal lives by relying too much on their own will-power and strength. God never intended for us to go into battle with Satan and defeat him by relying on our own devices. It's through His power and by wearing His armor, vs 11, and I might add, by putting on every piece of the armor He lays out, can we find the strength to defeat the "evil one."

When we try and fit our churches with our own man-made theology or we misinterpret Scripture to fit into today's cultural thinking, we find ourselves developing our own armor and not the "armor of God." Remember when David told King Saul he would go and fight Goliath? King Saul "clothed David with his armor" (1 Samuel 17:38). David put it on and said to King Saul in verse 39 "I cannot walk with these." Of course, you can't David – It's someone else's armor. So, David went to battle with the weaponry God prepared for him. He went in the name of the Lord since the battle was His anyway and God gave David and Israel a great victory that very day. The point I am trying to make is this, the church does not need to re-event or replace the "armor of God" with more contemporary narratives or shallow theology. The message of the cross and the power of truth preached in love and conviction will continue to save souls and snatch families and individuals from the clutches of Satan and the "sons of disobedience."

Paul then goes on to remind the believers that our fight and war is not against "flesh and blood but rather against the powers of this dark world, spiritual forces of evil." Perhaps that is why the Apostle Paul reminded his close friend and ally Timothy to "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). Does your church like to fight? Mine does. Each Friday night we have our Celebrate Recovery Meetings in which people implement the power of Scripture and the Holy Spirit to overcome the hurts and habits that have crippled them and rendered them ineffective. To see them overcome those sins and be transformed into soldiers of the cross is so rewarding. I

love a good fight when goodness and holiness triumph over evil. Monday through Friday at our Christian school we fight the good fight by instilling in our students a biblical worldview so they can be victorious for Christ. I love a good fight when we see families won to Christ through the efforts of our teachers and staff. So, if there is such a thing as a good fight, there must be such a thing as a bad, superfluous fight. I think a lot of churches loose focus of the real battle and the real enemy. They argue and battle each other of nonessentials so as to lose focus of the real issues that should be addressed. Make sure your church and your leaders are expending the necessary energy to fight the good and legitimate fight. The best way to decipher between the two is to be governed by a hierarchy of truth, a spiritual GPS system; hence the "Belt of Truth." Ralph Sockman in his book, *The Whole Armor of God*, writes, "To have your waist tightened with truth means that your single-eyed aim is to find out what is true, cost what it may, lead where it will. He must fight to find out truth. He must overcome the inertia of his own mind to be what he wants to be and do what he wants to do. Paul wrote many of his epistles while in jail chained to a Roman guard. He was inspired by this image to write the 6th chapter of Ephesians. He knew that no Roman soldier would go into battle with his outer robe flying about. Therefore, he would tighten his belt around his robe so as to free himself from being entangled with it. Truth keeps the church tight in areas such as doctrine and lifestyle choices. We know, based on objective biblical truth, how we should act and live. Philippians 4:8

Paul desperately wanted the early church, as well as the church today, to have a tight rein on their doctrine. The best way to do that is to have our spiritual waistlines "gird about with truth." If we can accomplish this spiritual goal, we will not be congregations, "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

Strong biblical teachings based on solid biblical truth can make a church strong and vibrant and extremely relevant. That is why so many mainline denominations are dying every day in America. They have sacrificed truth for preaching drenched in pragmatism. Biblical truth forces each disciple of Christ to conform our lives to a standard and a calling greater than what we could derive on our own presuppositions. Peter challenges us to "gird up the loins of our mind" (1 Peter 1:13).

Chuck Colson in his book, *How Now Shall We Live*, writes, "The church's singular failure in recent decades has been the failure to see Christianity as a life system or worldview that governs every area of existence. This failure has been crippling in many ways. By failing to see Christian truth in every aspect of life, we miss great depths of beauty and meaning. Christianity is not merely a religion, defined narrowly as personal piety or corporate worship. It is also an objective perspective on all reality, a complete worldview. Only Christianity gives us an accurate road map. Only Christianity matches the way we must act if we are to live humanely and rationally in the real world."

Let's fight the good fight of faith and, if need be, let's tighten the belt!! ^(RH)

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Closer Home

Maxine Fream Gash
(mackydcc@yahoo.com)

“So—Sow”

The four-year-old son of a friend of mine showed her an acorn he had found, curious about this little brown nut that looked as if it were wearing a cap. She explained that the acorn was a seed, and if planted, would grow a huge oak tree. To demonstrate this lesson in botany, she helped him plant a lima bean in a glass container so he could watch as the seed sprouted and sent roots downward and stems upward, which then grew small leaves. She explained that the plant would continue to grow and one day produce more beans. He found it all very fascinating and did not take long to act on his new knowledge. The next day, his mother watched him out the window as he dug a hole in the dirt and carefully put something in it and covered it up. When he came back in the house, she asked him what he had planted, satisfied that her lesson had been well learned.

“A Coca-Cola bottle cap,” he replied proudly. He was certain he was going to grow a Coca-Cola bottle tree!


We smile at his naiveté, and yet as adults we too often fail to appreciate the absolute wonder of the gift of life that resides in any seed. A seed can be as small as the period at the end of this sentence, or as large as a coconut, yet that marvelous faculty of life within it will produce a plant that is totally unlike the seed, and that plant will in turn produce many more seeds totally unlike the plant. Men have been capable of creating many remarkable inventions, yet nothing that possesses the mysterious entity called “life.” Man, with all his intelligence and effort, cannot produce life, and the attempt by some men to account for the origin of life apart from God by positing some accidental occurrence in a primordial chemical soup defies reason. You might as well plant bottle caps.

We also fail in applying the principles we learn from science in the natural world of botany to our own behavior in daily living. “You reap what you sow.” Beans will grow beans; acorns will grow oaks. “If you sow to the flesh, you will of the flesh reap corruption.” If you smoke, in time you will ruin your lungs. If you indulge in liquor, you can ruin your liver – as well as your brain and your personal relationships. If you overeat, you can bring on a heart attack. We ignore these facts

to our harm, yet sadly, people do so daily.

It has been said that we will not believe more than we know, and we will not live higher than our beliefs. In a culture where the man on the street thinks Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife, is it any wonder then that they see nothing wrong with same-sex marriage?


If we spend the largest part of our time in pursuit of entertainment, sports, and acquiring material things, while ignoring prayer, studying God’s Word to understand His will, and serving others, then we will not reap the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We cannot reap these fruits when we sow anger, envy, deceit, selfishness, immorality, and pride. To do so, is to show no more maturity than a four-year-old.

What is your spiritual I.Q.? 

In the Lamb,

Maxine



Maxine Fream Gash is a Christian writer who makes her home in Joplin, MO.



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FIRST THINGS FIRST

This July fourth we will be celebrating the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It has been 243 years since we declared our independence from England.

I remember in elementary and high school we had to memorize the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. It was a hard job for me. When you have A.D.H.D., memorizing anything is difficult.

The paragraph says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”



Tony Sullivan

What a great statement. Over the years millions have died to keep this promise alive. I am proud to live in a country were these three things are valued.

I got to thinking (I know that scares you) about the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Even if I had not been born in the United States, I would still have these blessings. Christ, with his death on the cross, gave those who would accept Him, the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Jesus came to give us life. In John 10:10 he says, “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*” (NASB)

Another translation says that He will give us life to the

“fullest.” The word has the idea that Jesus gives us life until it overflows. You might say Christ gives us more life than we can handle.

It is a life overflowing with purpose and meaning. We are serving the Creator of the universe. We have the task of reaching the lost and bringing them to know the savior we know.

He has given us a life of marvelous dignity. He made us just a little lower than the angels and has crowned us with glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:7). He has also lavished us with love in allowing us to be called His children (1 John 3:1).

Even when we are weak, He is there to strengthen us. He is with us in all our bad times and good. He never leaves nor forsakes us. Christ gives us life.

He gives us liberty. 2 Corinthians 3:7 says, “*Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*” (NASB). Jesus also tells us in John 8:36, “*So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*” (NASB).

Through Christ we are free from the law; we are free from sin, death, and the grave. We are free from legalism and we are free from eternal destruction. I don’t know about you but all that sounds like good news to me.

The freedom we have, both in our nation and in Christ, doesn’t come cheaply. Our nation’s freedom has cost the lives of millions of men and women. Freedom is painted red with the blood of the brave, people who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Our freedom in Christ is also painted in red, the red blood of our savior Jesus Christ. He made the ultimate sacrifice for us. He died so we could live. He suffered so we would not have to. He not only made the ultimate sacrifice, He made the perfect sacrifice, and in so doing He gave us freedom. (RH)

Tony Sullivan is the evangelist with the Lester Road Christian Church in Fairburn, GA. He is also an associate evangelist with the CRA. He can be reached by e-mail: Tonicra@att.net

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Here's An Idea!

"Information, Please!"

Do you feel that your local congregation may be in danger of stagnation? Has your attendance reached a certain plateau and remained about the same for a year or two? Has your attendance started to decline? Is there concern about this trend?



Ben Merold

Here is a simple idea that can be helpful. Almost every church can make it work and it seems to be very usable in small congregations. I will present it step-by-step.

First, choose four or five people from the congregation. Try to have a mix of age groups if possible. Invite them to a meeting with the preacher and one member of the official board. Choose an elder or deacon who is respected by the congregation. Also, choose a man or woman who will sit off to one side of the meeting for the purpose of taking notes.

It is necessary that the preacher explain that this group is not a decision making committee – they are there for the purpose of giving information.

The meeting with this group should be outlined around the following questions. Ask them for their input on each question.

1. What did we do in past years that caused this congregation to grow?
2. Why are we no longer doing these things?
3. Would any of these things be a help to our spiritual

and numeric growth today?

4. Are we doing things in our church program that are not effective?

- a. Are these things only done because of tradition?
- b. Could any of them be a hindrance to our growth?

5. What suggestions can you make concerning changes or additions to our ministry?

- a. Are these things in the realm of possibility for us?
- b. Do you know people in our church who might help with these ideas?
- c. Would you be willing to help with one or more of these ideas?
- d. Will you pray daily about these things?

Now, after you do this, repeat the whole process with a new group of four or five people. If possible, do the same with a third group.

Finally, go over the notes from each meeting with the church leadership. You have a witness to each meeting to help you with the report and you are giving information received from twelve to fifteen respected people from the congregation.

Prepare yourself to know that many of the new ideas may not be usable but in all of this, you will receive several ideas that will work. They may become very workable in the minds of your leadership because one of their group was in each meeting and the groups were made up of people in the church. In other words, the input of the members will add to the validity of the ideas.

Give it a try. This idea has a high success rate. RH

Ben Merold is a minister of the Harvester Christian Church in St. Charles, MO. Email contact: terri.brown@harvesterchristian.org.

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About Our Lesson Writer



Born during the depression and raised poor, Phil Emmert didn't come to Christ until he was 25 years old. Even then he confesses he only played church until he was above 30. At age 33 he left Lebanon, Indiana, and his secure job with Dow Chemical Company and took his family to Johnson Bible College. He was graduated from JBC in 1974. In the last 45 years he has served small churches in Tennessee and North Carolina, while working at secular jobs to help support his family. He has worn many hats while at the same time ministering. He has been a school bus driver, a children's Social Worker and School Counselor. At age 77 Phil began to write books. He has published five to date. Phil and his wife Bea live in Washington, NC, and drive 55 miles twice a week to Christ's Church at Rose Bay, where he has preached since 2012.

Be the Difference

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text

Uniform Lesson

July 7, 2019

Matthew 5:13-20

Background of Text

Our lessons are from what has been called the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon consisting of several short homilies, has also been called King Jesus' Inaugural Address. However, as we examine it, perhaps it is more accurately a "State of the Church" address. Or at least what Jesus intended His church to be. Jesus would build His church and call it by His name. It was not named for any man or any system. It would be called the Church of Christ or Christ's Church which would show ownership.

You see, God's people had strayed badly once again.

This time, just sending prophets would not be God's answer. God had been patient, but it was now time to send His only begotten Son. And so, the ministry of Jesus had begun. Jesus was such a powerful speaker that His audiences had grown, and they followed Him wherever He went.

In almost every beauty contest the master of ceremonies asks the contestants, "What do you want to do with your life?" Invariably the answer comes back, "I want to make a difference." However, Jesus does not just want us to make a difference; He requires us to be the difference.

Understanding God's Word

Verse 13: Jesus addressed the people directly. He was not talking about someone else. He was making it personal. He told them, "*You are the salt of the earth.*" Not all salt is the same. There is rock salt for melting ice and making ice cream, iodized salt and, of late, sea salt. We have been warned about using too much salt in food. But personally, I love salty food. I cannot imagine popcorn without a lot of salt. In hot climates, salt is a necessity to keep from becoming dehydrated.

Jesus is telling us, we are to be salty Christians. However, we are to not be like the salt often used in Israel at that time. Much of that salt was mainly from the Dead Sea and contained many impurities which sometimes made it tasteless, useless, and fit only for the manure pile. Jesus was saying, "Don't be that guy." Don't be Dead Sea salt; be the salt of the earth that seasons, adds flavor, and preserves.

Verses 14-16: You are the light of the world. Can you imagine a world without salt and without light? We might make it, but it would be a pretty drab existence. Spiritually speaking, if we allow him, the Holy Spirit will spice up our life. We receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38). The Bible also says we put on Christ in Galatians 3:27. If there is no sunshine, there would be no moonlight. When we put Jesus Christ in our lives, He supplies the light and we reflect His light in our lives, homes, where we

work, and in the church.

We are indeed to be salt and light. It is not by accident these two thoughts are back to back. It is not that you are just making a difference. Are you being the difference by living more like Christ every day? What would your congregation be without you? What would your workplace or community be without you? We are to make sure we season and preserve the doctrines that Christ has given us. The Church of Christ must shed light on the Word and preserve the Word of God for the generations coming after us.

Verses 17-19: Grumbling about Jesus had likely already begun. The complaint by the Pharisees was that Jesus was not teaching what the teachers of the Law taught. Let's face it, Jesus' teaching was, indeed, like no other. He was teaching that it was not just what you did that counted, but what your had in your mind and heart. However, Jesus had come not to abolish the Law of Moses or the teaching of the Prophets. No! He came to fill them full.

In that day one could think anything in His heart, and it was okay. Jesus on the other hand, indicated that one was to have a pure heart. Or to be clean not just on the outside, but to be clean inside as well. Jesus illustrated by using the scribes as an example. They were to copy the Scriptures exactly as written. They could not change a comma or a period.

Jesus never taught the people to break the Law. And He kept the Law perfectly Himself. He was the only one who had always lived a perfect life and had never broken a commandment or one of God's decrees. He was perfect in every way.

Verse 20: Jesus was about to insult the Pharisees. He stopped talking to and about the common, ordinary man, and spoke about the Pharisees who were in the crowd. They were no doubt there out of curiosity and to catch Jesus in a violation of the law.

"Unless your righteousness exceeds or surpasses, the righteousness of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law..." The Pharisees were sure that no one could surpass their righteousness. Each of them was wondering, "How could anyone be more righteous than I?"

Jesus was saying our own righteousness is as filthy rags. Man has no righteousness of His own. It is only when we have given ourselves to Jesus completely and been immersed into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins that we become righteous. But it is not ours, it is because we have clothed ourselves with Him.

Perhaps some of our problem is that we are lazy. It is easier to tell others to make a difference than to "be the difference" ourselves.

Love From The Heart

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text

Uniform Lesson

July 14, 2019

Matthew 5:21-32

Background of Text

Social media has given us the opportunity to be bolder than we have ever been. Some are often very crass, cruel and even godless. We sometimes think we can tweet or post whatever enters our mind since we are not standing face to face with that person. We may communicate things we would never utter to a person at the dinner table or on the telephone. However, we shall be accountable to God for the

very thoughts which are in our hearts and minds. In that day, people had been taught the commandments from the time they were very young. The problem was that the people had been taught that they could think anything they wanted to think, and there was no penalty. We can only imagine the baggage being carried around in the minds and hearts of these people.

Understanding God's Word

Verses 21-22: We all know that murder is not only illegal, it is immoral, for it is against the law of God. Jesus is not contrasting the difference between the Old Testament and His teaching. He is not saying the Old Testament is wrong. He is pointing out how the Law in the Old Testament had been misinterpreted by the Rabbis. Everything was external to the Rabbis. All they were interested in was the outward appearance. Jesus is trying to correct thousands of years of misinterpretation of the Scripture.

Jesus is not just speaking of self-control of one's actions, but also having control of one's tongue as well. Some people have the philosophy, "If it enters my mind, it has to come out of my mouth." Controlling our actions is often much easier than our mouths. Jesus is speaking about our total attitude and mindset.

He said, don't say "Raca" to anyone. That word is related to the Aramaic word which meant, "empty" and likely meant empty-headed or "worthless." We should be very careful about calling people names who are created by God and for whom Christ died. We could be in bigtime trouble if we call someone a fool or worthless. He indicates using such hurtful language puts us in danger of the burning pit of fire which is hell. By this time Jesus no doubt had the complete attention of the crowd. They were thinking perhaps of the times they had called people names. Jesus had

just told them that was not okay. They were in danger.

Verses 23-26: Next time they went to make a sacrifice, they would likely be thinking about the times they had insulted someone and there had been a serious falling out. When two parties are angry with each other, worship is impossible. Oh, yes, one can pretend, but God knows. Jesus is speaking about reconciliation, the forgotten "R" word. Church members sometimes offend each other as well as family members. Breaking up is easier than reconciliation. As a counselor I remind people of three short sentences we should never be afraid to say to those we have hurt. "I am sorry." "I was wrong." And "I love you." But don't say it like this. "I was wrong, and I am sorry I love you."

As a preacher, I have noticed the cunning of the devil. He often tries to provoke me on Sunday morning just before worship. He of course uses people to do this. The Apostle Paul had the answer for anger management. It is okay to get angry. It is a sin to stay angry. Ephesians 4:26.

Verses 27-30: Do not commit adultery. Marriage is sacred. Marriage is the oldest institution in the world. Marriage between a man and a woman was created by God long before Christ built

His church, which is called by His name. The vows of marriage are as sacred and binding as the confession of faith we make when we are baptized into Christ. Jesus is about to give the correct meaning of this commandment. Don't even think about it!

It may or may not begin with an eye problem. However, it is always a brain problem. We sometimes cannot help what our eyes take in. But we do not have to take a second look or let our eyes and our mind wander to unholy regions.

King David is the best example of this. 2 Samuel 11. David was not where he was supposed to be. He saw something not meant for His eyes. It ended in adultery and murder.

Jesus spoke of marriage, adultery, and divorce one right after the other. For, you see, unfaithfulness in marriage usually leads to divorce.

Verses 31-32: It is not required that one divorce an unfaithful spouse. Reconciliation would still be most desired. God intended for one man to be married to one woman until one of them died. Moses evidently made allowances for divorce but only in the case of unfaithfulness.

The commandments were not meant to control only our bodies but our hearts and minds as well.

All You Need Is Love

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text

Uniform Lesson

July 21, 2019

Matthew 5:38-48

Background of Text

By not becoming a Christian until age 25, I missed a lot of great teaching. I was never really interested in church and knew very little about God, Jesus, or the doctrines of the Church of Christ. Let me say quickly, I was not a bad person. But I agreed with my worldly coworkers, that if one was wronged or treated badly, the best thing to do was to “get even.” But actually no one wants to just get even. We want to hurt that person worse

than they hurt us. This is the way of the world. This was also the mindset of the people in Jesus’ day. You see, people have not changed much.

I found this a rather timely lesson as I began to prepare it. For our nation’s leaders are at odds with each other. The problem? Everyone wants their own way. Today we will learn Jesus has a better way for us to handle conflict in our personal lives.

Understanding God’s Word

Verses 38-42: Jesus knew the Scriptures because He was the author. He was quoting Deuteronomy 19:20-21. The people to whom He spoke were also familiar with this Scripture. The mindset was you put my eye out, I will put your eye out. You knock my tooth out, I will knock your tooth out. The trouble with that is that sooner or later, you may be blind and unable to eat.

Jesus had a better idea because it was His Father’s idea. When Jesus said, do not resist, He was not telling us to become doormats. Nor was He saying never defend yourself. But He was giving the formula for calming a volatile situation.

My son-in-law is a policeman in a metropolitan area. He is impressively large, muscular, and could easily physically settle hot issues. However, he learned in his training how to deescalate potentially dangerous situations using friendly persuasion. Solomon said, “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*” (Proverbs 15:1).

If we would just learn to take to heart what Jesus taught, we would save ourselves a lot of grief. Plus, we could likely win others to Christ. As Christians we are to be different from the world. The world fusses and fumes with each other. We who are in Christ are no longer of this world.

We are in it, but not of it. The Apostle Paul wrote a great commentary on this passage in Romans 12:17-21.

My version of Romans 12:19, “Don’t try to get even with anyone. Back up and give God room to whip those who are doing you wrong. God does not always pay the bill on the first of the month, but he will repay the wrong.”

He also repeated in his own way what Jesus said. If your enemy is hungry feed him and if he is thirsty give him water. Your kindness will be like a shovel full of hot coals on his head. And if you don’t do that you will surely be overcome by evil yourself.

Verse 42-48: Jesus indicated that we should not just do what is required of us; go the extra mile. We live in a society that wants the most reward for the least effort. This is contrary to what Christ taught. We should be much more passionate and enthusiastic about our service to Christ and our fellowman. Remember the warning in Revelation 3:15-16 to the church in Laodicea. They were lukewarm and without passion for Christ and his Church. Jesus rebuked them harshly.

Verses 43-44: God did not tell His

people to hate their earthly enemies. What had been taught was a misinterpretation of the Law. Many people today tell us what the Bible says... and they are often wrong. This is a good reason to bring your Bible to church. Even preachers or Sunday school teachers can read something wrong at times.

Whom do you love? A problem of bias has existed since the beginning. We tend to pick and choose those to whom we extend our love. Granted some folks are not so loveable, but perhaps they are the ones who need it the most. I have seen Christian acts of love drastically change people.

Verse 48: We have here a misconception of the term “*be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.*” He is not telling them they must be sinless for that would be impossible. The word means to be complete. Be mature. Grow up in Jesus.

Are you the same person spiritually today as you were a year ago? I hope not. I pray you are more complete as a Christian.

We must strive for maturity and become a more complete, well rounded and disciplined Christian. Let us start today to take to heart what Jesus said in this great Sermon on the Mount.

The Pursuit of Truth

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text

Uniform Lesson

July 28, 2019

Matthew 7:1-6, 15-23

Background of Text

Jesus has handled many subjects in His Sermon on the Mount. All are things we deal with almost daily in our lives. All these subjects are important. However, perhaps the most essential subject is the rise of false doctrine taught by false teachers in the modern church. There can be no truth if teachers are false. Without truth our salvation is lost. A half-truth is still a

lie. We must get back to the very basic teaching of Jesus and the Apostles which is only found in the New Testament. The Restoration Movement was founded upon discovering the truth in God's Word. Individuals, and then whole congregations, came out of denominationalism because they found the truth in the word of God.

Understanding God's Word

Verses 1-2: Jesus says we will be measured by the same yardstick that we use to measure others. In America we have the Office of Weights and Measures. This office assures us that an inch or a foot is always the same. It is not one length for one person and another length for someone else.

God is our office of weights and measures. Therefore, we are cautioned to be very careful to not judge. We are, however, urged to be fruit inspectors. Bad fruit can be dangerous to your health. In verses 16-20 Jesus tells us to inspect the fruit of those who teach.

Verses 3-5: gives us the graphic, almost comical, picture that Jesus paints for us of a man trying to search for a tiny speck of sawdust in the eye of another person. All the while he is battering the man in the face with a 3 foot, 4 by 4 in his own eye. Picture that for a moment. That is how we must sometimes look to God when we are judging a weaker brother. We think that he needs the speck removed. Rightfully, he may. But most likely, he needs healing, not a beating. All the while we have a 2x4 in our eye but don't feel the need for any help. We need to look in the mirror from time to time, to make

sure we are fit to help someone else.

Verse 6: This verse needs to be handled by itself. What do hogs have in common with pearls? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Hogs wouldn't know a string of pearls from string of beans. They do not know the value of pearls. This is what it is like trying to teach a person who is so full of the world that they cannot understand real spiritual things. We must always try to reach people like that, but there comes a time when our attention should be turned to those who are receptive.

There was a preacher in our area several years ago, who was attacked in his home by a drug-addicted man whom he had tried to assist. He had cast the pearls of the gospel before a man who turned on him.

Verses 15: There were false prophets in Jesus' day just as there are today. In that day they were populists, only giving the people news they wanted to hear. People who received only good news which made them feel good and they paid these prophets well. Today we call them televangelists.

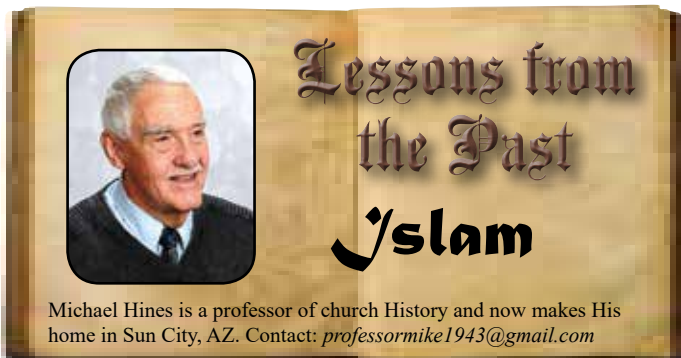
They sell their message and try to cloak it in the good news of the gospel. (I'm okay! You're okay! Now send me some money.) Unfortunately, these same kinds of preachers have gotten into the local congregations. Jesus says watch out for them!

I once had a dog that got into my neighbor's sheep. He was fine around my livestock. There was no indication from just looking at him that he could kill or maim sheep, until we carefully examined him. He had wool in his teeth. Then we knew.

Always examine carefully what someone says from the pulpit or in a Sunday School classroom. If it is not true, you can first follow the example of Priscilla and Aquilla in Acts 18:24-26, and try to teach the false teacher the truth.

If the message is true, then you must take it to heart, obey it and share it.

The only way to know if a teacher is teaching the truth is to study the Word of God. Too many people say, "Doesn't the Bible say somewhere that" How much better to say, "The Bible says this and I will stand on the truth of the Word."



Core Differences Between Biblical Christianity and Islam

Okay, I'm still writing about Islam. I keep studying, so why not share what I learn? I'm taking an online course on Islam from Pfander Centre for Apologetics. Pfander Centre for Apologetics is headquartered in London, England. It exists to promote the academic study of issues relevant to Christianity and Islam, to engage Muslims on key historical and theological issues, and to resource and equip Christians to engage Islam with the Gospel. Each year Pfander offers a four-module course in Islamic studies. At this writing I am finishing up the first six-weeks module and I have learned a great deal. More importantly, the study is driving me back into the Old Testament.

I keep getting reports from *Restoration Herald* readers and friends reacting to previous articles and my recent book, *Fake Prophet: Essays on Islam and Its Prophet*. These reports tell me many brethren continue to believe Islam is one of three great Abrahamic religions. A few professors on our college and university campuses continue to teach Jews, Christians, and Muslims all worship the same God. This belief is a grievous error which desperately needs correction.

Islam is *not* an Abrahamic religion despite their claim. Descendants of Abraham come down through history from Isaac, not Ishmael. Yahweh never said he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Ishmael. When Yahweh told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah the Scripture records, "God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here am I.'" He (God) said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...' (Genesis 22:1). Despite Yahweh's promise to Ishmael to become a great nation, he had no promise as a descendant of Abraham. Dismiss from your thinking any idea Islam is an Abrahamic religion. Yes, the Qur'an includes Noah, Abraham, and Moses but it twists those accounts.

Muslims also claim Islam is one of only three monotheistic religions. That's also untrue. Monotheistic concepts existed in Arabia prior to Islam. It is clear thoughtful Arabians elevated Allah to not only supreme status among many gods, but *the only* god.

When I talk about Arabia prior to Islam, you must understand Islam did not appear with Muhammad. No historical record outside Muslim sources written many years after Muhammad's death in 632 speaks of Islam, or Muslims for that matter. The first mention of Islam appears on inscriptions found in the Dome of the Rock constructed by Abd al-Malik in 691.

Inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula were in contact with numerous

Christian heretical groups as well as Jews and Zoroastrians. Therefore, Arabians had familiarity with monotheistic concepts which circulated freely throughout the peninsula. Evidence in the Qur'an indicates Muhammad borrowed these notions to preach a familiar message which would resonate with Meccans. Later, in Medina he hardened the message presenting an absolute monotheistic deity who required full and abject submission.

Too much effort is expended to find similarities between Christianity and Islam. While there is no need to be combative, the emphasis when presenting the Gospel to Muslims must be upon truth. There are five core differences between Islam and Christianity. The rest of this article focuses on those five differences, differences which show Islam to be false. At the heart of the argument is the fact there is no common road to God with Islam and Christianity. There is only one way. "There is salvation in no one else (Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, ESV).

THEOLOGY OF GOD

Islam – Islam's theology of Allah is summed up in one word: *Tawhid*. Just as the term *Trinity* is not found in the New Testament, the word *Tawhid* is not found in the Qur'an. It is a term designating Allah's absolute indivisible nature. Allah is a singularity who has no partners, no son, no relationships of any sort. Since Allah is a generic name, similar in nature to the term god, his true name is unknown. Allah has no connection or direct contact to humans. Although a creator, Allah has no relationship or interest in his creation except in terms of control and the absolute submission of created beings. Allah placed Adam and Eve in Paradise but has no relationship with them. He does not enter Paradise and cannot be found there. Because of Adam's disobedience, Allah banished him from Paradise to exile on a prison planet where he and his descendants are tested. He offers no salvation, no relationship, no promise of eternity in his presence. The Qur'an ascribes 99 names to Allah, but there is no action accompanying each name's meaning. For example, he is called "Merciful and Compassionate," but he shows no mercy or compassion, requiring only total and absolute submission. He is called "holy" but he is a deceiver who manipulates his creation for his own ends.

Christianity – In contrast, Yahweh is holy, righteous, and just. He created Adam and Eve for relationship, placed them in a beautiful garden, and came into Paradise for fellowship. He communicated with the first couple and despite casting them from the garden because of Adam's sin, he continued to communicate with them and their descendants in many and various ways culminating with His Son Jesus (Hebrews 1:1, 2). Yahweh is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who is not capricious but "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). On numerous occasions Yahweh "came down" (Numbers 12:5). The many names ascribed to Yahweh in Scripture describe His activity and nature. For example, He is *Yahweh Jireh*, the provider (Genesis 22:14), He is *Yahweh Maccadeschem*, the sanctifier (Jeremiah 23:6), He is *El Olam*, the everlasting God, and He is *Yahweh Roi*, a shepherd (Psalm 23:1) and more. In every situation, the Bible portrays Yahweh as personal and so concerned with your well-being that even the hairs on your head are numbered.

I've written quite a lot here because it is crucial to understand the God of the Bible is not Allah. Muslims and Christians *do not* worship the same God. Even here I have not presented an exhaustive treatment of
(continued on page 18)

Lessons from the Past (cont.)

the differences. I've presented just enough to demonstrate the point.

VIEW OF HUMANITY

Islam – Islam views humanity as Allah's slaves created only to obey. The term "Islam" means submission. Allah has no relationship with his created beings. To suggest Allah created humans "in his image" is tantamount to *shirk* because to the Muslim mind it suggests partnership or deity.

Christianity – In Genesis, the creation account says, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*" (Genesis 1:26). In the next verse, the Scripture says, "*So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.*" Yahweh created man in His image giving him the ability to communicate. In Scripture, humanity is not created for slavery but for relationship. Adam's sin caused the relationship to be broken, but God chose to overcome the brokenness with a plan which would restore relationship. Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of full restoration to come.

VIEW OF SIN

Islam – In Islam sin is no big deal. It is a mistake or test. Islam does not see sin as an affront to Allah's holy nature. In a recent podcast with Dr. Paul Axton, I described the Muslim view of sin in terms familiar to liberal Christianity: sin is wrong thinking. Since sin is only a mistake or test, there is no need for atonement or a redeemer. Thus, Jesus (the Muslim Isa) is merely a human prophet, a "warner" who corrects mistakes. Everything in Islam contradicts the biblical teachings of Jesus. Jesus did not die to take the sins of the world upon himself. He did not act as a propitiation for sin. He did not rise from the dead. His major role comes in end times when he returns to slaughter all the pigs and Jews prior to the establishment of a world-wide caliphate.

Christianity – Sin is *hamartia*, missing the mark. It is an affront against the character of God and causes separation. Yahweh is a holy God whose just nature requires punishment of the sinner for the sin. At the same time, Yahweh's love for His creation requires the justification of the sinner so relationship is restored. At first glance, this seems paradoxical in that God's holy nature requires both, just retribution for sin and the rescue of the sinner. The solution is found in the gift of Yahweh's only begotten Son who came to take sinners' punishment upon himself. Jesus is a propitiation (a sacrifice which turns away wrath) to be received by faith (Romans 3:25). Paul writes, "*It (Jesus's propitiatory death) was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*" (Romans 3:26).

VIEW OF SALVATION

Islam – Islam has no concept of salvation. Allah arbitrarily determines who will and who will not enter Paradise. Man's works are placed on a scale and should the good deeds outweigh the bad, he *might* find a sensual Paradise in the afterlife. However, sin continues in Paradise as Paradise is described as an eternal orgy of earthly and sensual delight. Martyrs for Allah's cause are the only ones guaranteed Paradise complete with sensual *houris* (virgins) as a reward.

Christianity – From Genesis to Revelation Scripture recounts

the steps Yahweh undertook to restore man's sin-caused brokenness. Sin caused separation and (moral) sickness in humanity. Jesus' atoning death and victorious resurrection turned away God's wrath, healing the separation and setting the rescued on a path leading to Christlikeness (sanctification). Those who receive Christ by faith in baptism find restoration and healing.

VIEW OF ETERNITY

Islam – Muslims have no hope to enjoy a relationship with Allah. Allah is so totally other there is no way to come into his presence. There is no hope of an eternity with Allah. The best a Muslim can hope for is an eternal existence in a sensual earthly paradise.

Christianity – Genesis relates the Creation and the Fall. Revelation portrays the restoration of a universe where heaven and earth are reunited. John writes in Revelation 21, "*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband*" (Revelation 21:2).

The Old Testament Tabernacle and Temple were "models" teaching us these truths. Exodus 28-29 provides for us the history of the Tabernacle. Prior to the description of the "tent," God told Moses to build three pieces of furniture: the Ark of the Covenant, the Table for Bread, and the Golden Lampstand. Each of these together represent the triune God who existed prior to the creation of the universe. God gave Moses precise directions for building and erecting the tabernacle, which represented the universe. God intended the universe as a dwelling place where he and his creation co-existed. Adam's sin changed God's intention and within the tabernacle God ordered a curtain placed which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tent. On the curtain cherubim were embroidered. Paradise and earth were separated in the same way Adam was cast from the garden and cherubim set to prevent his re-entry. The Ark of the Covenant remained in the Holy of Holies representing God's dwelling place. The Table of Bread and the Golden Lampstand remained in the greater room of the tent indicating Yahweh's presence among his people. Another piece of furniture, the Altar of Incense, representing the prayers of God's people, was set close to the curtain. Outside the tent was a laver, a Great Sea, where priests were cleansed for their duties, and beyond that an Altar of Burnt Offering.

When Jesus died on the cross, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was rent. The rift between heaven and earth was ended. The eschatological events destined to result in the reuniting of heaven and the universe were underway. Even now the way is open for anyone to enjoy relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Every person who is "in Christ" is promised eternity with Yahweh who once again walks in a restored garden enjoying relationship with his people.

As you can see, the differences between Islam and Christianity are insurmountable. There is no reason to seek points of compatibility with Islam and Christianity. Islam is a lie conceived in Hell. Muslims cannot follow Jesus and remain enslaved to Islam. Like those of any other ethnic or national origin, there must be acknowledgement of the Christ of the Bible leading to adoption into the true Abrahamic family. "*If you are Christ's then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise*" (Galatians 3:29). (R)

Endnotes:

1. <https://www.pfander.uk/about/>
2. This assumes Muhammad existed and the traditional account is at least somewhat accurate.

PERSONAL THEOLOGY: **A STUDY IN** **HOW WE RELATE TO GOD**

Part Six: *"I SHALL"*

by **Jim Nichols**

"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" – 1 John 3:2.

Let's face it: when it comes to our salvation, even our sanctification, our part is small, even miniscule, in comparison to what God has done and continues to do. A freewill decision may have brought us back to the Loving Father, but it was a freewill act of rebellion that took us out of His presence in the first place! Even if our free will was that big a thing, it wasn't enough to pay the penalty and to reconcile us with God. He does that for us. And apart from the working of His Holy Spirit within us, we couldn't keep ourselves pure, no matter how hard we try. Only God can affect such radical transformation in our behavior.

It is in this same humble mindset we come to a personal declaration that simply describes what it is to come apart from what we do. It is the difference between "I will" (a declaration of a decision) and "I shall" (a declaration of a future state of being). With the former, there is something we affect by our decision. With the latter, it is an acknowledgment of our passivity; what God will do for us He does apart from our goodness, works, or effort.

John says when Jesus appears, we shall be like Him. This boggles the mind. Jesus is the Eternal God, the rightful Heir to the Throne on High. He is glorified and given the Kingdom which was promised before the very beginning of all things. As God, He is truly Eternal, from Everlasting to Everlasting. In stark contrast, we are human beings with birthdays. We have a point where we came into being. What's more, when we sinned, we died. We left the presence of the Eternal One. We have no reason to expect anything but judgment and death from the Just Judge.

The fact is that you and I would owe God our good works, our utmost allegiance, our love and devotion, even if there were no promise of eternal life. We have already received the repurposing of life found when our sins were forgiven and the Holy Spirit came within us to give us the desire and ability to do the will of God. But in addition to all of this, God gives us the promise of sharing in the Eternal Nature by living forever in His presence and sharing a constant communion with Him that has no end!

How does the saying go? "You ain't seen nothin' yet!"

There's obviously a way in which our eternal life will never be the same as the Eternal Life of God. He always was. We have a point of beginning. And the promise of Eternal Life? Well, that is totally dependent upon the trustworthiness of God. Of course, He



is trustworthy and keeps all His promises, but what if God were capricious and somewhere in the future would say, "I don't think I'm going to let you live forever!" What could any of us do to stop Him from zapping us out of existence? Our eternal life is contingent upon His promises. His eternal life is not.

Despite the differences, our life going on into eternity is not even a question. God has promised gladly to share eternity with us and make us joint heirs with the Son.

Even though my eternal life is contingent upon His word, and even though I am passive in my ability to make it happen, I am able to declare it with certainty:

I shall be like Him! The Resurrected Jesus had a glorified body which enabled Him to be seen, heard, touched, even given food to eat. There was assuredly physical substance to the body which came out of the grave. At the same time, it was vastly different! He could materialize in locked rooms. He could just as easily vanish again when He decided it was time to go. Only in science fiction can we imagine someone "beaming in and out" of a place. If I shall be like Him in that respect, I guess I won't need planes, trains, and automobiles! I will have a resurrected body. I Corinthians 15 makes this clear. Unlike my current "flesh and blood" though, I will be changed into an immortal body which will not grow old, get sick, and die.

I shall be in the Presence of God forever! *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God'" – Revelation 21:3.* While sin removed us from Him, and while the curse of sin on the earth has caused a partial withdrawal of His glory and the intrusion of death and decay on His creation, it isn't always going to be like this. In the new order of things, there will be a new heaven and new earth where only righteousness dwells. God will once again walk with man in the cool of the day, and there will be this companionship between us forever.

I shall be free of the curse! The corruption of all creation will be a distant memory to us. There will be no more sorrow, or sickness, or death. Things will be restored to an Edenic nature which will reflect what God had initially finished in six days and pronounced "Very good!" Isaiah 65:25 speaks of a new order of creation where the wolf and the lamb lie down together and the lion eats straw like an ox. In the meantime, all of creation moans and travails in pain, waiting for that day.

(continued on page 20)

HOW WE RELATE TO GOD (cont.)

I shall know fully, even as right now I am fully known by God. This idea is mentioned so quickly in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that it almost gets off our train of thought before it pulls out of the station! There's a lot of stuff that we currently experience that doesn't make sense to us at all. Like Job, we face affliction without any definitive word from God about what He's up to or why He operates the way He does.

God was strangely silent the day Jesus was crucified – not that He had said nothing beforehand, and certainly not that Jesus hadn't spelled it out in clear terms for the Twelve. It's just that none of it made sense at the time, so it didn't register properly until it was all accomplished. The same thing is true for us in our daily struggles right now, even when God has clearly spelled out how suffering completes our faith and patience, equips us to comfort others who suffer, identifies us more fully with Christ, and several other things. All the same, when Eternity has come, we will look back on all of this; and every bit of it will make perfect sense!

I shall see Him as He really is! There was still something strangely subdued about Jesus in His appearances to Mary Magdalene or the two on the road to Emmaus. Mary mistook Him for a gardener. The Emmaus pair didn't recognize Him for a couple of hours at least. It's very different in the book of Revelation when He appears as the Lamb. In Revelation 6 we read, *"¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave⁵ and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, ¹⁶ calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'"*

At the beginning of John's Revelation, Jesus appeared to him not as the frightful Lamb, but as an Authority with eyes of fire, white hair of wisdom, feet of burnished bronze, a voice of thunder, and a face shining like the sun with a double-edged sword coming from His mouth as He spoke. He holds the keys to death and Hades because He had been alive, had died, but now is alive forevermore!

John loved his Lord and longed to see Him again, but at this sight he fell on his face. How do you suppose someone who didn't know Christ, didn't long for His appearing, would respond to such a revelation? People who know Jesus to a lesser degree aren't ready

to see Him as He really is! Before they see the Conquering King, the Judge of all Ages, the Angry Lamb, they need to know Jesus in more accepting and less threatening terms. Sinners need to know Jesus as a Friend Who will not turn them away. They need to know that when they let their hair down in front of Him He will not judge them, but rather say, *"Your sins are forgiven! Go in peace!"*

This is why what we shall be is not yet made known. If He came as a Judge right now, there are too many people who aren't ready to see Him fully as He is. Even when Moses communed with the Lord God on Mt. Sinai in the wilderness and wanted to see God in all His glory, the Lord said, *"No one has seen my face and lived"* (Exodus 33:20). As Moses hid in a crevice, the Lord covered the opening with His hand, then passed over the crevice with only His back in view.

Saul saw Jesus "as He really is" on the Damascus road. The view blinded him so badly it took a miracle to restore his eyesight. Such is the view of Jesus in all His eternal glory.

People still aren't ready to see Jesus as He really is. Someone has to prepare them.

This is a mandate for Christians who have come this far in the spiritual pilgrimage to fulfill the Great Commission. It is up to us to prepare those still struggling with the "I Can't" phase to be able to face the Lord in all His glory without fear. They need to relate to Him now as their Friend and Savior, so they can stand in His presence as the Judge, with confidence He has accepted them and has only good in store for them. It's not too late for them to say, "I will," to discover "I can." Together, we can then stand before Him at the Great White Throne and say, "I shall!"

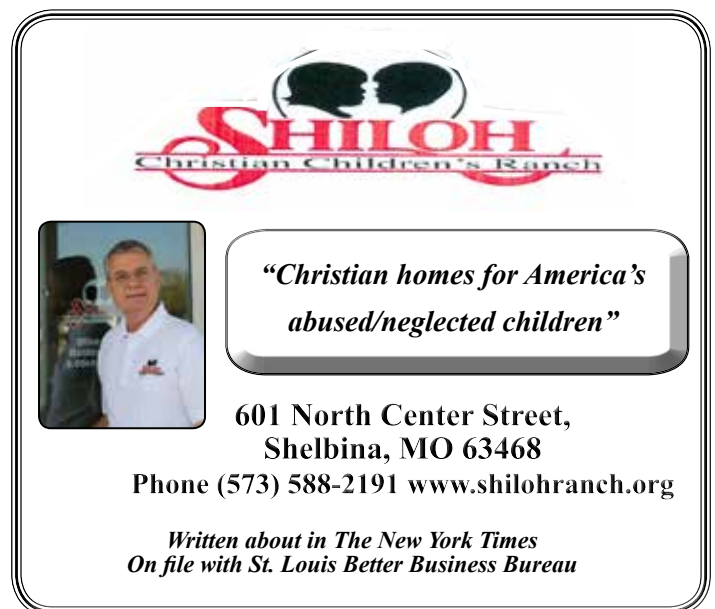
To sell others on this Perfect Plan, we need to show them how "sold out" we really are! This part comes in our next, and final, personal declaration. **(RH)**

Jim Nichols is a preacher/writer who makes His home in Pekin, IN. Some of His books can be found on the CRA website and on Amazon.com



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Strangeness of the Month Club

*Kent B. True

This month we will draw on sources even more unusual than our usual unusual. Those will be a current television sitcom series and a paper from the Future of Humanity Institute. That is sufficient introduction as we begin . . .

A Sitcom and the Fermi Paradox

There is a very cute TV series now in its second season. It is titled simply “Young Sheldon.” If you have ever heard of another long running and about-to-conclude TV series called “The Big Bang Theory” you know the character Sheldon Cooper. Sheldon is highly intelligent in the fields of math and science, but far less than average in other areas, such as how to deal with people. He also often stumbles when he ventures into philosophical questions. With that brief introduction, we turn to “Young Sheldon.” This series began recently and goes back to the math prodigy Sheldon Cooper as a young boy, living with his family in Texas in the 1980s.



Kent B. True a.k.a.
Harold N. Orndorff

The show “Young Sheldon” is actually better than “The Big Bang Theory” in spite of the dependency. Sheldon’s family, while not without problems, displays all sorts of endearing relationships. One of the most interesting of these is between Sheldon and his mother, Mary Cooper.

Mary is a “born again” Christian, dedicated mother, and housewife who also works part-time for her church. The church is portrayed in a believable form for the time and place of the show’s setting. Sheldon is an agnostic at best, even at this young age. But he greatly respects his mother and often attends church with her along with his mother’s mother whom he calls “Mee Maw.”

The minister at this church is also believable. He is fairly young. He seems to exhibit the attitudes of a minister of a generically evangelical church of a couple of hundred people from the 1980s - at least for a TV character. Sheldon often has questions for the minister, and it has become common for Sheldon to simply ask his questions during the church service. Though the minister often exhibits a look of dread when Sheldon asks a question, the minister says he wants to encourage questions, so he is always willing to pause and at least attempt to answer Sheldon’s questions. The Mee Maw character rather delights in urging Sheldon to ask his questions since she rather enjoys watching the minister “squirm” a bit trying to answer Sheldon’s questions, which are often somewhat “out there.”

In one episode, the minister is talking about the Son of God

coming to earth as a man, Jesus, to redeem sinners. Sheldon has a question: if God came to earth as a man, would he come to a planet of intelligent octopus-like creatures as a man, or as one of the octopus creatures? The minister is unsure. His first thought is that God would come as a man. Then Sheldon wants to know if this would not scare the octopus creatures severely and defeat the whole purpose.

Later in the episode, the minister reports to Mary Cooper that he checked with his professor at seminary, and the “official ruling” is that, to the octopus creatures God would come as an octopus creature. He is happy with this, having one less thing to worry about in his busy church schedule. No one seems to wonder much if this is even something that is at all likely.

While this is just sitcom dialogue, the question of the possibility of other places in the universe with intelligent creatures, made in God’s image, is intriguing. C. S. Lewis visited this topic in his *Space Trilogy*.

Might God have made some other creatures in His image? What kind of form would such creatures have? If they, like we, sin, would God redeem them also? While it might be something we never have to think much about, when the thought does come up it can make one wonder, and wonder - at least until some important immediate task draws our attention to more mundane matters!

But in those circles not much concerned with God, this has been often considered. The majority view seems to be that if intelligent life occurs by chance, chances are that there is quite a bit of it out there. The thought on the part of most is that even if the probability of intelligent life developing at a given site is small, the extremely large number of such sites, given the vastness of the universe, should yield a rather large number of groups of intelligent life.

One such model that predicts this is called the “Drake Equation.” At the SETI institute, where they are, of course, searching for extra-terrestrial intelligence, you can find this:

“While working as a radio astronomer at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, West Virginia, Dr. Frank Drake conceived an approach to bound the terms involved in estimating the number of technological civilizations that may exist in our galaxy. The Drake Equation, as it has become known, was first presented by Drake in 1961 and identifies specific factors thought to play a role in the development of such civilizations. Although there is no unique solution to this equation, it is a generally accepted tool used by the scientific community to examine these factors.”

The problem is that, search as we might, we have found no indication of other intelligent life in the universe. This leads to the Fermi Paradox. This is the conflict between the assumed high probability of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe and the apparently lifeless, apart from us, universe that we in fact observe. Think of all the listening and observing done so far, and how there is still no evidence of any other intelligent creatures out there in the vast universe. There are, of course, many speculative variables to consider. This leads, as you can guess, to no end of debate.

But recently, three researchers at the Future of Humanity Institute of Oxford University published a paper in which they attempt to

(continued on page 22)

Strangeness of the Month Club (cont.)

resolve the Fermi Paradox. They point out that Drake-like approaches always make assumptions that, as they put it, “span multiple orders of magnitude.” In other words, these equations assume starting points that could easily be *very* different. They also argue that even modestly different starting assumptions can dramatically change how likely other intelligent life really is.

If they are right, as the authors of this paper remind readers, the Fermi Paradox is “dissolved.” The payoff, they say, is that this “removes any need to invoke speculative mechanisms by which civilizations would inevitably fail to have observable effects upon the universe.” In other words, if they are anywhere near right, we should not really expect other intelligent life in the universe.

Of course, the authors of “Dissolving the Fermi Paradox” are not interested in the theological side of this. But let us turn there now.

What if God made creatures in His image only on planet earth, as we call it? There is no direct information about this question in the Bible. But if the Fermi Paradox has been dissolved, that is the situation, at least from what we can observe.

That would mean, perhaps, that the whole universe, which appears ever-larger the more we can “look” at it, was put into place by our Creator just as a kind of display of what He can do. It is an extremely impressive display of God’s power, we must admit.

In a related matter, some of those who both recognize God and study the chemical mechanisms of life have pointed out that God often designs life with what appears to be inefficient workings. In other words, much like German engineering, God designs life with mechanisms that work, but appear to be more complex than needed just to get the job done. It appears God made life work in ways that almost seem designed to impress observers, even though it might not need to work that way in order to do what is needed.

That does seem to be parallel, in a very general way, to God creating a vast, vast universe just to impress us. That just “sounds like God” - at least to some of us. If the Fermi Paradox is resolved as described above, it might give us a somewhat different understanding of Psalm 19:1, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”*

If the vast, vast universe which we observe is there just so we will see it, and not because there is “anyone else” in it, it speaks in a very loud voice. Perhaps its declaration of the glory of God is even louder than we thought. A universe teeming with life and other creatures made in God’s image would still speak of the glory of God. But a universe in which the humans of planet earth are the sum of creatures made in God’s image screams of God’s glory in a way that is deafening and magnificent. (RH)

* Kent B. True is the alter ego of Harold N. Orndorff, Jr., a recently retired campus minister who has taught college and seminary courses in the fields of apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and logic. Lately he enjoys studying his, very interesting one and all, grandchildren. Find more a bit more from Kent, if you can stand it, at <http://www.kentsclubhouse.blogspot.com>, or contact him at hnoii@hotmail.com.

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From the Editorial Outlook

(Editor's Note: The following article appeared in The Restoration Herald, Vol. XXXV, March, 1961, written by Harvey Bream. Here Harvey reminds us of two purposes we have in preaching and teaching the Gospel)

A Neglected Emphases

In the conclusion of his article "The Perversion of the Gospel" (page 12) brother Elmore states: "The New Testament is concerned with two supreme purposes: Preaching The Gospel, and Defending The Gospel. Such must be our supreme concern. In preaching it, let us not fail to defend it; in defending it, let us not fail to preach it."



In this we concur and are distressed when we hear or see one to the exclusion of the other. Observation of the times, however, confirms the conclusion that the defense of the gospel is distasteful to many preachers and church members. Under the increasing pressure of the world's distorted concept of "charity," "brotherhood" and "unity" even some once staunch defenders of the faith have backed down. They and others, while protesting their opposition to the in-roads of infidelity and worldliness in private conversation and safety,

they speak with muted voice in public. They look askance upon those who publicly under the compulsion of the divine directive "speak as the oracles of God" and "shrink not from declaring the whole counsel of God." Sad to say, they are sometimes not beyond maligning them behind their backs with such terms as "radical," "narrow," "vitriolic," "belligerent," "bitter," etc. They are uncomfortable in their presence and give them a wide berth.

They remind us of Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah, who though dressed as soldiers and having gone to the battle, refused to engage the blasphemous unbeliever Goliath. They did not hesitate to heap reproach upon David for his "audacity." The courage of the "kid brother" cast reflection on their manhood.

Brother Elmore gave a practical application in his indictment of the Disciples apostasy. The application is even more pertinent and wider in its scope today. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

In considering this twofold emphasis we must be careful lest one blind us to the importance of the other. Let us evangelize, preach the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in power, love, and truth. But let us also preserve the faith and integrity of God's elect in a fearless, self-effacing defense of the gospel. (RH)

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Contact: Vernon.eldridge@mstcoc.org

Upstate New York Family Camp June 28-30
(Dansville, New York)

Contact: scottwferguson@msn.com

Whitewater Family Camp July 3-5
(Vevay, IN)

Contact: Preacherchris1974@gmail.com

Hillsboro Family Camp July 22-25
(Hillsboro, OH)

Contact: p2pm_office@yahoo.com

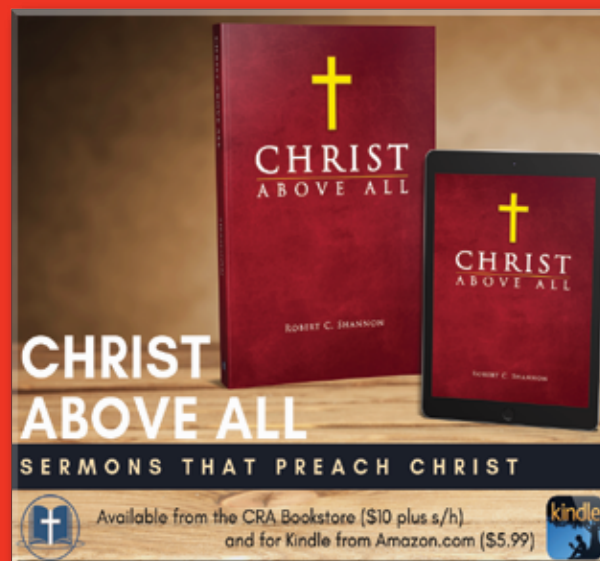
Riverbend Men's Camp July 29-Aug. 1
(Arenac Douny, MI)

Contact: www.riverbendmenscamp.com

Winning at Winchester Aug. 30 - Sept. 1
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