



THE RESTORATION HERALD

The Wisest Course of Action The Christian and Alcohol

By Jamie Franke

Is it acceptable for Christians to drink alcohol? Many have wrestled with this as they genuinely seek to live out God's will. Considering the enormous prevalence and accessibility of alcohol in our culture, they ask, "What is the Christian to do? Is it permissible to drink socially? Does God approve of this?"

This article begins with an explanation of what the Bible prohibits: drunkenness. This is followed by a recognition that drinking alcohol in moderation falls into the realm of Christian liberty. The question then becomes: what is the wisest course of action on this issue?

Since it is a matter of Christian liberty, I cannot set forth my own view as if it is a "thus saith the Lord." However, I can offer my reasoning in applying Biblical principles pertaining to this matter. Thus, the article concludes with a discussion of why abstaining from alcohol is the wisest course of action for me as a Christian and preacher.

That Which is Prohibited

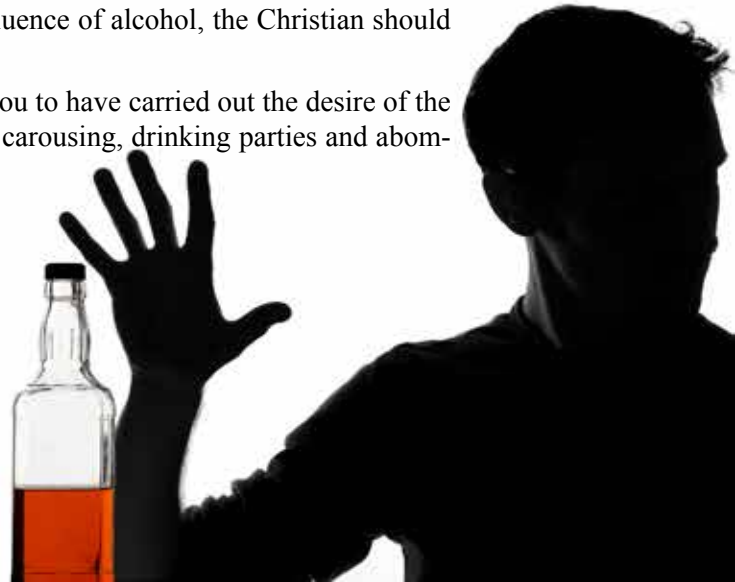
Examination of the Scripture finds that drunkenness is prohibited. Romans 13:13 says, "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy."¹ Drunkenness is one of the deeds of darkness (Romans 13:12), as are the other sins mentioned in this verse.

Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." Drunkenness causes dissipation, which translates a Greek word which has to do with extravagant, wasteful spending on one's lusts and desires.² Rather than being under the controlling influence of alcohol, the Christian should be under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit.

First Peter 4:3-4 says, "For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you."

As in the above passages, it should be observed here that drunkenness is listed alongside other sins, and that it, along with these other sins, is described as dissipation.

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Meeting the Challenge

I certainly didn't plan it, but this current issue of the *Restoration Herald* morphed into the challenge edition. What do I mean? Interestingly, most of the writers this month in effect issue challenges to our readers — from Jamie Franke and alcohol, to Mike Hines and church discipline, to Christian Martin and our approach to Millennials, to Jim Book and the use of our facilities to advance the kingdom, it seems every article issues some sort of challenge.

Therefore, please let me suggest that this issue be read under the umbrella of “Glory to God in the Highest.” In other words, read this issue through the lens of bringing glory to God in all things, for ultimately it is His honor, name, and reputation that are at stake.



John R. Mitchell

One of the most well-known and beloved historical narratives in the Bible teaches the same thing, namely 1 Samuel 17 — David & Goliath. Reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament, can be tricky business for it is easy to be deaf to what the text is saying. One

way to protect ourselves from such deafness, and the corresponding hermeneutical errors, is to note where a narrative talks about God and what it says about Him — this is most likely where the emphasis falls.

I don't have space here to fully develop this, but I submit that the overriding concern of 1 Samuel 17 is the honor of God's name, His reputation, and His glory. In effect, David is saying, “God's reputation is at stake, and that matters to me, and it matters enough for me to put my life at risk for it.”

Attitude — As you read and respond to the challenges contained herein, strive to have the same attitude as David. In verse 26, David asks, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” The Israelites thought the Philistine was invincible. David saw him as only uncircumcised. Serving a living God makes a huge difference, and provided David a whole new perspective on the matter. As we think about the cultural and societal pressures we face, potential issues within the Lord's church, the value of lost souls, etc., let us remember that it's God's honor and reputation that are at stake.

Antagonists — If I was afforded the privilege to teach a

course on 1 Samuel, one of my final exam questions would be, “How many battles did David fight that day?” The answer, surprisingly, is three (not one).

First, David fought Eliab. In Eliab he faces the contempt of Goliath. Eliab, in what was surely a condescending voice, asks, “Why did you come down here?” In other words, “What in the world do you think you are going to accomplish?” When an individual gets serious about God, and serving Him in a way that truly brings God glory, there will always be those who mock — what do you think you are doing?

Second, David fought Saul. In Saul he faces the mindset of Goliath, in that only the experienced and properly equipped warriors can enter the battlefield. David, however, recognizes that in faithfully executing his day-to-day shepherd duties, he had been providentially prepared to tackle the Philistine giant. We must never underestimate God's ability to prepare His servants for His work.

Finally, David fought Goliath. In Goliath, obviously, he faces the power of Goliath. David beautifully illustrates 2 Corinthians 12:9, “...for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” David's victory especially stresses that God does not save by human might or creativity, but through the weakness of His servants. The text takes care to note, “David prevailed... with a sling and a stone... there was no sword in the hand of David.” David was inadequately equipped but alas, that didn't matter for the living God was on his side.

If we read carefully and listen to the text of 1 Samuel 17, we observe that the theme of “weakness” has been building throughout the entire chapter. All the major players in the narrative viewed David as weak. David, however, cared less about what they thought of him. All that mattered to him was the reproach brought on God's name, and the fact that the living God had been defied.

Application — As we finish reading this issue of the *Restoration Herald* and begin contemplating the challenges set before us, let's ask ourselves what is our point of view? Do we discern the various scenarios in our lives where we clearly see God's honor at stake, or do we view things through a selfish and personal lens? Jeremiah 10:10 says it best, “But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.” Let's respond to the daily challenges we face like God's honor matters above all else. ~RH

THE RESTORATION HERALD

Editor, John R. Mitchell

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Postmodernism: The Anti-worldview Worldview

Part Two

A fifth area of conflict among the three worldviews concerns history. While premoderns study history to find evidence of God's work in the past and moderns look to history for expanded knowledge, postmodernists deny that we can know the past with any certainty. Post-



Richard Koffarnus

modern historian Keith Jenkins argues that historians only write interpretations of the past, therefore there can be neither historical knowledge nor truth.¹ Other postmodernists see history as myth, fading into empty shadows, devoid of any substance. Still others equate history with storytelling. Facts are unimportant. It's all about the narrative. Thus, the purpose of history is not to gain insight into the past or to learn answers

to history's mysteries but to use the past to further present objectives. Postmodernists do this via two strategies: *revisionism*, rewriting the past to make it come out "right," and *presentism*, judging history by present standards.

The *New York Times* "1619 Project" provides an example of revisionism when it claimed that a critical reason the colonists declared independence from Britain was to protect the institution of slavery in the colonies. Despite objections from historians that slavery was not one of the main reasons for the revolution, the *Times* published the claim anyway, because it fit the project's narrative that slavery has profoundly shaped—and still shapes—American life.

On the campus of the University of Missouri, Columbia is a bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson, sitting on a bench, writing the Declaration of Independence. Near the statue is Jefferson's original tombstone, donated to MU in 1885. The statue and tombstone have been there together for twenty years, and most people didn't even notice them. Recently, however, some students wanted the statue removed. A student petition circulating about campus read, "Mizzou has no room for a racist slave owner on our campus, in the Quad, where thousands of black students pass by every day,

forced to deal with imagery of the past in the future where we should be promoting equality, diversity and inclusion."

The petition did not mention that Jefferson, in 1778, wrote a law adopted by Virginia banning the importation of slaves to that state, or that he signed a similar law for the entire U. S., as President, in 1807. The petition also failed to note that Jefferson's Declaration of Independence inspired Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address calling for "a new birth of freedom," and, eventually, the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery in the U. S. In judging Jefferson by twenty-first century standards, he was just "a racist slave owner."

To his credit, the interim MU chancellor responded to the petition, "We learn from history. We contextualize historical figures with complex legacies. We don't remove history." Presentism doesn't deal with or learn from "complex legacies." It simply removes them from view.

To begin our critique of postmodernism, let us look at their notions of subjective reality and subjective truth. First, recall that Lyotard rejected all metanarratives as attempts to explain the meaning of life. In their place, he offered "mininarratives" consisting of smaller, more personal, subjective "truths." Lyotard, like Derrida, was greatly influenced by Wittgenstein and his "language game" approach. However, Wittgenstein also had a second theory of language he called his "picture theory." In this theory, Wittgenstein said the world was composed of "facts," "states of affairs in the world." We "picture" the world to ourselves by propositions (sentences that make truth claims). "True" propositions correspond exactly to the facts. This is a far cry from postmodern subjectivism and contradicts the claim that objective truth is inaccessible to us. Wittgenstein never saw any contradiction between his picture theory and his game theory, yet postmodernism rejects the first in favor of the second.

Second, numerous philosophers have pointed out that postmodernism is self-refuting in their claims concerning subjective reality and subjective truth. Consider this example: (a) *There is no such thing as objective truth*. Now, if this proposition (a) is true, then there is at least one objective truth—proposition (a). However, that contradicts the claim in (a) that no objective truth exists! Therefore, if (a) is true, then it is false.

Third, postmodern subjectivity encourages the coexistence of contradictory truth claims. We earlier gave the

example of Australian aboriginal claims versus DNA evidence. Another one comes from South Africa, where the Decolonize Science progressive student movement announced that witchcraft was an acceptable alternative to science as a way of knowing. There is no attempt to prioritize these truth claims or to validate any of them. What matters is only their usefulness in redistributing power.

Another issue for postmodernism is its claim that human nature is created and shaped by language. That is a big part of the reason why postmodernists insist that certain words be or not be used. Words such as “mailman,” “actress,” and “Indian” are considered demeaning to certain groups of people. By insisting on terms like “letter carrier,” “actor,” and “indigenous person,” postmodernists are hoping to condition us to think a certain way to further their quest for social justice and equity. However, the theory behind this approach is far from certain.

In fact, epistemologist Alvin Goldman reports that babies possess logical categories *before* they can speak or understand any language. Adults are also capable of employing concepts without words. It is not uncommon for people to inadvertently use mixed metaphors, such as “a watched clock never boils,” to say something quite different from what they intended. These things would be impossible if thought were exhausted by language. Goldman concludes, “In short, postmodernists need to moderate their claim that language is the great determiner of thought, for that unqualified view is simply false.”²

This raises several questions concerning Foucault’s quest to take cultural power from oppressors to give to the oppressed. First, who is responsible for the taking and giving? Current events suggest that our government and its agencies, plus educational institutions, corporations, and the media, are leading the way because they have the power to compel change. Yet, Foucault thought that the law equaled oppression and lawlessness is freedom. He was so convinced that society conspires to stifle free expression, that he wasn’t sure if rape should be punished by imprisonment! How can postmodernists trust government to carry out such an ambitious project?

Second, if cultural power is transferred from the oppressors to the oppressed, is there any guarantee that the formerly oppressed won’t simply become the new oppressors? Just as postmodernism believes in subjective reality and subjective truth, it also accepts a radical ethical relativism. “The good is whatever those who wield power in society choose to make it. If a person is happy with how society draws its ethical lines, then individual freedom remains.”³

Consequently, we are seeing the grandchildren of those who marched to *desegregate* our society now demanding that they get to live in *segregated* dorms and have other “safe spaces” on campus reserved for minority students.

Earlier, we pointed out Jacques Derrida’s process of deconstruction to claim that each reader brings his own interpretation to a text and that the author’s intended meaning is irrelevant. The result, Alister McGrath points out, is “All interpretations are thus equally valid, or equally meaningless (depending on your point of view).”⁴ Now, the initial problem with deconstruction is similar to the problem postmodernism has with objective truth. If the author’s intent is so unreachable as to be irrelevant, why does any author, including Derrida and his fellow postmodernists, bother to write books expressing their views? How is it possible that thousands of Derrida’s readers mimic the views he presents in his books, if, in fact, they could be interpreting them in an infinite number of different ways?

History is, and must be, more than just a “long ago in a galaxy far, far away” story. It must have historical facts available, objectively, in records and artifacts, monuments, and tombs. We don’t study history just to be entertained, but to be informed, so that we don’t behave like kneejerk iconoclasts every time someone exposes a flaw in the life of an historical icon.

Regarding this error, Johnny Presley replies, “The author’s intent is the actual meaning of a text. The reader’s response is not the meaning, but the application of the meaning. Practical application is no less desirable than original meaning, but it is unreliable and worthless if it is not grounded in the actual meaning of the text.”⁵

Finally, we return to the issues of historical relativism, revisionism, and presentism. Postmodern historians’ use of presentism unfairly judges past events and people by present day standards; it also leads to the impression that history

has retreated, leaving behind it a void that we neither can, nor care, to know. Instead, it is much easier to rewrite the past, since no one knows it for sure, because people care much more for the quality of the story than for its accuracy.

Postmodern historian Christian Kiefer argues that we really don't care about the historical details of the gunfight at the OK corral. What matters to us, culturally, is a gripping, Star Wars-type-tale spun by novelists, filmmakers, and historians. Now, I don't deny that most people love a good yarn. I certainly do. However, history is, and must be, more than just a "long ago in a galaxy far, far away" story. It must have historical facts available, objectively, in records and artifacts, monuments, and tombs, because we don't study history just to be entertained, but to be informed, so that we don't behave like kneejerk iconoclasts every time someone exposes a flaw in the life of a historical icon.

We "picture" the world to ourselves by propositions (sentences that make truth claims). "True" propositions correspond exactly to the facts. This is a far cry from postmodern subjectivism and contradicts the claim that objective truth is inaccessible to us.

Perhaps, if we studied history more thoroughly, we would be more careful about who we memorialize in bronze and stone. Finally, maybe we should be more cautious about getting caught up in every new philosophy and worldview that rides into town. ~RH

(Endnotes)

- 1 Keith Jenkins, "Why Bother With the Past?" *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory & Practice* 1 (1997): 56-66.
- 2 Alvin Godlman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1999), 19.
- 3 James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 227.
- 4 Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 186.
- 5 Johnny Presley, "The Nature of Truth," in *A Humble Defense: Evidence for the Christian Faith*, ed. Mark Scott and Mark Moore (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2004), 207.

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MY STORY

Part 1

I could say that I have lived a fairly successful life. God gave me the spiritual gift of teaching, and I had the opportunity to use it in the Cincinnati Bible Seminary graduate school for 49 years. I was able to teach thousands of students, many of whom went on to teach in other schools. I have preached and taught classes in scores of local church congregations. I have written and published 42 books. Most importantly, I have a fantastic, beautiful wife and co-worker!



Dr. Jack Cottrell

I have written and published 42 books. Most importantly, I have a fantastic, beautiful wife and co-worker!

However, all this teaching would mean nothing if I were not teaching the *right things*. I am happy to acknowledge all the above accomplishments with humility and with praise only to God, but what makes me the happiest — and I think what pleases God the most — has

been the *content* of my teaching. What is the essence of that content?

A few years ago, I had one of those unexpected "it dawned on me" moments. I was reading or thinking about John 1, and verse 14 jumped out at me: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, **full of grace and truth.**" Then I came to verse 17: "For the Law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** were realized through Jesus Christ."

John could have added many other things to this list of things Jesus was filled with and things realized through Jesus. But *twice*, he simply connects Jesus with **grace and truth.**

However, this connection of Jesus with grace and truth was not what dawned on me as I pondered this reality. What struck me in this moment was this — when I looked back upon my own five or six decades of teaching, I realized

that the two *main* subjects I had learned and developed and taught were these same ones — GRACE and TRUTH!

What I am saying is this: I believe I can sum up my teaching ministry in these two words: **grace** and **truth**. Now I will say a bit about each of these.

GRACE

I learned *nothing* about grace in my early years, including both my local church days and my five years at CBS. Why not? I believe it was because we in the Restoration Movement knew very little (if anything) about grace at that time.

My exposure to the doctrine of grace happened in my years at Westminster Theological Seminary, but NOT because of its Calvinism. In those years I was able to focus on two things that formed my thinking about grace — (1) the Protestant *Reformation* (especially Martin Luther) and (2) the book of *Romans*. I began to see the difference between LAW and GRACE as ways of salvation, i.e., between being saved by *works* (how well I could keep God’s law commands) and being saved by *faith* (trusting in the works of Jesus as the only thing that opens the gates of heaven for anyone).

I did not hesitate to work this theme of SALVATION BY GRACE into my preaching and teaching. At that time (the early 1960s), I was not consciously aware I was going against the grain of not just my own early learning and experience, but also against the understanding and teaching within the Restoration Movement in general. Looking back on it now, I can see that what I had begun to teach was something quite new and different from what was accepted and taught throughout most of our Movement.

I just had to preach it and teach it, though. I did a lot of Sunday preaching in many churches during the years of my graduate studies at Westminster and Princeton seminaries. My favorite sermon was one which summed up salvation by grace: “The Robe of Righteousness” (from Isaiah 61:10). Over the years I preached that sermon between 50 and 60 times. (It is now available as the cover article in the February 2022 issue of *The Restoration Herald*, under the title of “God’s Dress Code.”)

When I started teaching at the CBS graduate school in the fall of 1967, I WAS the theology department! I had to plan the entire theology curriculum, and I was the only theology professor for the first twenty years or so—which was fine with me. I chose what courses would be taught, and I taught most of them. I created and taught over forty courses during my career.

At the beginning, though, our graduate dean, Dr. Lewis Foster, told me to be sure to teach a course called “New Testament Theology,” which had not been in my mind. I asked him what he wanted me to teach in this course. He said, “Whatever you want.” So I chose to teach the contents of ROMANS 1-8, a text I had fallen in love with. I taught this course as “NT Theology” for two or three years, then decided to change its title to — guess what? — “The Doctrine of Grace”! Why? Because that was the content I was teaching in the course! Over my 49 years of teaching, I taught that course over 70 times.

During my early teaching years (as I look back on them from today), at least two things now make me realize that I was teaching something quite new in our Restoration Movement context. **ONE** is the fact that over the years (and still today) I have had dozens of students tell me that my course on grace had CHANGED THEIR LIVES. (You can find the latest content of that course in my 2009 College Press book, *Set Free: What the Bible Says About Grace*. For a shorter Bible study version, see my 2017 CRA book, *Saved by Grace: The Essence of Christianity*.)

The **SECOND** thing is the fact that, after a few years of my teaching on grace, several members of our CBS faculty charged me with teaching false doctrine, and I was brought before a special meeting of a few chosen members of our administration, faculty, and trustees. My accusers were mainly a three-member clique (which I will not name). They said I was teaching the Calvinism I had learned at Westminster seminary. I absolutely was not, which I showed as I defended myself. Finally, the chairman of our board of trustees, Brother Wayne B. Smith, said, “What are we fussing about? We all still believe in baptism for salvation, don’t we?” The meeting ended without my being disciplined or dismissed, and I went back to my office and wept for quite a while.

Now I will give you another example that shows how different—and how appealing—my teaching on grace had become. Our grad school had begun to attract many students from various mission fields, including the Philippine Islands. These students, such as Jonathan Orillazo and Tito Pel, had grown up in the Filipino churches and had graduated from Filipino Bible colleges such as the Manila Bible Seminary. Unfortunately, the missionaries that had planted the original Restoration churches and institutions in the Philippines did not know the real meaning of grace, and had taught the same works-salvation that was present throughout much of our Movement.

Thus, when these Filipino students (who had been indoctrinated with works-salvation) came to CBS and heard our

teaching on salvation by grace, they were excited about it and arranged for me to visit the Philippines and spread this good news. Leaders there invited me to preach for the Manila Bible Seminary’s graduation service (around the year 2000). They also asked me to stay for another week and teach a seminar on grace for the entire Filipino church community—which I did. Two or three hundred church leaders from all over the islands attended this seminar.

The result is that grace is now a key word in the Filipino Restoration Movement community, and they associate this with me. How do I know? About five years ago, I was invited to give a series of lessons on grace to our churches in Vancouver, British Columbia. I did not know until I got there that the invitation was from the *Filipino* churches in Vancouver! A year or two later, I was invited to speak on grace for the community of Filipino churches along what they call Christ’s Corridor—the stretch between Calgary and Edmonton—in Alberta, Canada.

What is the point? My teaching on grace has been permeating the Filipino Restoration Movement community and replacing the works-salvation doctrine. Hallelujah!

Many of our younger preachers and leaders have probably never known any other teaching about salvation than salvation by grace, through faith, in baptism, for good works. However, if you had grown up a couple of generations earlier, as I did, the chances are that in your early years you would have been taught the form of works-salvation known as Galatianism. But if so, now you know better!

I believe that our Restoration Movement still has a lot of kinks to work out in our understanding of grace, but I also believe that many, if not most, of us have gained a lot of ground in that direction. I like to think that my teaching has had a lot to do with that.

I say this with the fear you will think I am a very arrogant person, but I am simply trying very hard to be objective, and I want to give God all the credit for whatever I have been able to accomplish. As I said in the beginning, I have been blessed with the spiritual gift of teaching. I can do what I have done only through God’s gift, and He gets all the praise. I am trying to take 1 Peter 4:10 seriously – “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”~RH

— To Be Continued —

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JIM BOOK

Education in America

The Need for Real Options

If you want to get people excited or even angry, talk about education reform in America. Nobody (and I mean *nobody*) would argue education in the United States is not in real need of reform and a king-size overhaul. It seems like every week there is a group of parents taking on a dysfunctional school board. I am witnessing more and more common folk running for their local school boards in hopes they might bring some form of normality and common sense to a system that is unhinged.



Jim Book

I feel a movement taking place in America as more and more parents and citizens are questioning the overwhelming insufficiencies in many government schools’ systems. People are asking more and more if there are alternatives available for their own children and the children in their community and churches.

Let me start with the short answer—a resounding YES! Let me take this moment and encourage my readers to think of what they could do to provide a quality alternative to what the public schools are offering.

One positive alternative that is catching on, even in many of our churches in the Restoration Movement, is a strong, vibrant homeschool ministry run out of our churches. Churches are catching on to the idea of partnering with parents within the church and local community by using the facilities that are available during the week. Churches are using these highly functional classrooms as tools to train and partner with parents in a homeschool program. Many churches have hundreds of children and parents on their campus every week receiving a quality alternative to secular education. Think about how great it is to have so many families on the church campus every week. This affords the church

staff an opportunity to rub shoulders with these families and introduce them to the ministry of the church. Not only can the church offer their facilities to homeschool families, but they have so many potential converts on the campus every week. I would encourage preachers and children's ministers to look into starting one out of your own church family and then reach out to other families, who though they may be unsaved are looking to partner with a church in helping to raise their children in a biblical worldview.

A second alternative to running a homeschool ministry out of your congregation, would be to start your own Christian School. I can not only say from personal experience but from testimonies from other church schools that, yes, it is a lot of work and can be stressful on the facilities. Remember, however, the building was built for ministry, it was not built to be worshipped. Too many churches fear the building will suffer pre-mature wear and tear from daily usage coming from too much activity. I just had one of our custodians come into my office, even as I draft this article, and report that one of the grade-schoolers made a pencil mark on one of the classroom walls. Ok, we can clean it up and try and find the culprit. Meanwhile we go about the business of training young people in a Christian environment and wear this building out for the Lord. We can buy paint any day and mop up juice spills when needed, but if we fail to meet the growing needs of our community today regarding educating them in a biblical worldview, then we will have lost another generation of young people to the devil. I am not willing to concede any more kids to Satan.

I was speaking to a fellow preacher recently at our State Ministers Meeting that we host here at Kissimmee Christian Church. He just launched a Christian Academy this past year. I encouraged him to partner with the school as often as he can and challenge the parents and the children to align themselves with the church and develop together a relationship with Christ. I cannot tell you how many parents and children were introduced to Jesus through our Christian Academy and have gone on to be stand-out members of our congregation. It is a great feeder into the body of Christ. To say it was an outreach ministry would be an understatement.

Folks, the secular system is broken. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. shares this insight, "The United States spends more money per student than any other country on earth, save Switzerland. On most public goods, America outspends the world, but when it comes to intellect our standards are among the lowest." This is to be expected when you see how we have lowered academic standards over the years and mock any form of traditional values. Transgender education as well as

all forms of sexual expression are encouraged while morals and biblical absolutes are considered archaic and out of step with contemporary society. The Bible is mocked to the point that many public educators now feel entitled to attack not only Christian students but God Himself.

If the National Education Association, which is the largest teacher's union in America, continues to control the behemoth we know as the public-school classroom, then we can expect the tide to continue to move to the far left. Sterling Lacy in his book *Valley of Decision* writes:

"The NEA is the most potent political activist group. A survey of recent stands taken by the NEA shows that it backs Marxist revolution groups. It despises the free enterprise system and loves socialism. It advocates public, amoral sex education and abortion on demand. For all practical purposes, the NEA might be labeled, 'the Socialist Party in America.'"

This explains why parents and students across America are fed up! However, getting angry isn't enough. It never was and it never will be the most comprehensive response to something this broken and in need of repair. Churches, let us be on the front end of this revival. Let us run people in our church for local school board positions like one of our preachers is doing in our state. Let us begin to use the classrooms that sit empty throughout the week for productive educational opportunities. Let us respond to the new educational opportunities that young people have now in the form of scholarships. Let us become more externally focused on the realm of Christian education and expand the definition to include a Monday through Friday school, not just one that operates on Sunday morning. ~RH

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The Sad Girl

Recently, our four-year-old granddaughter, Julia, was at our house, and the news was covering the travesties of Ukrainian life under siege. As the news reporter told of the latest updates, the camera followed a little Ukrainian girl who had fled her home and was arriving in Poland. She



looked sad and haggard and about the age of our granddaughter. Julia was silent as she watched this little girl half a world away, bundled up in a winter coat, stumbling along on heavy feet with no change of expression. When the camera panned away, Julia asked, “Is she okay?”

Jennifer Bullard

Instead of attempting to break the situation down to the level of a four-year-old, I opted for making good on her compassion and what was within reach for her to help. We prayed for “the sad girl” as Julia called her. It’s been a joy to hear our grandchildren learn to pray, but Julia’s prayers had been comprised of a lot of thanksgiving until the Sad Girl touched her heart. That day, we told God we knew she was sad, and we asked God to help her as only He could. A week later, when Julia was back at the house, she said she’d been praying for the Sad Girl, asking God to help her. Julia had done her best to explain her concerns to her five-year-old brother, Israel, but he had much weightier questions. “Why doesn’t she have a home anymore? Who did this to her? Why were the people doing bad things?”

It is no wonder Jesus was “indignant” when the disciples were shooing away the children when the parents wanted Him to lay hands on and bless them. I get it. The disciples had watched Jesus be pressed on all sides from crowds with needs, and they watched Him having to negotiate the hostile aggressions of the Pharisees simultaneously. The children just didn’t seem the priority. I love that the Greek definition of the word translated “indignant” is “to grieve much,” so let’s use that.

“People were bringing little children to Jesus for Him to place His hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was grieved much. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And He took the children in His arms, placed His hands on them and blessed them.” (Mark 10:13-16)

When children pray into the quiet of closed eyes and bowed heads, it is an act of the purest faith. They’ve not just been taught to go through the motions but to believe in the power of their actions. How much sadder would the Sad Girl image be if Julia did not have a belief that she was helping to ease her circumstances? No wonder Jesus said to let the children come to Him!

We tend to think that because we’ve figured out how to feed and clothe and shelter ourselves we are fully self-sufficient. Yet, the inability to create something from nothing or to escape death are the great equalizers of earth and the piercing reminders we are as helpless as a child when we are without God. This is probably no more evident to anyone than it is to parents who’ve watched their children suffer or even die. How does one accomplish or survive anything, great or small, without the assurance of a God who cares?

The VanRyn and Cerak families have become permanently correlated for all who’ve learned of their story — one daughter dead and the other clinging to life and a most traumatic account of mistaken identity. On April 26, 2006, a collision between a semi and a van claimed the lives of four students and one staff member from Taylor University in Indiana. It was more than a month, however, before two sets of parents, the VanRyns and the Ceraks, came to the realization that it was Whitney Cerak who had survived and lay in a hospital bed, not Laura VanRyn.

Nearly two years after the tragedy, NBC was interviewing the parents as they recounted the confusion and loss. Both

girls had been crushed in the accident, so the distortion of their bodies was the cause of the errors in identity. In this interview, the testimonies of two sets of Christian parents were blanketed with words of faith and devotion to a God who knows all things and carries their hearts in His hands. The news personality interviewing them was astute enough to appeal to their faith-centeredness but prodded Mr. VanRyn, who had sat vigil in the hospital for five weeks next to a daughter that wasn't his, "Do you feel angry with God or question why He let this happen?" Mr. VanRyn movingly began to witness with an opening assertion that he was not angry because he has walked with God a long time and knows a little about His character. What a powerful claim!

God has told us who He is:

"Then the Lord passed in front of Moses and called out: 'The Lord, the Lord God, is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion and faithfulness, maintaining loving devotion to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished; He will visit the iniquity of the fathers on their children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generations'" (Exodus 34:6-7).

Knowing God is as profound an achievement as man will ever attain. Somewhere out there in the homes of Godly parents, there are little children saying bedtime prayers that start their journey in knowing God. Julia has a faith relationship with God because she believes in something that is not tangibly playing out in her presence. Mr. VanRyn, by the time he lost his daughter, had added to his faith, trust. He'd walked with God long enough to see and understand the evidence of God the Divine and to know that his daughter was participating in the divine nature of God.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. Through these He has given us His precious and magnificent promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, now that you have escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Wouldn't it be amazing if, someday, the Sad Girl was grown and knew God and could open the Scripture to read this verse? ...*So that through His promise you became a partaker of His divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world...*

Peter continues:

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, per-

severance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities and continue to grow in them, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever lacks these traits is nearsighted to the point of blindness, having forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" (2 Peter 1:5-9).

The traits itemized here are the building blocks in our own character development and certainly clarifies why Jesus did not want the children turned away. Laura VanRyn had once said, long before her death at age 22, that she didn't necessarily fear death and wondered what it would be like to meet Jesus. There is no kind of hope for Mr. VanRyn, who has walked a long time with God and who knows a little about His character, like knowing his daughter who once said a child's prayers, looked forward to meeting Jesus, a Savior she knew.

With the grandchildren, Julia and Israel, our prayers have expanded to "the little girls of Ukraine" and "the little boys of Ukraine." Julia may be just four years old, but truly, we can begin with anyone at any age introducing them to the steps of faith that empower them in otherwise helpless circumstances. We all find ourselves humbled by life and we simply don't have hope without God. Mr. VanRyn said, "One of my favorite verses in the Bible says, 'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God'" (Micah 6:8).

I thank God Mr. VanRyn walked with God and did so humbly, because only God redeems this world. We all need God the Divine. Julia needs God. Laura VanRyn needed God. Laura's parents need God. You need God. You know someone who needs God. The Sad Girl needs God. ~RH

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FIRST THINGS FIRST



A TRIBUTE TO MAX SMITH

A LIFE LIVED FOLLOWING JESUS

One of the benefits of preaching where I do is that our location is just a little over a mile from Christian City¹. Christian City was started in 1965 by the Christian Churches in Georgia.

It was the vision of Dr. Byron Harper, a local Physician, and Preacher James Dyer, Minister of Southwest Christian Church in East Point, Georgia. With the prayers and support of the Christians and congregations throughout the south, Christian City went from a vision to a reality.



Tony Sullivan

In the beginning, Christian City was a home for children; over the years it has grown into so much more. One of the areas that has been developed is the Life Leases. People come and buy what is called a Patio Home. They can live there until their death and the unit then goes back to Christian City. Suzanne and I now make our home in one of these units.

It is not surprising that retired preachers from the Christian Church/Church of Christ buy into the life leases at Christian City. Since Lester Road Christian Church is the closest Christian Church to Christian City, several of those preachers make Lester Road their church home. (At present we have three preachers who attend with us. We have had more in the past.)

Several years ago, Brother Max Smith and his wife, Joann, moved into Christian City and, to the delight of all of us at Lester Road, made us their church home. They immediately became an active part of our church body.

Max preached for us once a month on Sunday nights. He also filled in for me when I was out of town or under the weather. He was one of the regular teachers for our Adult Sunday Bible School class. Max also taught a Bible Class at Christian City.

Sadly, Joann passed away a little over a year after they joined Lester Road. Eventually, Max moved from his life

lease unit into Assisted Living at Christian City, and then began to ride our bus to church each week.

Max was the preacher's friend. He always encouraged me and "bragged on me." Most weeks he would call and tell me what he enjoyed about the sermon from the past Sunday. He would lift up our praise team and encourage them.

Max had to be one of the most positive people I ever knew. Everyone at Lester Road loved him. He was in his nineties when he became a part of our congregation.

Max was a graduate of Johnson Bible College. He held ministries in Indiana, Michigan, Florida, and Kentucky. He also taught at Louisville Bible College.

Max never slowed down. In 2010, he wrote a book, *Max Speaking: Devotionals from My Heart*. He dedicated his book to his first wife, Josephine Marlow Smith. She had ministered with him through his life until her passing.

His heart of generosity led him, most likely, to give more of his books away than sell them. I am proud to have one in my library.

When COVID hit, Christian City was placed under a lockdown that lasted over a year. We could only talk to Max over the phone. It was good, but it was not the same. We could not see him, shake his hand, hug him, and be encouraged by the smile that was always on his face.

During this time Max would take the Lord's Supper to those on his floor who had requested it. He read Scripture, prayed, and served them the Lord's Supper. Still ministering in a time of crisis.

When the lockdown was lifted, Max was back in church. Smiling, laughing, and loving us as we loved him.

Then last October, Max quietly "slipped" away to his heavenly home. At the age of ninety-four, he left us and went to be with his heavenly Father—to be reunited with his family that had gone on before him.

Max is greatly missed. We talk about him almost every time we meet. Recently, during our Sunday morning service, his name was mentioned in the Communion Medita-

tion. The man who was giving the meditation used Max's book.

There are several things we could all learn from Max. Be positive and look for the good in everyone, in every situation. Speak well of other people. Go out of your way to be an encourager. Develop a spirit of generosity. Wear a smile. Learn to love people. Above all, love Jesus Christ and His church.

Max Smith was a wonderful example of a man who followed in the feet of Jesus. May his tribe increase.

See You Next Month.

~RH

(Endnotes)

1 Christian City is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization that provides vibrant living, life-changing hope and a community of loving friends. Life at Christian City is all about looking forward to a better day and living life to its fullest. For more information, see their website at christiancity.org.

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 email: Tonymcra@att.net.

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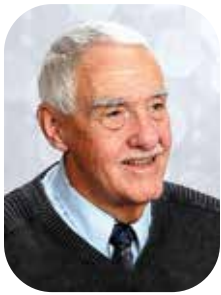
LESSONS FROM THE PAST

MICHAEL HINES

Alexander Campbell on Discipline

Part 1

Gerry Dake, our Christian Education Director at Boise's First Church of Christ, called me rather late one evening. A young lady in our congregation was pregnant out of wedlock and Gerry wanted to know what we were going to do about it. I mumbled back, "What do you think we should do?" Since nearly everyone in the congregation knew of the pregnancy, Gerry thought we should talk to the young woman and call upon her to show her repentance. I swallowed hard and agreed. A private conversation ensued with the young woman and on Sunday morning she came forward, acknowledged her sin, and asked for forgiveness. From that moment forward, the congregation surrounded her with love and saw her through one of the most difficult times



Michael Hines

in her life. It was an experience in church discipline I've never forgotten.

In the contemporary church there is little emphasis on church discipline. We live in a time when the cultural "virtue" is tolerance—a tolerance built on the assumption of moral relativism, not truth. Nonetheless, such tolerance has become the chief "virtue" in America and in the church. Christian Churches and Churches of Christ pride themselves on standing on biblical authority while looking the other way when moral issues raise their ugly head. In fact, to attract worldly people, the church says, "Don't worry! We're normal people just like you. We sin, too, and we don't judge! Come join us and be safe in your sin!" Somewhere along the path, the doctrine of grace became the practice of license.

In his series, *"A Restoration of the Ancient Order of*

Things," Alexander Campbell wrote eight articles on church discipline. He broke the subject down into two major parts: private and public offenses. I will speak to that later, but I prefer to break the subject into *formative* and *corrective* discipline. Then I will, as briefly as possible, survey New Testament teaching on church discipline.

Formative Discipline

Formative discipline concerns the teaching which prepares believers to become active participants in the family of God, the church. When he gave the Great Commission, Jesus said, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19, 20a). Jesus commanded the apostles (and us) to not only baptize converts, but to disciple them. Most congregations do a decent job with the former, but not so the latter. Dallas Willard referred to this as "the *great omission* from the Great Commission." The church effectively makes "Christ followers," not disciples.

Jesus commands the making of *disciples*, not *followers*. There is a difference! A follower is one who has an interest in and tags along with the crowd surrounding a teacher. A disciple is one who seeks to replicate in his/her life the life of the teacher. The former stands in the shadows outside the circle of commitment, while the latter builds an intimate relationship.

How this worked out in the first century church can be seen at Acts 2:42, "*They (those Pentecost Christians) were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching...*" After the first century, the church demonstrated care concerning who was admitted into the fellowship. Persecution and Roman animosity meant Christians met in secret and "general admission" was not permitted. Only those for whom others could vouch were admitted into the assembly. By the end of the second century potential converts generally underwent a 30-day period of instruction in what it means to reject Satan, repent of sin, and seek Christlikeness.¹

Today churches talk a great deal about Christian formation, but that is pretty much all it is—talk. In most cases, newly immersed believers are either cut loose altogether or encouraged to voluntarily join a small group. I love small groups! They help believers build wonderful relationships, but they are, at least in my opinion, ineffective in instilling biblical content. Many congregations require converts to complete a series of classes prior to membership. These sessions focus on membership requirements, personal spiritual growth strategies, and involvement opportunities. Still these studies place little emphasis on biblical doctrine, biblical ethics, or assistance in creating a Christian worldview. However, something is better than nothing!

Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline follows one's commitment to Christ. A theology of church and church *membership* is at the heart of any concept of discipline. The New Testament clearly teaches the concept of church membership. Believers become part of the family of God (Romans 8:15), the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), the flock of God (John 10:16), all of which are a unit with individual members. Granted, the universal church is comprised of all Christians everywhere, but the *only visible expression* of the church is the local congregation. Thus, it is within the local church where biblical discipline occurs.

A practice of church discipline was once considered essential. Jesus gave the procedure for disciplinary action in Matthew 18:15-20, and Paul called upon the church in Corinth to carry out discipline in 1 Corinthians 5. Stephen J. Cole says, "Some of the Reformers viewed church discipline as the third mark of a true church."² Churches generally practiced corrective discipline until well into the 20th century, then it seemed to stop.

Alexander Campbell said church membership depended on two public actions: (1) The profession of one essential fact and (2) the submission to one essential act. He referred to the confession of Jesus as the Christ and to immersion into Christ for the remission of sins as the essential act. Admittedly, no one can know the heart of the believer, but those two acts identify an individual as seeking a relationship with Jesus and willing to submit to the congregation's discipline.

Throughout the 19th century and at least through the 1950s, individuals moving from one congregation to another brought with them a "church letter" identifying them as members in good standing *and* under no congregational dis-

ciplinary action. As the culture moved into the 1960s, congregations no longer required a letter, but simply informed former congregation's that individuals identified with a new church home. Few congregations today even take that step! New members may never make a public declaration of faith, they are simply introduced as believers. For many people, joining a church is merely an identification with a social structure with little expectation of discipleship. ~RH

—To Be Continued—

(Endnotes)

- 1 If you were a former pagan priest, the instruction period increased to three years.
- 2 Stephen J. Cole, *Lesson 16: Biblical Church Discipline (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13)*, <http://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-16-biblical-church-discipline-matthew-1815-17-1-corinthians-51-13>

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Skulls Full of Mush

Sometimes a certain phrase fits something so well that nothing else can quite take its place. The phrase “skulls full of mush” fits our topic today. It is not meant to be harsh or name-calling. There is a topic with which some are obsessed which displays itself like mush. When you try to examine it reasonably, the part you are examining tries to ooze away to be replaced by another part, and the process is repeated without end.



Kent B. True, aka Harold Orndorff

This is very much the case when something remotely akin to the Christian faith is mixed with climate change activism. We will see this as we look through . . .

“‘Within Minutes I Was Weeping’: The US Pastor Using Scripture to Mobilize Climate Action.”

Melissa Godin, *The Guardian*

April 20, 2021

The character in the limelight here is Rev. Scott Hardin-Nieri. Scott is with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The first thing we learn about him is “... Hardin-Nieri regularly revisits the story of Noah’s ark.” What does he have to say about this matter? “People look at that story fondly, because they focus on all the animals that were saved.”

I can’t say that I have ever thought much about all the animals that were saved as a reason to like the account of Noah. However, if you do think that way, Reverend Scott disagrees. What you *should* get from the events around Noah is “We forget how many people were killed in this apocalyptic world where the environment was ruined.”

According to Hardin-Nieri, what happened with Noah was all about the environment. It wasn’t about sin or vi-

olence—it was the tragedy of people being killed by the environment.

Next, we are told this: “Hardin-Nieri, who was ordained in the Christian church in 2003, works in North Carolina trying to get congregations across the state to care about climate change.” He “believes scripture is uniquely suited to help religious communities better comprehend the unfolding environmental catastrophes happening around them.”

We are also told that when our Reverend conducts Bible studies, he likes to ask, “How is nature being discussed in these passages?” Reverend believes “nature” is the main point of the Bible. In the end, the whole Bible is about climate change and the environment.

The article helpfully tells us, “Hardin-Nieri knew people in North Carolina who were already feeling the impact of climate change . . . North Carolina is also one of the states experiencing the most hurricanes in the US, damaging people’s homes and local economies.”

Here is one of the deceptive ways people persuade others to join them in their quest for what they want. It is easy, and somewhat exciting, to claim that hurricanes are becoming more severe and more frequent. Add to that the claim that this is being caused by climate change, and away we go.

The boring thing people never bother to follow up on is whether such claims are true. To find that answer, you must look up things like the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*, Vol. 99, Issue 7. See? Already you are not interested. However, if you even look at the abstract of that study, you find this:

“Continental United States (CONUS) hurricane related inflation-adjusted damage has increased significantly since 1900. However, since 1900 neither observed CONUS landfalling hurricane frequency nor intensity shows significant trends.”

So why has inflation-adjusted damage increased? Again, most people find such things boring, but according to the study:

“Growth in coastal population and regional wealth are the overwhelming driver of observed increases in hurricane-related damage. As the population and wealth of the United States has increased in coastal locations, it has invariably led to the growth in exposure and vulnerability of coastal property along the U.S. Gulf and East Coasts.”

Despite Reverend Hardin-Nieri’s claims being false, as director of the Creation Care Alliance, he rolled out “a series of initiatives to bring climate action into people’s spiritual practices.” Hardin-Nieri and his group have organized “climate reading groups.” (I wonder if they read any of the

studies such as the one mentioned above?) What happens at these reading sessions? The article says, “A grandmother cried as she told Hardin-Nieri that her grandchildren were scared about climate change. Another man spoke of sleepless nights, where he lay awake anxious about environmental destruction.”

In light of this, Hardin-Nieri decided to “host a one-time grief conversation about climate change.” One attendee reported, “Within the first four minutes I was weeping.” The same person also said, “I never felt like I had a spiritual outlet for my climate anxieties and this group gave me that.”

Sometimes this column is parody or satire. I assure you that, sorry to say, none of this was invented by Kent B. True.

A fellow-traveler of Reverend Hardin-Nieri is Reverend Kevin Bates. To recruit more people to his cause, he “went door to door, handing out energy-efficient LED light bulbs that people could use in their houses, as well as vegetables grown by church members.” Bates reports, “We said to people: ‘We care about you, we care about the Earth, and we want to help lower your energy bill.’” Well, the light bulbs, perhaps, but how do home-grown vegetables help lower energy bills?

The article (which is much more of an advocacy piece than a report) allows the Reverend Hardin-Nieri to sum things up, “Climate change is a symptom of a larger moral problem of greed.” Thus, he continues, “Faith communities, at their best, can address those things in a way that a solar panel industry cannot.”

“Climate change is a symptom of greed.” How is the desire for affordable energy merely greed? Is concern about things like skyrocketing electricity rates honestly connected to greed?

Shouldn’t “faith communities” attempt to be honest, even the goofy ones? There is no need to debate the extent to which human activity affects climate change. It is easy to find out that the earth’s climate has been changing since it has been around, as far as we can know. We know that in the last 11,000 years or so, earth has been coming out of an ice age that had previously blanketed North America in ice. Proclaiming “the climate is changing” is somewhat akin to announcing that the earth is spinning on its axis!

By “climate change” most people mean the “earth generally getting warmer.” This only means there is no logical way to draw a conclusion about the results of it, whatever they might be. If you are alarmed that the earth is getting warmer, you should have some idea of what the normal temperature of earth ought to be when it is “correct.” Unfortunately, there is no correct temperature for earth. It has al-

ways been changing. That makes the claim “the earth is too warm” pointless. If we cannot show a correct temperature for earth, it is meaningless to claim that it is “too warm.”

Now here is some more of the kind of boring material people never much bother to consider. A fellow named Bjorn Lomborg, a visiting professor at the Copenhagen Business School, collected data from the International Disaster Database. When he compiled climate-related deaths since 1920, he found that they had declined by 98.9%. Surprisingly, climate change has not made the world more dangerous for humans.

Despite this, the religious climate activists have focused on people’s anxieties about impending doom from climate change. Here is a telling statement from the article we are considering: “Experts say religious leaders who know how to relate to their communities on an emotional level, may be best positioned to convince people to support climate action.”

That is why the goal of groups like the Creation Care Alliance and their operatives like Reverend Scott Hardin-Nieri is to convince people *on an emotional level*. What about the matter of not even knowing if the earth has a “normal” temperature? Nothing to see here, move along. Move along to the emotional level. That way, real questions simply don’t matter. All that matters is how some people feel. ~RH

** Kent B. True is the alter ego of Harold N. Orndorff, Jr., a retired campus minister who has taught college and seminary courses in the fields of apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and logic. Lately he enjoys studying his grandchildren, who are very interesting one and all. Contact him, if you must, at hnoii@hotmail.com.*

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A MILLENNIAL MOMENT

Targeting

I loved basketball when I was growing up. I was a pretty good shooter, and I tried to help others with their shooting when I coached. One of the biggest reasons shooters miss their shots is because they usually are not aiming at the right thing. Now, you are probably curious why any player would aim at anything other than the rim. Ask a good shooter where they aim, and they will tell you they aim at the back of the rim. If you aim at the front, all your shots end up being short, but if you aim at the back part of the rim, you hit the sweet spot. It doesn't mean some players aim at the "wrong thing," just at the wrong spot. It was about the *targeting* of their shot.



Christian Martin

What I want you to focus on when it comes to "targeting" is to ask this about your church: *Who are we targeting? What are we aiming at?* That is usually a tough question to answer. I know of a church that looked at their congregation and saw a high population of seniors/senior couples and a lack of younger couples and families. In response to this, they decided that they were going to *target* young families. They decided to focus some outreach opportunities, events, and programs on engaging and targeting young families. Soon after, they saw new families from the community coming in and being a part of their congregation.

Now, I don't know what their exact strategies and plans looked like. I'm not sure exactly what they changed about their outreach or their events to make them geared toward younger families. What I do know is that after noticing an issue that would greatly impact the future of this church, they decided to make some intentional changes. It all started with an evaluation of who they were currently targeting (if anyone) and making a change to who they felt they needed to target for them to grow and have a future.

If we shift gears a bit, what would you say is the age group where the church in general has the biggest drop off? What

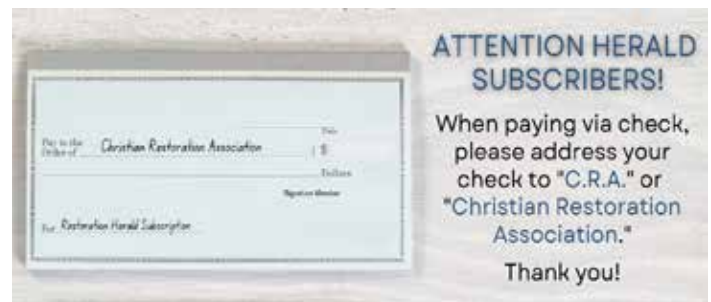
age group is there the least of in your church right now? Statistically speaking, it is more than likely younger adults (or millennials). Why would that be? Well, many times in churches, this is the age group that is the most forgotten and left out. There are no specific events or programming designated or *targeted* for this age group.

Why would that be the case? Usually, a youth minister worries about the youth and the senior minister worries about the adults. This younger group has crossed the threshold from one category into the other, and they are either expected to still be like youth or to grow up and be with their parents or people around that age. Often, the transition from being a youth to being an adult includes going to college, and when that happens, they usually don't look for a church in their area or a campus ministry but instead stop with all faith-related activities because they are now away from their home church. However, some college students come home for the weekends. Many of these college students are home for summer, winter, and spring breaks. Can you imagine engaging those millennials and challenging them to use their connections to bring other millennials into the church?

You're probably thinking that I am crazy. *"These millennials can't have that much responsibility and that much focus! That only feeds into their already larger-than-life egos and their sense of entitlement!"* What if you sat down with a millennial from your church or community and asked some questions, just to see what they are seeing and ask how to reach others in that age range? You could even ask that millennial to oversee some activities your congregation could do to reach younger adults. There are few millennials who will turn down a free cup of coffee, just in case you're looking for a way to get them to have a conversation. That involvement with a millennial could bring in a whole new focus for the future of your congregation.

"Wise targeting could well be the secret to new growth and life" — Tom Claibourne ~RH

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These passages clearly teach drunkenness is prohibited and is, thus, sin. Any view one takes concerning alcohol must consider seriously the teaching of these passages. One should not view “having a little too much to drink” as permissible or innocent but as sinful or at least dangerously close to sinful.

That Which is Permitted

Having observed the prohibition in Scripture concerning drunkenness, the next question is whether the Scripture permits one to drink in moderation so long as it falls short of drunkenness. Can a Christian drink alcohol in careful moderation, or does Scripture teach strict prohibition from all alcoholic beverages?

Though some have suggested otherwise, it does not appear Scripture absolutely prohibits consumption of all alcoholic beverages. While there is an explicit command concerning drunkenness, one is hard pressed to find one concerning alcohol in moderation that applies to all Christians. There is simply no command in Scripture prohibiting consumption of all alcohol. The closest thing to such a command is 1) the law of the Nazarites that clearly required complete abstention of any drink connected to grapes for those making a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1-21), and 2) the prohibition of priests drinking strong wine or drink when serving in the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:9). While there are certainly principles we may observe from these passages, these commands applied to specific people in specific circumstances, not to all of God’s people.

It is important to *not* make a “thus saith the Lord” where one does not exist. Doing so actually causes more harm, regardless of how well-meaning the intentions. Jesus had this problem with the Pharisees. They had set up traditions of man above God’s word and ended up invalidating the word of God for the sake of their traditions (Matthew 15:1-9). However well-meaning their intentions might have been, creating a command where one did not exist resulted in spiritual harm. While we may sometimes wish God would have given a simple command to refuse all fermented drinks, the simple fact is He has not done so. In our zeal to (rightly) teach and warn about the dangers of alcohol, great caution must be taken to *not* create a “thus saith the Lord.”

Alcohol in (careful) moderation falls into the realm of Christian liberty, and the two key passages pertaining to Christian liberty should be applied: Romans 14:1-15:13 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-10:33. Of particular importance are

the principles found in Romans 14:3: “The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.” Here, Paul is dealing with an issue first-century Christians faced: should they eat all things, even food sacrificed to idols, or should they abstain from certain foods and eat vegetables only? The one who chooses to eat all foods is not to regard with contempt the one who does not, and the one who chooses to abstain from certain foods is not to judge the one who eats. These same principles apply to the issue of alcohol in moderation. The one who chooses to drink in moderation should not regard the brother with contempt who chooses to abstain, and the one who chooses to abstain from alcohol should not judge the brother who chooses to drink in moderation.

That Which is Wise

Since drinking in (careful) moderation falls into the realm of Christian liberty, the best question to ask is what is the wisest use of one’s liberty for this issue? Each Christian should carefully consider this question and practice that which provides a clear conscience before God, knowing each one will give an account of himself to God. Having said this, I offer the following reasoning for why I consider abstaining from alcohol the wisest choice.

Avoiding Potential Danger

My Christian living takes into consideration the serious warnings about the dangers of alcohol given in the Bible.

Proverbs 20:1 says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.” The word translated “intoxicated” in the NASB literally means “to go astray” or “to err.” This proverb identifies wine and strong drink for what it is: a mocker and a brawler. While alcohol may appear to be harmless, it is dangerous. It can cause one to become a mocker—one who scoffs at that which is holy—and to become a brawler—one who is unrestrained by the laws of morality.³ The one led astray by alcohol is not walking in wisdom. This proverb teaches the one who would walk in wisdom is not fooled by the harmless appearance of alcohol but sees it for what it is, namely a (potentially) dangerous pathway to unholy and unwise living.

Proverbs 23:20-21 warns against being with heavy drinkers of wine, for it will only bring one to poverty. There is no shortage of examples of people who have been left penni-

less because of alcohol. The one walking in wisdom understands that alcohol may lead to financial ruin.

The lengthiest warning about alcohol in Proverbs is found in Proverbs 23:29-35. The passage warns that those who linger long over wine have woe, sorrow, contentions, and complaining. They have wounds without cause and redness of eyes. They see strange things, and their mind utters perverse things. They are deadened to reality, oblivious to danger, and suffer terrible hangovers. They are interested in seeking another drink.⁴ The inspired penman speaks truth: “Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like a viper.” Alcohol may have an enticing appearance, but it is dangerous.

Additionally, the Scripture gives several examples of those who have sinned and acted foolishly due to drunkenness: Noah (Genesis 9:20-27), Lot (Genesis 19:30-38), Nabal (1 Samuel 25:36), Amnon (2 Samuel 13:28-29), Elah (1 Kings 16:9), Ben-hadad (1 Kings 20:16), and Ahasuerus (Esther 1:10, comp. to Esther 2:1). Furthermore, the New Testament clearly connects drunkenness with other sins (Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3-4).

Drinking alcohol in moderation does not mean one will necessarily become drunk and participate in sinful activity. Such would be a logical fallacy. However, alcohol has the potential to be highly addictive and may lead down a destructive path. Many alcoholics wish they never would have taken their first drink, and the surest way to avoid the possibility of addiction is to abstain. My conclusion is that it is unwise to risk such danger in my life. It is not worth it.

Influence on Others

The Scripture teaches that behavior which falls into the realm of Christian liberty should be tempered according to how it affects others; we are *not* free to behave as we want without regard for others. Romans 14:13 teaches us “not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.” In other words, there is a serious responsibility to temper our behavior—even behavior in the realm of liberty—according to that which is for the good of our fellow Christians. Not only must we not put stumbling blocks in their way, but we are also called to do that which makes for peace, encourages, and builds up one another.

In light of the responsibility we have to live in a way that considers others, the wisest course of action is to abstain. There are numerous brothers and sisters who have been en-

snared by alcohol before they became Christians. They live with the temptation to go back to the old life. In addition, numerous people have been indirectly harmed by alcohol (i.e., victims of an abusive alcoholic father, etc.). Abstaining from alcohol is not offensive most of the time, but alcohol in moderation *could* be offensive or *could* be a stumbling block for others.

This is especially the case regarding my example to my children. While it is certainly possible for parents to drink alcohol in careful moderation and to teach their children to do the same, it is also possible that parents could start their children on the road to alcoholism through their example of drinking in moderation. Many fathers and mothers have endured untold heartache watching their children become consumed with alcohol addiction. In my judgment, it is wiser to abstain from alcohol and teach my children that while total abstention from alcohol is not commanded in Scripture, such a decision is a wise way to avoid the potential dangers associated with alcohol.

Holiness in Leadership

Leaders in the Lord’s church should be especially cautious with alcohol. The qualifications of elders teach they must not be addicted to wine (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7) and deacons must not be addicted to much wine (1 Timothy 3:8). Paul instructed Timothy to show himself an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Timothy 4:12). Certainly, Timothy’s example to the church would have included how to behave in regard to wine. It is instructive to note Paul’s instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23 to “no longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” Timothy’s practice was to drink water exclusively. Paul’s instructions were to use a little wine for medicinal purposes (not to participate in “social drinking”). An equivalent today might be using cough medicine (which contains alcohol) to help with a cough.

Proverbs 31:4-5 speaks to kings and warns that wine and strong drink are not for them. Why? “For they will drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.” While no one reading this article is likely a king, there are many with responsibility of leadership. Leaders have important oversight responsibilities and must follow appropriate policies and procedures and treat others well. Wine and strong drink may keep them from carrying out their responsibilities.

Another passage leaders in the church should consider is

THE WISEST COURSE OF ACTION (CONT.)

Leviticus 10:9-10, which is the Lord's instruction to Aaron, the high priest:

“Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons with you, when you come into the tent of meeting, so that you will not die—it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations—and so as to make a distinction between the holy and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean.”

It is instructive that this command follows on the heels of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who offered strange fire before the Lord and were stricken with consuming fire from His presence (Leviticus 10:1-3). While the text does not directly make the connection that Nadab and Abihu were under the influence of wine when they acted in an unholy manner costing their lives, it is significant that immediately following this account the Lord commands Aaron and his sons to refrain from wine and strong drink while serving in the tabernacle.

We recognize we are no longer under the Old Covenant and that church leaders today are not equated with Levitical priests. However, there is an important principle to observe. Aaron and his sons were tasked with leading God's people in things pertaining to God, and the task was of such a holy nature that their behavior and judgment could not be clouded by alcohol. As a preacher, I must also recognize the task of preaching and caring for God's people in things pertaining to God is of such a holy nature that I dare not risk having my judgment clouded by alcohol. While drinking alcohol in moderation does not necessarily lead to unholy behavior and clouded judgment, it is simply not worth the risk. Again, the wisest course of action is to abstain.

Conclusion

I believe the adage applies: just because I *could* doesn't mean I *should*. Just because I *could* partake of alcohol in moderation doesn't mean I *should*. Given the potential dangers, the influence upon others, and the demands of leadership, I submit the wisest course of action is to abstain. ~RH

(Endnotes)

1 All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

2 See *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. The adverb form of the word is used in the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:13 (“there he squandered his estate with loose living”).

3 Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, p. 607.

4 See Smith's helpful treatment of this passage in *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, pgs. 634-636.

Jamie Franke is the Preaching Minister with Vandalia First Christian Church, Vandalia, MO, and is a Christian Restoration Association Trustee.

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About Our Lesson Writer



Mike Hawkins is the Preaching Minister at West Park Church of Christ in Portsmouth, Virginia. He came to West Park in 2014 to serve as their youth minister and transitioned to the role of Preaching Minister in 2017. Prior to moving to Virginia, Mike served as associate minister to the Westwood Christian Church in Ashland, Kentucky.

Mike and his wife, Sarah, are the parents of three children, Austin (19), Caitlin (16), and Sydney (13). Mike enjoys preaching and teaching and works each summer as a faculty member at the GAP Youth Preaching Camp at Camp Wakatomika, OH.

He and his family love to travel, especially to visit historical sites.

“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” — 1 Peter 4.10–11



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Background of Text — For ten years now, our family has enjoyed the companionship of a dog named Shelly. As a part of training our pup, we chose early on to use a crate for those times when we left the house. To this day, Shelly isn't too fond of her crate and she will usually do just about anything to avoid it.

It's funny how dogs can be keenly aware of their surroundings. Shelly knows something is afoot when we put our shoes and jackets on. She instantly becomes suspicious whenever my wife grabs her purse. But the telltale sign is when she hears the jingling sound of our keys. She knows then that a trip to the crate is inevitable. Thus, the

game begins: she runs, she hides, we find her, and then off to the crate she goes.

Our text describes a scene in which there is absolutely nowhere for Babylon to run. For nine chapters (Isaiah 40-48) God used the prophet Isaiah to describe the imminent future of Babylon. Because of their idolatry, the once mighty captors of God's people would be brought to judgment. Ultimately God would use the rise of the Persian king Cyrus to bring about the judgement of Babylon (Isaiah 44:28, Isaiah 45:1,13) providing the exiles a second exodus (Isaiah 48:20).

Isaiah 47 is a poem of hope. It is the sequel to the promises given to the exiled people of the rise of Cyrus, which would in turn mean the inevitable fall of Babylon. The prophet uses a good amount of imagery and irony to convey their captor's doomed future.

Verse 10 "*You felt secure in your wickedness...*" As our text opens, Isaiah explains the error of Babylon's ways, specifically calling attention to their security in self. Their wickedness was their refuge, but a shoddy refuge at that, later citing how "*your wisdom*" and "*your knowledge*" has led you astray. Perhaps the bigger lesson, though, comes from the statement, "*No one sees me.*" Often, we can be tempted to do wrong when we believe no one will see us. When we believe that there will be no consequences for our actions, the temptation to sin can be great.

Verse 11 "*...you will not know how to charm away...*" The prophet goes on to explain that God will continue to expose Babylon's false confidences to their demise. It is apparent that the Babylonians took pride in their so-called knowledge and proficiency. However, when the "*evil*" and "*disaster*" and "*ruin*" comes upon them in judgment, their so-called knowledge and proficiency will be of no profit.

Verse 12 "*...perhaps you may be*

able to succeed; perhaps you may inspire terror." This verse offers a bit of sarcasm which bears comparison to Elijah's mockery from 1 Kings 18:27. These sorcerers of Babylon had labored long in their occult practices, giving the impression that they are in control of the future.

Verse 13 "*...those who divide the heavens...*" This is an attempt to translate two Hebrew words that make up an idiom (a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to a phrase) that is unclear. The NIV and KJV translate this phrase as "astrologers." Here in the ESV it is rendered as "*those who divide up the heavens*" as the Hebrew words can be translated as *heavens* and *divide*. Historically speaking, astrology has its roots in Babylon. A bit of ridicule is used in saying let those astrologers, let those who divide the heavens, stand forth and save you.

Verse 14 "*...they cannot deliver themselves...*" Here, Isaiah explains the true worth of these sorcerers and star gazers. They are like stubble or straw burned up in the fire. These experts cannot save Babylon because they cannot save themselves.

Verse 15 "*...they wander about, each in his own direction; there is no one to save you.*" The prophet finishes this foreboding prediction with the image of aimless wandering and hope-

lessness. Is it not true that the wrong kind of companions tend to go their own way when times get difficult? When life goes awry, we might look at the companions that we keep. Though the summation of this passage is in reference to the judgement of Babylon, it still harkens to another truth from scripture: "*Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals*" 1 Corinthians 15:33.

In the following century, the prophet Daniel would acknowledge to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon that his empire was great. Daniel even referred to the king as "the king of kings" (Daniel 2:37). Nevertheless, his empire would fall to the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 5:28). In the year 539 B.C. the Persian king Cyrus conquered the ancient city of Babylon.

What is important for us to note is the concept and implication of "Babylon" as seen from scripture. Yes, Babylon was an actual kingdom in the ancient world, but it was also a people and an empire that were established in defiance of the one true God. Although the city was conquered and remains no more, the symbolism of a godless people remains with us today (see 1 Peter 5:13, Revelation 17-18). One might consider the question: are we inching closer to becoming an American Babylon?

A Mission to Save

Background of Text — There is a show on television where a group of men are searching for a fabled fortune buried on a small island in Nova Scotia. Each episode I watch with bated breath, hoping they will save this missing treasure from the bowels of the earth. Unfortunately, the conclusion of each episode is met by me with a bit of disappointment and a resolve to watch the next episode.

As people, we often admire those who have led successful exploratory, or scientific, or military missions. From Tranquility Base to the shores of Omaha Beach there is

something about brave individuals and their successes that inspires us. Notwithstanding, success sometimes come at a great loss.

Isaiah chapter 49 contains the second of four servant songs of Isaiah. The other three are in 42:1-4; 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12. As one progresses through the servant poems, one can see descriptions that would fit the nation of Israel transitioning to the revelation of a person who would suffer for the nation and humankind at large. The transitional meaning of the servant is found within this one song.

Verse 2 “*He made my mouth like a sharp sword...*” Isaiah begins by describing a servant with a sharp tongue. This metaphor is used throughout the Old and New Testament to describe the strong words of men and the searching words of God. Here it’s evident that this servant is a weapon for God’s use: a *sharp sword*, a *polished arrow*. It’s interesting for us to note the apocalyptic nature of the servant in comparing this description with that of Revelation 1:16 which says, “*In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.*” No one can escape the sword when it is drawn to slay.

Verse 3 “*You are my servant Israel...*” Here the prophet defines the servant as the people of Israel. This servant will fully display the beauty and magnificence of God.

Verse 4 “*But I said, ‘I have labored in vain...’*” After giving a clear declaration of God’s involvement in calling and enabling him, it seems the servant is frustrated, having “*labored in vain*,” spending his “*strength for nothing and vanity.*” One would think the servant is distressed at his apparent failure, but he goes on to confess his confidence in God. Remember this song is a song of “transitioning.”

Verses 5 and 6 “*I will make you as*

a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” The prophet speaks of this helper as an individual restorer of Israel and savior of all humankind. It’s interesting to note how verses 5 and 6 contrast verse 4. Isaiah equated the servant with Israel, including their shortcomings. Here in verses 5 and 6, he presents the servant as someone faithful and capable of accomplishing God’s will to bring salvation to “*the end of the earth.*” These verses serve as a reminder first of our purpose as Christians, to bring the gospel message to the four corners of this world, and as a reminder of the strength we have in God as His servants.

Verse 7 “*...one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation...*” This restorer is “*one deeply despised.*” This foreshadows the description of the suffering servant contained in Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

Verse 8 “*...a day of salvation...*” This phrase in the passage is tied to the restoration of Israel. The apostle Paul uses the reference to refer to the completion of the new covenant in 2 Corinthians 6:2. “*I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people...*” Here in Isaiah the Hebrew word regarding the servant’s role in the covenant is unclear. It could mean that the servant would be the one offered to sign and seal the treaty. It is also pos-

sible that the servant himself would be the covenant of peace. Regardless, the point again is established that God will use His servant to accomplish the purpose of redemption.

Verses 9 through 12 “*...they shall not hunger or thirst...*” The wording of the restorative work in verse 10 can be compared to that of Revelation 7:16. Here the prophet promises that God will call His people from all directions, alluding to the fact that there is something bigger coming than the return from Babylon.

Verse 13 “*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth...*” This verse is a call for the heavens and the earth to celebrate the comfort God extends, as described in the prior four verses.

By the close of our text, it’s evident that this suffering servant is on a mission to save. It’s interesting to think that the title of Yahweh’s representative is “servant,” but his description is one of strength and leadership. It is true that leading people to freedom, providing for their physical needs, and being merciful to the weak are some of the highest callings of leadership. Is that not the example of Christ? The suffering servant, on a mission to save. Leading people to freedom from the bondage of sin. Providing for our desperate need of reconciliation. Showing mercy on the cross of Calvary. Praise God for His Suffering Servant!

All Things Put Right

Background of Text — Laughter is good for the soul. A few years ago, I and our staff engaged in a lighthearted “prank war” with one another. It all began the day our secretary went to lunch and left her church keys hanging in the lock to her office. When she came back from lunch, there were detailed instructions guiding her through a scavenger hunt for each of her keys. One morning when I arrived at the church house, there was a huge inflatable turkey in my office. I believe the final prank was when I and a couple of our teens flipped everything upside down in our youth minister’s office — everything on his desk, bookshelves, even the pictures on the wall.

We live in an upside-down world, don’t we? Whether we recognize it or not, I think we long for a time when all the

world’s problems are solved. Perhaps that is why we enjoy stories with happy endings. SPOILER ALERT – the Bible concludes with all the world’s problems being solved, a happy ending indeed.

Without question the exiled Jews longed for a time when all things would be put right. The words of Jeremiah must have weighed on their hearts, “*Why do you forget us forever; why do you forsake us for so many days?*” (Lamentations 5:20). Thankfully Isaiah was able to offer hope for those who longed to be free of their confinement in Babylon. Our text is a continuation of the second servant song of Isaiah, celebrating the one who will put all things right — the Redeemer of Israel who will bring about peace, prosperity, freedom, and justice.

As Isaiah continues, he shifts his attention from the exiles in Babylon to the Redeemer of Israel.

Verse 18 “...*you shall put them on as an ornament; you shall bind them on as a bride does.*” Not only does God keep Zion in mind (verse 14), but He also promises a day when her children will return to ornament her again (verse 18-20). The command to Israel to ornament themselves can be contrasted to the command of Yahweh to remove their ornaments after the incident of Aaron and the golden calf (Exodus 33:3-6). This imagery conveys the message that Yahweh has taken unfaithful people back as a bride. The imagery of the Redeemer as the bridegroom and the redeemed as bride is seen in its fulfillment in Christ (see Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:6-8).

Verses 19 and 20 “*Surely your waste and your desolate places... will be too narrow for your inhabitants...*” The restoration of the “*desolate places*” seems to point to the future return from Babylonian exile. The adjective meaning ‘to be desolated’ is used repeatedly in Jeremiah’s writings when referring to the exile (Jeremiah 10:25; 33:10; Lamentations 1:4; 1:16; 4:5; 5:18). Since the Exile, Je-

rusalem was a virtual ghost town. Yet here the prophet explains that Yahweh, through the servant, will fill the land to overflowing with the returning people. The fourth servant song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) is followed immediately with the command to a redeemed Israel to “*Enlarge the place of your tent*” and “*spread abroad to the right and to the left*” to “*lengthen your cords*” (Isaiah 54:2-3).

Verses 21 and 22 “*I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away... and they shall bring your sons in their arms...*” The generation of the exile was the one to whom God had revealed Himself as the law. Their sentence was banishment and enslavement by a brutal people. Zion, the mother-city, lay in ruins, desolate. Verses 21 and 22 shift from a bereaved and barren woman to a bride (verse 18) that will acquire a large family. What a comforting thought it must have been to the displaced to imagine being brought home by humbled foreign leaders.

Verse 23 “*Then you will know that I am the LORD...*” We are all familiar with dystopian stories where attempts to create a better world turn out horribly wrong. The problem with many of those stories is that the “created”

is attempting to do something only the “creator” can. The restoration of God’s people is never through human effort, but by the power of God. Such miraculous rescue is consistently done throughout the Old Testament so that both Israel and the whole world will “*know that I am the LORD*” (Isaiah 49:23, 26; see also Exodus 6:7; 7:5; 7:17; 8:22; 14:4; 14:18; etc.).

Our text closes with the words, “*...those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.*” What an eternal truth of the Bible. Yes, we live in an upside-down world, but there will come a time where all the world’s problems are solved, where everything is put right.

“*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’*” — (Revelation 21:2-4).

Back to Basics

Background of Text — I've always considered myself an old soul, in that my preference and appreciation for certain things don't always reflect that of the mainstream. Recently I've turned to watching an episode of the Andy Griffith show before I retire for the evening. The show harkens to a simpler time. No cell phones. No social media. Just a community of people who placed the needs of others ahead of their own. There's a lesson there, perhaps we need to get back to basics?

It's true how the things we consume prove to conform our minds. If we feed on the message of bigger, faster,

stronger, are we going to be content? If we continually take in violence, and hatred, and death are we going to be at peace? However, if we follow the example of the psalmist, "*I will meditate on Your precepts and fix my eyes on Your ways*" (Psalm 119:15), we find contentment and peace of mind.

As for Israel, they would return home after being subjected to the godless culture of the Babylonians. The key to their prosperity would have to be getting back to basics. Remembering who their God is, what He has done, who they were, and His promises.

Isaiah 51 seems to be addressed to the people of Israel who lived more than a century after the time of Isaiah. Much of Isaiah 40-66 looks beyond the time of the prophet to the exile and the returning exiles.

Verse 1 "*...look to the rock from which you were hewn...*" Our text begins with Isaiah calling upon those who "*pursue righteousness*" and "*seek the LORD.*" This is later paralleled in verse 7, "*you who know righteousness*" and "*whose heart is my law.*" These were the true believers of the remnant, and God is calling them to remember the past things.

Verse 2 "*Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you...*" Instead of pointing to the law that Israel had broken, Isaiah goes centuries before that to the promise given to Abraham. A promise that should serve as a source of comfort to the remnant, the true descendants of Abraham and Sarah. God promised to produce a nation of people from this one couple. Through the one "seed" of Abraham (i.e., Christ) God would save the nations. The apostle Paul echoes this theme that salvation for all nations comes not from the law, but the promise (Galatians 3:15-18).

Verse 3 "*For the LORD comforts Zion...and makes her wilderness like Eden...*" Isaiah offered comfort to Is-

rael in her "*waste places.*" This Hebrew word is used by later prophets to describe Jerusalem's ruins that would be restored (ex. Jeremiah 44:2; 6, 22; Ezekiel 38:8, 12; Daniel 9:2). God in His compassion would turn their wilderness into a paradise: a city of joy, gladness, and thanksgiving. Desolation would be temporary; deliverance would be forever.

Verse 4 "*...and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.*" In this the latter portion of the book of Isaiah, the prophet repeats the promise that Yahweh's covenant and teaching will illuminate the entire world. The remnant is exhorted to be attentive to God's teaching, for His word would be a light to all people.

Verse 5 "*My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out...*" Here God's righteousness is paralleled with salvation and judgment. God has righteous plans for the salvation of all people through Christ His son. Also listed here is the judgment that will come to those who reject His will. Thus, Isaiah is alluding to the two parts of God's righteousness: salvation and judgment.

Verses 6 and 7 "*Lift up your eyes to the heavens...Listen to me, you who know righteousness...*" As is typical throughout the Bible, Isaiah does not point to the obscure, but rather to the

verifiable to give hope. His commands are not to feel hope, or transcend reality, but to "*look*" and "*listen*" for the assurance of God's work.

Verse 8 "*For the moth will eat them up like a garment...but my righteousness will be forever...*" In the prior verse, the remnant is told "*fear not*" and "*do not be dismayed.*" The reason being is found here in verse 8. The fate of evil men has been determined, the moth and worm "*will eat them up*" like a garment. God's people then can rest assured in the righteousness of God and the promise of salvation to all generations.

Many of us were brought up believing the basic concept that doing the right thing will eventually pay off. That concept has its origins in God's Word. As we see here in our text, God is instructing His people, those who "*pursue righteousness*" (verses 1 and 7), to keep doing the right thing. Keep pursuing Him and His ways. Remember His goodness and His promises. As a result, He will turn ruin into rejoicing. He will handle the unrighteous righteously. Furthermore, His salvation will be forever, extending to all generations. As Paul reminded the Philippian church, and us as well, "*I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...*" Keep pressing on church!

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Calendar of Events

Events are added to the calendar as they are provided and at the Editor's discretion. Please keep us informed.

2022

Preaching in the Mountains June 12-16

Hyndman, PA

Contact: tshaffer248@yahoo.com

Southern Indiana Family Rally June 29-July 2

Madison, IN

Contact: jake.brown@live.com

Delmarva Christian Family Week July 10-14

Laurel, DE

Contact: Shawn Short (443.235.8582)

Hillsboro Family Camp July 25-28

Hillsboro, OH

Contact: p2pm_office@yahoo.com

Riverbend Men's Camp August 1-4

Sterling, MI

Contact: www.riverbendmenscamp.com

Winning at Winchester September 2-4

Winchester, VA

Contact: ccmv4thebible@gmail.com

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This new feature will allow ministry openings to be promulgated in a more timely fashion to a much broader audience — overall, providing much better service to the churches.