



# THE RESTORATION HERALD

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## Avoiding Extremes

by

Bill Campbell

I had an interesting medical discussion recently. The topic was the dangers associated with diabetes. I was stressing the problem of high blood sugar. My friend quickly informed me that high blood sugar isn't the lone problem with diabetes. Low blood sugar readings, he indicated, are just as problematic as high readings.

Yours truly learned a lesson for life in this discussion. Simply stated: you must avoid extremes. In place of extremes one should aim for balance. Why? Because balance is something essential. Necessary. Crucial. Indispensable. So, what is true of balanced blood sugar readings applies elsewhere as well.

Most notably is the issue of balance for Christians. Specifically, we must not allow one biblical emphasis to nullify or diminish the importance of another item. This is because extremes are always dangerous and lethal. In fact, they are destructive and dismantling. They create distance from the larger context of biblical truth. In short, extremes create imbalance, could cause anyone to miss the overall counsel of God in Scripture.

Allow me though to set forth a disclaimer at this point: avoiding extremes doesn't remove the radical nature of Christianity. That is, when one chooses to follow Christ, the call brings with it a summons to a radical transition in ones convictions and lifestyle. Existence no longer centers in me and what I want; for I am no longer the master, the one in charge. Christ is now the

Master. Thus, compromise is not being encouraged through the avoidance of extremes. The radical call to Christian discipleship still remains in place.

Perhaps Paul stated best the radical transition that occurs when he stated: *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20 - NIV).

With the foregoing being said, extremes still need to be avoided; resisted, removed from responsible living with our Lord and others.

An obvious example of extremes, I believe, is in the area of law and grace. As I read and observe church practice today, I often see law and grace greatly misunderstood. As a result they are misused and abused. For one of the two is frequently given greater pre-eminence than the other. Yet, Scripturally you cannot place one of the two ahead of the other, make one more important than the other. In biblical teaching law and grace go together like a horse and carriage. You can't have one without the other.

**LAW** - Allow me to initially highlight law in Scripture. Jesus clearly taught that He had not, *"come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them"* (Matthew 5:17 - NIV). Thus, when grace emerged in Scripture the

(continued on page 5)

# EDITOR'S VIEWPOINT

## FLOURISHING OR...

Since Eden, sin has been the problem of man and God. In Romans, Paul expresses the universality of sin when he says, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), "there is none righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10).

Sin is not feared much by the world as a whole, or even by those who call themselves Christians. We don't know that much about sin anymore because the modern preacher doesn't like to talk about it. It seems that murder, robbing banks and hurting the environment are the only real sins today.

In Genesis 3, the devil told Eve that God didn't really mean it when He said that disobedience brought death. Eve ignored what God said and decided to think for herself. This brought about what we call "the fall" as man fell away from what God wanted (see again Romans 3:23 above).

Later, in chapter 4, when Cain's sacrifice was not accepted by God, God said to Cain,

*"Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it"* (4:6-7).

Did you notice the imagery that God uses about where sin is? Similar imagery is used by Peter, "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Lions prowl until they see their prey and then they crouch so their next meal doesn't see the aggressor coming.

Sin often comes when we are the weakest, and perhaps even feel the strongest. He definitely does not come when we are being really strong in the Word. It was only after Jesus was in the wilderness and had gone without food for 40 days that Satan began his temptations, thinking that at this point Jesus must be weak. "Make these stones bread!" The Scripture says that after 40 days He was hungry. I'm sure He was! But the Lord was not going to give in to the "lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes" (give you all the kingdoms of the world), or "the pride of life" (get down from the pinnacle of the temple, and implied in this temptation was that people will accept you and you won't have to go to the cross).

The Lord met each temptation with Scripture. I used to think that strange because whatever He said could have become Scripture, but our Lord went back to the Old Testament and quoted Scripture, I think, as a lesson to us.

Psalm 119:9, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word."

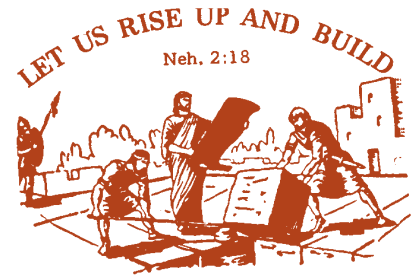
Psalm 119:11, "I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."

When I was just a boy, my dad had me memorize Psalm 1. The summer before entering high school I had the honor of hearing the great Bible-teacher L. Edsil Dale lecture from Psalm 1 at church camp. He put more meaning into the words I had memorized. He pointed out the progression that one takes who is involved in sin.

*"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;"*

First, one walks and listens to the counsel, or words, of those living outside a relationship with God. After listening awhile, one lingers and spends time

(continued on page 4)



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### OUR PLATFORM

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

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

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

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

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

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

### INDEX

#### ARTICLES:

Avoiding Extremes.....	1
The Curse and The Cure .....	4

#### FEATURES:

Editor's Viewpoint .....	2
Pulpit Talk .....	6
A Page from the Book.....	7
Closer Home .....	8
Ask the Professor.....	9
First Things First.....	10
Here's An Idea.....	12
Uniform Sunday School Lessons.....	13
Let Me Illustrate.....	18
Lessons from the Past.....	19
Strangeness of the Month Club.....	20
Lessons from Life .....	23

#### NEWS:

Florida Bible Conference 2015.....	3
Needs of Churches .....	23

#### SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The CRA Today .....	24
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# FLORIDA BIBLE CONFERENCE

## JANUARY 27-29

\* **Kissimmee, FL** — The 2015 Florida Bible Conference is scheduled for January 27-29. It will be held at the First Christian Church of Kissimmee.

The theme of this year's conference will be "TRUTH." The Bible is the truth of God to man and in a day when truth seems to be vanishing, all of the messages will point simply to the truth of God's Word in all subjects.

Tuesday night, the program will begin at 6:45 with a Gospel concert by Art Bush and Steven Foster. They will be directing the music of the entire conference.

Dr. Johnny Pressley, professor of Theology at Cincinnati Christian University, will be the first speaker of the evening. He will be followed by Tom Moll, preacher and church builder from Ohio.



**Johnny Pressley**

Wednesday and Thursday mornings will begin with a Bible study led by Dr. Mark Ziese, professor at Johnson Bible College Florida. Mark will be speaking from his Biblical knowledge and also his archeological knowledge. He has spent much time in Bible lands working on archeological digs. His lessons will be illustrated.

Tony Sullivan will be preaching at 10:15 on Wednesday morning. Tony is always well received because of his unique style and use of humor.

At 11:05, on both Wednesday and Thursday, there will be two workshops. The ladies will be led by Kay Moll. Kay has spoken to women's groups all over the country. She has a deep love for the Lord and His Word.

Tom Moll will be leading the men in a workshop that will deal with church growth. He has built great churches in all of his ministries. His last church went from around 600 to averaging over 2400 per Sunday.

Wednesday afternoon, Johnny Pressley will be leading an afternoon of Bible study. Dr. Pressley is Dean of the graduate school in Cincinnati and is an exciting speaker and teacher. He will hold you spellbound.

Our Wednesday evening service will begin with music by Art and Steven. Paul Nichols will be our first speaker for Wednesday night. Paul comes from a family of preachers and will have a solid message that will help build your faith. Paul is also the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of The CRA.

Closing our evening will be a message from Jim Tune of Toronto, Canada. Jim has built the largest Restoration Movement congregation in Canada and also has started a church planting ministry to reach all of Canada. His enthusiasm is contagious.

Thursday will follow a similar schedule with just a couple of exceptions. Paul Nichols will preach in the AM session.

At night we will again hear from Jim Tune and Tony Sullivan.

This is a program that is second-to-none. You can register at the door. There is no registration fee. The meeting is supported by the free-will offerings from friends of the meeting.

There will also be a meal on Wednesday night, prepared by the people of the First Christian Church. The cost of the meal is just \$5.00.

There are many fine hotels in the area where people can stay. You will need to make your own reservations.



**Art Bush**



**Steven Foster**



**Mark Ziese**



**Paul Nichols**



**Tony Sullivan**

**This meeting is sponsored by the Central Florida Ministers  
and The Christian Restoration Association.**



## Editor's Viewpoint (CONT.)

with those people. Finally, he sits and enjoys the company of those who do not know God. The more time spent with those who are away from God, the easier it is for us to wander off. We become like them. Oh we think we are strong, but more often than not we succumb to their friendships and their way of thinking and doing.

This is one of the reasons why worship, fellowship, daily Bible study, and friendships with Christians are so important. We are bombarded daily by the world trying to get us to listen, linger, and then sit and enjoy the world with them.

I know, someone is now saying, "Well, how can we win the lost if we are not around them?" Read John 17:14-17 where Jesus spoke of this very thing. Notice how important He says the Word is.

We rationalize, like Eve, that God didn't, or doesn't, mean what He says. "Doesn't God want me to have a good time?" It depends what you mean by a "good time." Primarily He wants us to be holy as He is holy. Because we are adults we think we know, but compared to the eternity and wisdom of God, we at our best are not even three-year-olds.

The godly person, the Christian, doesn't listen to the siren call of the world. He delights in what God has said. Psalm 1:2: "but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." He is in the Word often. In fact, he is in the Word more than just on Sunday. Listening to God is a daily activity. If we were in the Word like Christ must have been, we might be better able to face temptation.

Of the righteous person the Psalmist said, (vv. 3-6) "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." A tree by the water is secure. It is constantly nourished and therefore flourishes as it produces fruit.

Then the Psalmist tells about those who don't follow the Word. "The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Those not in fellowship with God are like the dry chaff that simply gets driven away by whatever way the wind (the world) is blowing.

"Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

When you get down to it, it is pretty easy: flourish or perish. The choice is up to us. (RH)

**Mini-messages...**In Luke 22:31 Jesus tells Peter that Satan wants Peter. Satan wants us all. The more souls he can influence are those who will not be following the Lord. Pray for those in your sphere of influence....Chances are that you will get this after the 2014 CRA Bible Conference (Symposium) has been held. I hope you were present. We have another Bible Conference that is sponsored by the CRA every year in Kissimmee, FL, at the First Christian Church. You can read about it on page 3. If you are in the Southeast, I hope you will come. If you are in the bitter North, use this meeting to get to Sunny Florida in the winter. You will be blessed by both the Bible Conference and the weather....This is a trying time for the Restoration Movement. Please pray that the movement will be strong and in the proper direction. LM

## THE CURSE AND THE CURE

Richard L. Marshall

I had a news channel on television earlier this morning, and the content was much like it has been on most days in recent weeks: floods, drought, fires, crime, sexual predators, economic uncertainty, international tensions, and many other such items dominated the telecast. In fact, one commentator remarked after 3 or 4 consecutive reports of calamities that the news seemed particularly distressing today.

I recall in reading Phillip Yancey's book *The Bible That Jesus Read* a few days ago, I came across a passage in which he remarks something to the effect that the Old Testament prophets, although neglected reading, even by Christians, have a timeless message that speaks to our society as accurately as if they were written today. This truth came clearly to my mind as my wife Betty and I were reading from Isaiah last evening.

Isaiah is writing to a nation on the brink of destruction. Jerusalem is about to be destroyed, and its inhabitants carried away to Babylon into a 70-year period of captivity. He pinpoints the problem in Isaiah 30:10-11 when he writes, "They say to the seers 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophecy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!'"

Is this not like our day when firm Biblical Christianity is represented as "intolerant," or "politically incorrect," when holding to Biblical standards of morality is thought of as radical and impractical? Are we any different from the populace of Judea in Isaiah's day who demanded that God's spokesmen affirm rather than rebuke their errant lifestyles? There are those in Congress who are pushing for legislation that would make speaking out against some blatant sins described by the Bible as abominations, a felony by defining it as "hate speech." The enforcing of such a law would deprive preachers of the freedom of speech and criminalize declaring some things God's Word teaches us to proclaim. The pulpit dare not become so enamored of trying to appeal to all people that we cease setting forth the will of a Holy God who requires holiness from people who would be identified as His people (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15). For all our religiosity, is our society afraid to be confronted by the Holy One of Israel?

Isaiah, who has so eloquently portrayed the problem gives us the cure, in the same chapter. He writes in Isaiah 30:15 "This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.'" The answer to the ills of society is simple, but it is not easy. Repentance and quiet submission to the will of God is the hope of our nation.

Seven centuries later, when Jerusalem was again facing destruction during the ministry of our Lord, Jesus gives a warning similar to that of Isaiah. The people of Jerusalem, trying to explain the disaster that had come upon some who had been slaughtered in the temple area, and some who

(continued on page 22)

# Avoiding Extremes (cont.)

law was not automatically eradicated; removed or ended, done away with, placed in the archives or on the garbage heap. For grace didn't replace the law; make the law unnecessary, a mere relic of the past.

As one reads the fifth chapter of Matthew's gospel, fulfilling the law was tied to following its inward intent, not with just adhering to its outward ethical expectations. External conduct, Jesus recognized, needed to be matched and paired with the law's internal complement. Through this fulfillment of law, Jesus raised the bar, elevated the standard. Should this connection not occur, the law would become nothing more than a legalistic trap or tape measure, devoid of the balanced and needed change of both the external and internal person.

Some have avoided the law today because they believe it's only negative; overly demanding, a dead end street, no longer relevant for life in the present time. In contrast, the Christian message is thought to be positive, unrestrictive, and free from the negative expectations and overtones that it projects.

But when the law stresses the "thou shall nots," it doesn't mean that the law's intent is primarily negative. The law is in place to keep one from venturing out too far in arenas of serious danger. When raising my children I often drew parameters and boundary lines. I did this because I knew the dangers first-hand with which they were then being confronted. God's laws are designed with the same intent for His children today.

The good news, though, is that what has been prohibited has a positive reward. God is intent, through His expectations, to keep His children from anything that will ultimately harm and damage them. Many have taken the hard road of a personal agenda that moves ahead of God's agenda and laws for life. As a result, these persons have emerged from their free-wheeling lifestyle extremely bitter, negative, and overwhelmed.

Consider adultery as one example. Initially an affair appears fun, natural, and uncomplicated. But the end result of an affair is something most destructive. Space doesn't allow me to tell all the stories that have unfolded out of an adulterous relationship. For one thing, marriages become difficult to maintain after an affair. Families are destroyed. Friendships are sacrificed. This all happens because God's laws are abandoned and ignored.

But while the laws of God can be ignored, they can nonetheless become grossly imbalanced. Much too heavy to bear. How does this happen? It happens when all that persons hear are the constant demands and expectations that the law lays on them. Often, the temptation to sin is even greater by the excessive references to following rules and regulations that are invented beyond the law's basic teaching. The law's restrictions really need to be balanced with some of its ultimate rewards. There needs to be a balanced movement between restrictions and rewards in biblical teaching; not because this "wins friends and influences people," but because God in Scripture moves back and forth Himself between these two.

**GRACE** - Grace needs attention as well. Where law can become legalistic with its demands, grace easily develops a license to do as one pleases; being free to live with no restraints, no drawbacks. Excessive freedom can give credence to numerous unjustified and unrestrained limits of behavior. And the results of such an expression of freedom brings much abuse, along with agony and pain.

Paul encountered this abuse of grace in the first century. He writes in his Roman letter: "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase*" (Romans 6:1 - NIV)? Some were obviously thinking that Paul was

doing away with the law, replacing it with grace. This was because his teaching and preaching had become so heavily laced with the message of grace. These abusers of grace were stressing the idea that increased sinning was now okay. It was okay; that is, if one readily accepted Paul's instructional transition. This was an extreme response Paul wanted them to resist, a lifestyle they were to avoid.

But Paul had not forsaken the law. It was impossible to separate the law from the message of grace. As indicated earlier, they go together like a horse and carriage. One complements the other. Each balances its counterpart. Paul did teach that we are no longer under the law but under grace (see Romans 6:14). Yet, he added in another instance that "... *by the law is the knowledge of sin*" (Romans 3:20). And again he pointed out, "... *I would not have known sin except through the law*" (Romans 7:7). Grace cannot exist contextually in scripture without the biblical presence and understanding of sin as taught in the law, with its ever present revelation of sin's assault on our lives. More importantly, those who've chosen to follow Christ have, "*died to sin*" (Romans 6:2).

As I read numerous contemporary treatments of grace, a radical divorce between law and grace has been made. Once grace made its appearance on center stage, these persons teach, we were given unrestrained liberty from any further restrictions or ethical demands as taught in the law. A lot is consequently written about grace, but much less emerges about the role of the law today. Once again we need to remember that they go together like a horse and carriage.

Allow me to return and highlight Paul's response to the earlier question in Romans 6:1. Emotionally, he informs his detractors that free sinning is out of the question (see Romans 6:2). That is one critical reason why the law is necessary. It keeps our lives free from the dangerous liberty of living an outright open and degenerative lifestyle. Behaving, that is, with no boundaries or parameters. We are not freed by the Lord, through grace, to live as we please, to conduct our lives like the unregenerate world around us, although that's often happening today. Grace is a call to a Godly and holy turnaround of life (see I Peter 1:13-16). This doesn't remove our enjoyments from life. Rather, it protects us from the unforeseen evils that follow in unrestricted living.

Perhaps grace can best be understood in another way. Just as sin breaks our lives, sin nonetheless breaks God's heart, brings Him more pain than human words could ever possibly express. Thus, grace is God's action to smother us in the depths of His love and mercy. Once we have been overwhelmed with the vastness of His grace, how could we do anything else but cling to Him, adore Him? And how could we possibly live in an unrestricted and undisciplined fashion? Do anything that would dishonor Him and break the spiritual marriage relationship with Him that exists?

Grace was, and is, God's correction to the sin problem. (The means He set in motion to reclaim His broken people.) The solution He executed for healing the broken relationship with Himself that He wished above all else to restore.

An old hymn, I believe, expresses it best in capsule form:

"Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will pardon and cleanse within; Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sin." RH

—Julia H. Johnston and Daniel B. Towner

*Bill Campbell is the preaching minister with the Woodland Christian Church in Tulsa, OK.*

## “The Church and Missions” (Part 2)

**H**ow can the church which merely “takes care of its own” be pleasing to Him who “loved the world”? Thus, I concluded the previous article of this present series. And it is a question that simply must be considered by every congregation, no matter what size she may be. But how does a church begin a mission program? How does a church get started?

The first step in undertaking a mission program is for the leadership team (the elders and staff) to determine that they are in favor of such a step. If the leadership team is not missionary-minded, then it is a foregone conclusion that the church, except in few instances, will not be missionary-minded. At times, it may rest first upon the preacher himself to be totally committed to missions if he is to encourage others to be so committed. He will preach messages that emphasize the Gospel for the world. He will become acquainted with as many mission enterprises as possible. He will make contact with various missionaries around the world. Perhaps he himself will go on a short-term mission trip in order to spark his own interest in a certain mission field. Whatever the case, at times a church will be as interested in missions as the preacher is. And so the first step in undertaking a mission program may certainly be making sure the preacher himself is committed to the worldwide mission of the church.

On the other hand, if the preacher is the only mission-minded person in the leadership of the church, the endeavor to undertake a mission program may be set for failure. It is as important for the elders to be mission-minded as it is for the preacher to be mission-minded. Some would believe that this “goes without saying,” but I have been acquainted with congregations whose leaders know little and care little about anything except their own share of the Kingdom. And this presents a very difficult barrier for those who desire that their congregation support missionary endeavors around the world. And so the very first step in undertaking a mission program is making sure that congregation’s leadership is dedicated to the Great Commission of our Lord!



## Pulpit Talk

**BOB STACY**

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The second step in establishing a mission-minded congregation is providing for preaching and teaching of missions throughout the church. Preachers, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, and all others with an opportunity to influence the church, must be willing to spend time preaching, teaching, and discussing the importance of missions. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, has a missions message, and that message will be taught in the church that expects her people to support a missions program.

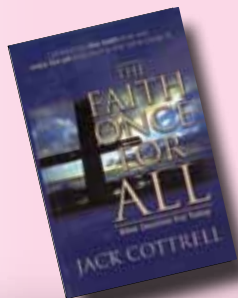
Just a few questions: When was the last time you heard a message emphasizing world mission of the church? When was the last time your Sunday School teacher presented a lesson bringing to the attention of the class the importance of taking the Gospel message to the whole world?

When was the last time you heard a missionary speaker preach in a morning worship service? (Most are relegated to Sunday evening or Wednesday evening when only the “faithful few” are in attendance.) When was the last time you received (and read) a mission message in your church bulletin and/or church newsletter? When was the last time you were asked to give to a mission project of some kind? When was the last time you saw a mission newsletter posted on your church bulletin board? Such questions may give you a clue as to the mission-mindedness of the congregation which you attend. (RH)

*(To Be Continued)*

## The Faith Once For ALL

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# A Page from the Book

“And Seeing the Multitudes, He Felt Compassion for Them.”

Matthew 9:36

When you read the illustrations and examples of Jesus caring for the needs of people, be it feeding or healing them, you will see the words, “He felt compassion for them.” Jesus stated in Luke 14:13 “When you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.” Before Jesus fed the 5000, Scriptures state that Jesus had compassion on the crowd for they had been with Jesus all day and were hungry. The point I am trying to make is this, Jesus had a heart for people. Before he ministered to the needs of those who were destitute, poor, and downcast, the Scriptures would preface the fact that our Savior had “compassion” for people.

Today there is a lot of emphasis on preaching in the local church and there should be. Good preaching and teaching is essential to keeping the doctrine of the “Chief Cornerstone” front and center



Jim Book

I do feel though that for many church leaders, and especially preachers today, we have become so driven to meet and teach that we are now suffering from a form of spiritual constipation. We literally move from camp to camp, revival to revival, lecture to lecture, and get re-charged only to do nothing with all of the energy and equipping we have received. I would like to offer a solid biblically-sound alternative to this dilemma: become more “externally focused” and less “consumer” driven. Ok, I know I went into uncharted territory for the conservative thinkers. I used a term often relegated to the progressives in our movement. But when you think about it, this is exactly the path and ministry road Jesus took every day as he preached and modeled his Kingdom vision. One author I recently read stated, “Ministry and service are part of God’s design for every follower of Christ, for we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do,” Ephesians 2:10. Could this be the very reason why so many churches in our movement are dying, spiritually, physically, and financially? There is no purpose outside of entertaining the same handful of folks every Sunday and Wednesday. When a church begins to feel that they have no purpose in a community but to erect a building and stay there to perform occasional weddings and funerals and to interact with the same tired saints each and every week—that church will inevitably seek to have a purpose for its existence! No evangelism is equivalent to no growth!

The flip side to that equation would be for the leaders in the church to look at the needs of the community and see how they, the city set on a hill, as Jesus stated, can be the beacon of hope to that particular city or town. At First Christian Church of Kissimmee where I have been privileged to serve for over three years, we began a ministry specifically geared to reaching, loving, feeding, preaching, baptizing, and reforming people who basically live on the streets each and every night. Many have chosen this lifestyle because of poor choices and a lack of tenacity to change their

lifestyle. I decided along with our elders that these folks needed Jesus just like the doctors and realtors and teachers within our city.

In August of 2011 we launched our 12:30 service and decided we would call it our “Community Outreach Service.” Professor Twila Sias of Johnson University of Florida stepped up and stated she would handle the music for each service. Todd, who is a deacon in the church, along with his wife Cindy, said they would be happy to coordinate the specifics needed to make these services happen effectively each week. We recruited volunteer team captains within the church to put volunteers together each week to cook hot meals to serve the crowd each and every week. Volunteers from our small groups and our ladies Bible studies begin to volunteer and embrace this outreach ministry. I stated that after our 9:30 and 11:00 service, I would preach to these folks a life-changing message from the only book that could free them from their chains of hopelessness and that is God’s word.

We have been doing this service for over three years. Last week we had close to 70 homeless or folks in transition, singing and praising God. We have had countless baptisms. In fact, one of the ladies, whom we baptized just a few months ago, went to be with the Lord last week. James, who had been visiting with us for over a year came forward on Easter Sunday 2012 and said he was ready to turn his life over to Jesus. I was surprised that after attending this service for over a year that this was the Sunday he wanted to be immersed into Christ for the remission of his sins. That day he was baptized. I had his baptismal certificate ready to give him the next week only to hear that he was hit and killed on the highway while walking.

Had First Christian Church not been “externally focused” we may never had had the opportunity to win him to Jesus. Now, being a focused-out church has its challenges. The room we meet in has a pungent odor after each service. Seats need to be cleaned more frequently since many of these precious souls haven’t bathed for a while, but when I see the faces of the folks worshipping with us and taking the message to heart and enrolling for the first time in drug and alcohol re-hab centers, and even attending our Celebrate Recovery Ministry on Friday night, it gives me great reason to celebrate.

Not every church has to start a ministry to the homeless. I just challenge my readers today to get your message into the streets and into your community. But don’t do it without first having a heart of compassion. Jesus had all the answers in his head – He was led by His Father’s Spirit. But Jesus knew having all the answers in His head without having a spirit of compassion and love for people in His heart would make him no different from the heartless Pharisees who exercised their religiosity only to be seen of men.

Paul admonishes the church, “And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians) 3:12. That is my plea today.

Rick Rusaw, who ministers at the LifeBridge Christian Church in Longmont, Colorado, stated, “Good nutrition alone cannot make a person healthy. Good Bible teaching alone is insufficient for spiritual maturity. People need exercise for physical health and service for spiritual health. We learn from the Scriptures, but we grow by serving others.”

Every mission moment we engage in, along with every external program we embrace, every food drive, school supply drive we volunteer for, must have at its ultimate goal, not to win the favor of

(continued on page 8)



# Closer Home

Maxine Fream Gash  
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## "The Eye of the Beholder"

One of my granddaughters, Kayleen, is a school teacher. She recounts a summer when she worked as a counselor at a kids' camp. On the last day of camp, each of the girls in her group presented her with a gift. One of the gifts she opened was in a small box, and as she tore off the wrapping paper, the girl who had bought the gift for her began whispering to the other girls around her... "This is the gift I got for her. It's a necklace, and it has real diamonds. It's REAL DIAMONDS."

As my granddaughter pulled the necklace out of the box, she noticed the price tag on the bottom of the box read \$14.95. Not wanting to embarrass this girl, who really thought the necklace was "real diamonds," she ripped off the price tag and hid it in her hand while the other girls "oohed and aahed" over the necklace. Unfortunately, one of the girls spotted the price tag and pulled it out of her hand. This second grade girl held up the price tag and announced to the other girls... "Girls! Look at this! \$14.95... it IS real diamonds."

We smile at this story and the innocence of young children and their value system. Yet I wonder how many times the Lord must smile at us as His children when he watches how we behave with our value systems. I wonder too, how many times He must sigh in dismay and repeat those frustrating words, "How long shall I bear with you, O you of little faith!"

The Creator of the universe has such treasures stored up for us in the place He has gone to prepare, yet we keep our eyes so focused on trinkets here below that we forget or simply fail to comprehend. Far too often we even neglect to give attention to the glory of God in the beauties of nature. We're busy driving here and driving there, watching out for traffic, shopping in malls, parked in front of TV or computers, texting on our phones, or focusing on the players in ball parks and golf courses, eyes

always on mundane things below.

An acquaintance I see often at a place where Charlie and I volunteer was telling me about a home and grounds that he delighted to see when he was a boy. Now, the present owner has neglected it so long it has fallen into a ruin. He said, "If I ever win the lottery I'm going to buy that place and fix it up again like it used to be."

I warned him to forget about the lottery, he was throwing money away; instead to take comfort in knowing that God would remake the world one day and it would no more have any ruins, or weeds, or curse. Everyone could have their own place to beautify to their liking, and if that new world wasn't large enough, God could make as many more as needed. Besides that, we'll have forever. The possibilities are endless. And the greatest glory will be beholding the face of the Lord Himself and having fellowship with Him. Why let the trivial incidents of this short life take so much of our time and energy? It's like exchanging diamonds for baubles of glass.

As Paul reminds us: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth...and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... And be thankful" (Colossians 2:2ff).

Charlie is 94 now. If anyone asks him how he is doing, he replies, "Well, for my size and age, I'm doing pretty good." He is, too. His health is good and he feels well; just tires easily and has trouble with stiff joints...complains about his memory loss. But he remembers to thank God every day for the way he has been so blessed. Both of us like to remind ourselves that each day finds us "closer Home." (RH)

In the Lamb,  
Maxine

Maxine Gash and her husband, Charles, make their home in Joplin, MO. Contact: mackydcc@yahoo.com

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## A Page from the Book (cont.)

the community, but to ultimately connect that audience to Jesus. Remember, to supply the physical needs of the community, while ignoring their spiritual hunger, simply means they go to hell well fed and housed. To build them homes and feed them physically as well as spiritually is how the church ultimately fulfills the Great Commission. Mark 6:34, "When He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." First he fed them physically, then He fed them the "Bread of Life" (RH)

James C. Book ministers with the First Christian Church of Kissimmee, FL. Contact him at: ibookdem@aol.com



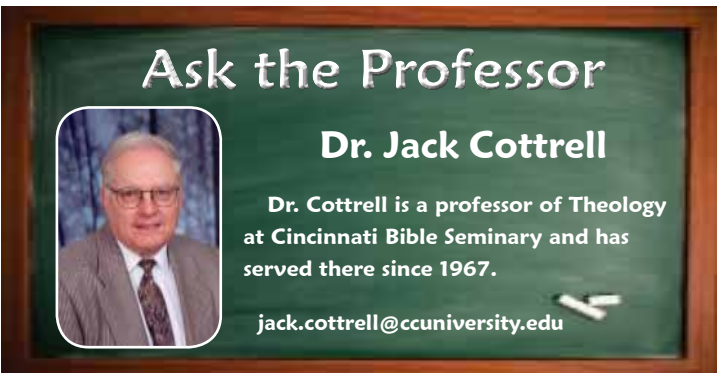
## What is Central in our Lives?

For decades I have tried to expose and refute a theological error I call “the Christological fallacy.” It is indeed a serious error in Christology, or the true understanding of the person and work of Jesus. It is also a serious error in theological method, and as such it is the source of many other errors in the interpretation and application of Scripture.

What is this “Christological fallacy”? It is the attempt to make Christ an epistemological principle, rather than the Redeemer he came to be. It sees Jesus as mainly a source of *revelation*, rather than the source of *redemption*. Jesus was of course a Revealer, but this is not the main reason for the incarnation. The Logos came to die and rise again in triumph over sin and over all his enemies. This is something only the incarnate God could do. While Jesus may be the highest revelation, there are many other ways in which God can reveal and has revealed himself and his truth to the human race. Thus our knowledge of God and his works comes to us from God *as God*, and not necessarily from God as Redeemer. And because of the reality of revelation and inspiration, this knowledge comes to us in written form in Scripture. The Reformers are still right: the Bible is our “formal principle,” our epistemological principle. Jesus Christ is not.

I first began teaching about this many years ago in a seminary course on theological method. I wrote about it in my book, *What the Bible Says About God the Creator* (College Press, 1983; now available through Wipf and Stock), in the chapter on “The Implications of Creation.” The issue arises in connection with the question, what is the relation between creation and redemption? I.e., which of these is the primary framework of existence? Are God’s eternal purposes formed first of all in terms of redemption, or in terms of creation? Shall we interpret creation in the light of redemption, or vice versa?

Surprisingly, many have said that God created *in order to redeem*. His primary purpose is redemption. I cannot here begin to explain how wrong and how disastrous this idea is. Over against this, the fact is that God’s primary purpose is creation, to which redemption is applied once sin enters the picture. (See my book, *God the Ruler*, pp. 118-122.) But creation is still the



ultimate framework of all things.

One of the main erroneous implications of giving redemption priority over creation is seeing God in his role as Redeemer as determining how we interpret everything. This leads, of course, to the isolation and elevation of Jesus and his redemptive work as the touchstone or central fact around which everything else revolves and must be interpreted. This is the Christological fallacy.

I saw an example of this fallacy in an article in *Christian Standard* (April 19, 1981,) written by Stuart Cook and entitled “Making Christ Central.” Cook states that “true restoration involves restoring Christ to His rightful centrality.” He says, “Every spiritual concept, practice, or deed must find its essential meaning and value in Jesus Christ—His identity, perfect life, atoning death, triumphant resurrection, and glorified status.” He continues, “If Christ is truly to be preached, then every doctrine and ordinance of the faith must be dependent on Him, His nature, character, and deeds, for meaning. . . . The ‘doctrine of Christ’ will be that doctrine which centers on Jesus Christ.”

When this is applied to creation, one result is that God is seen as creating the world SO THAT he could *redeem* it through Jesus Christ (which means that he had to intend for it to be infected by sin), and another result is that our *knowledge* of creation can come only through Jesus Christ. This whole approach must be vigorously rejected and refuted.

In my original discussion of this issue in *God the Creator* (1983), I attempted to set forth in a few paragraphs what I understood (and still understand) to be the proper interpretation of the nature of things, of the relation between creation and redemption, and especially of the idea of what is CENTRAL in our lives. (See pp. 188-190 in *God the Creator*; see also the condensed version, *God Most High: What the Bible Says About God* [College Press, 2012], pp. 66-67). I will now simply copy these paragraphs below. (When I teach this material in my Doctrine of God course, I often say that in my own opinion, these ideas are among the most important I have ever written.)

When we ask the question, “What should be central in our lives?” we should see that this question must be answered in different ways on different levels. That is, central in what way? If we mean *essentially* central, the answer is that GOD THE CREATOR is central. That is, we can explain the essence of our existence only in light of the creation, and our primary relationship to God is to God as Creator. The creation-relation is the decisive reference point for the basic facts of our existence. For instance, our *knowledge* of God, as we have seen, comes to us from God the Creator. This applies not only to the written revelation of Scripture, but to the general revelation of God

(continued on page 11)

A promotional graphic for a book. At the top, the title "The Faith Once For ALL" is written in a large, white, serif font. Below it, the subtitle "Bible Doctrine For Today" is written in a smaller, white, serif font. In the center, there is a 3D rendering of the book's cover, which features a blue and white design with the title and author's name, "JACK COTTRELL". At the bottom of the graphic, the text "Only \$27.00 + postage and handling" is written in a white, sans-serif font. The entire graphic has a dark red background with a black border.

# FIRST THINGS FIRST

Well, it's only a few weeks until Thanksgiving. Since it's near Thanksgiving, that means it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Thanksgiving is a wonderful time of the year. Suzanne and I have established a tradition. We go to Cracker Barrel for Thanksgiving Dinner and then on to Walgreen's to look around and shop.

Thanksgiving is truly an American holiday. It started when the Pilgrims invited the Indians to a meal. Later on they massacred them, and took their land. My great-great-grandmother, (a Creek Indian) told the pilgrims, "Don't feed them, because if you do they'll never leave."

Does your family do the "what I'm thankful for" tradition? You know the one where you go around the table, before you eat, and everyone tells one thing they are thankful for? If you do, this year when it is your turn simply say, "I'm glad I didn't get caught," and just leave it at that.



Tony Sullivan

In my opinion the most important ingredient of Thanksgiving is the gravy. Gravy can cover a multitude of cooking sins. I love gravy; as a matter of fact I come from a family that considers gravy a beverage.

Ready or not, it will soon be Thanksgiving. That means 10 hours of shopping, 4 to 5 hours of cooking, 20 minutes of eating, and 4 hours to clean up the mess.

Truthfully, we should all be thankful. As Americans, we are still a country for which there is much to be thankful. As Christians, we have much more for which to be thankful to God.

Scripture speaks much about being thankful. Thankfulness is an attribute of a Christian.

Scriptures tell us we should give thanks in all circumstances. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "Give thanks in all circumstance, for this is God's will for you."

We are reminded in Psalm 34:1, "I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will be on my lips."

Paul would exhort us in Ephesians 5:20, "Always giving thanks to God the father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Many evangelists have pointed out to us that this Scripture does not tell us to give thanks for all circumstances but to give thanks in all circumstance. There are many things for which we are not thankful.

If you look around, there is much going on in the world that drives us to prayer for God's wisdom and deliverance. Every day we live there seems to be a new disaster that we must face.

While we are going through a difficult time, we can still lift our voices in thankfulness for a God who knows and understands our trouble. We can thank Him that He will see us through this problem and will bring us out better on the other side.



We know, whatever we face, God is working on it. He is aware of the problem and He cares for us. Let me encourage you, in the depth of heartache, to turn to God in prayers of thankfulness for His loving mercy. Turn to His word and turn to His people to support you.

A verse of Scripture that expresses this is Psalm 107:1, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. For His loving-kindness is everlasting." (NAS)

Where would we be without God's eternal goodness? God is always good. No matter what happens in life, God will always be good.

In a prayer service a lady made this statement, "Please lift a prayer of thanks. My mother was very sick and she is now better. We thought we would lose her but she is going to be okay. God is good." Truth is God would have still been good, even if this lady's mother had died. God's goodness is not based on what happens to us in our lives.

The truth is, it is His goodness that allows us to get through the tragedies that come into our life.

Some might wonder, "How can I show my thankfulness to God?" David tells us how this is possible in Psalm 5:14, "Offer to God a sacrifice of Thanksgiving and pay your vow to the most High." (NAS)

Giving a financial gift to the cause of Christ would be a great way to show your thankfulness. You can help someone in need with a special gift. Buy them some food, pay a bill for them. Speak to others about God's wonderful work in the lives of His followers.

Let everyone who meets you know you love and serve Him. Let them know you appreciate them.

Let me encourage you to read Psalm 100:1-5. There you will find three ways to show thankfulness to God. David tells us, in Psalm 100: to "serve the Lord with gladness," "Enter his gates with Thanksgiving," and to "Give thanks to Him, bless His name."

Can we all agree to be more thankful?

One more thing. What has happened to saying, "Thank you." in our country? I have noticed in the last few months that when we do the smallest courtesy for someone they rarely say, "Thank you." As Christians let's start being better than that, okay. (RH)

See You Next Month

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## Ask the Professor (cont.)

which comes through the witness of creation itself (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:18ff.). Also, the *will* of God (in the form of law) is known to us as the will of God our Creator. Thus ethics is grounded in creation, not redemption. Also, sin against God is sin against God the Creator; this sin-relationship with the Creator is what brings about the need for redemption. These are the points that have caused many theologians, especially those of Lutheran persuasion, to see that *law* (grounded in the creation-relation) must precede *gospel* (grounded in redemption).

Also, we should note that since man's essential relation to God is to God as Creator, this is the universal God-man relationship. All men are related to God the Creator in that all know Him, all know His will, and all have sinned against Him (see Romans 1:18-32; 2:14-15). But not all are related to God as Redeemer; this is an acquired relationship.

The question of centrality must also be asked another way. If we mean what is *epistemologically* central, then the answer is that THE BIBLE is central. It is typical today when such a statement is made for some observers to wax hysterical and accuse the speaker of "bibliolatry" or of elevating the Bible above the Lord of the universe Himself. This kind of response usually comes, however, from those who do not understand the primary role of epistemology and the difference between form and content. The question of epistemology is basic in any field of inquiry, i.e., how do we get knowledge about our subject matter? But this is

only a formal question and is not in competition with the content learned thereby. When we say that the Bible is epistemologically central we mean that it and it alone is our source of knowledge about the One who is central in our lives. This is the meaning of the time-honored slogan, "The Bible and the Bible alone is our only infallible rule of faith and practice." Faith in the Bible as our source of truth about Christ does not contradict our faith in Christ as the source of our salvation.

This leads to a final way in which the question about centrality can be asked, namely, what is *existentially* (or *experientially*) central in our lives? The Christian must answer that CHRIST is central when the question is asked this way. This means that our strongest *felt* relationship to God is the relationship we have with Christ our Lord and Savior. He is the One whom we know most about and to whom we feel the closest. As the One who has saved us from our sins, we owe Him more than we owe anyone else. He is usually central in our worship. We want our lives to be Christ-centered and Christ-honoring. Our very name is *Christian*. In short, all our conscious service to God is in the name of Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). This is the way it ought to be. But let us not demote Christ and distort truth by trying to make Him an epistemological tool.

In summary, we are saying that the Creator is the essential center of our lives; the Bible is the epistemological center; and Jesus Christ is the existential (or experiential) center. <sup>(RH)</sup>



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# Here's An Idea!

## "Statistics"

Do you ever find yourself doubting the truth about some of the statistics you see in print? Do you sometimes ask yourself, "Are these averages and percentages really right? Do they apply to the local church that I attend?"



Ben Merold

I find myself asking those questions and then I am forced to consider these statistical averages as a guideline in my decision-making process. Averages will vary from place to place and from time to time, but they are still averages and we must consider their importance. With that in mind, follow me as I consider a problem and a few solutions that pertain to every church in our brotherhood.

Several years ago a well-known church growth statistician made this statement in reference to our independent Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. He remarked that our *average* church would *average* losing 8% to 10% of the membership over a time span of few years. The loss comes from members who die or move away, but a large part of the loss will be by members who just quit attending the church services.

Can we do something to remedy this problem? Yes, we can! We cannot stop people from dying or moving out of our area but we can work a simple program to reclaim many of those who become inactive. Again, I will give you some statistics. They were given out over twenty years ago and, while I personally know of no new studies on this problem, I doubt that the averages have changed very much. With that in mind I will give you five things to consider:

1. A visit within the first six weeks of a person becoming inactive can have very good results. A proper call made within that time period, can keep about 85% of these people

from going out the back door. Of course, this call must be made by people who say the right things and who refrain from saying the wrong things. This indicates that a few people should be trained for this ministry. The average size church would only need three or four people, however.

2. But consider this. If we wait about six months to make this call, that 85% drops down to about a 27% recovery rate.

3. If no call is made until after six months to a year, the figure drops to below 15%.

4. With statistics like these we ought to comprehend why the average church, with little or no evangelistic thrust, can have a drastic drop in attendance within a three to four year period.

5. If you want to try something radical – then consider this. Exchange your list of inactive members with a nearby church of our brotherhood. Call on the people on your new list as if they were people who have just moved into your community. This does produce some results. Many people who become inactive do so, not because of something going on in the church right now, but because of something going on in them.

When you give them an opportunity to start with another congregation, you give them the opportunity to start all over again. By the way, this works better when these people can be invited to a special service of some kind that includes fellowship.

One thing I know, it is wrong for a church to let people slide into inactivity with no attempt at restoration.

**Note from Ben:** All of these percentages and averages were given out by Herb Miller, a church growth statistician from Lubbock, Texas. He, at that time, printed a monthly magazine called "Net Results." Herb was one of the best in taking surveys among the churches. I still have my notes from his address on inactive members. RH

(Ben Merold is a minister of the Harvester Christian Church in St. Charles, MO. Email contact: [TBrown@harvesterchristian.org](mailto:TBrown@harvesterchristian.org))



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## About Our Lesson Writer



David Provance is one of the evangelists at the Monroeville Christian Church in Monroeville, PA. He has served there for 20 years. He had previous ministries with the Meyersdale Church of Christ in Meyersdale, PA; Central Christian Church in Harrisburg, PA; and the Phelps Church of Christ in Phelps, KY. He grew up in Perryopolis, PA. He served in the US Navy for six years. He received the Diploma of Biblical Studies and his Bachelor of Sacred Literature Degree from Summit Theological Seminary and is currently working on his Master's Degree through Summit. He and his wife Laura have been married for 28 years and have two sons, Bryan and Caleb.

# Seeking a Place of Peace

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text.

Uniform Lesson  
November 2, 2014  
Ezekiel 43:1-12

## Background of Text

God's people were in Babylonian captivity because of the choices that they had made in following and worshipping false gods. God allowed Babylon to lead the people of Judah into 70 years of captivity to punish them and hopefully get them to repent of idolatry and find peace with Him. The prophet Ezekiel, during the captivity, receives visions and dreams from God to instruct, challenge, comfort, and encourage repentance by His people. Ezekiel's message in chapters 40-48 of his book tell us of the restoration of the temple and the land of Israel after the captivity. Ezekiel here tells us that God's people need comforted because of all that has happened to them.

People in general make bad choices in life which create pain, chaos, and problems for themselves. Because of this, many people do learn from their mistakes and seek repentance, restitution, and then peace in their lives. That is ultimately what God's people did! Yes, they were crushed and hurt when they went into captivity. Many people lost their lives in war, love ones were killed, houses were demolished, Jerusalem was sacked and destroyed, and the great Temple of Solomon was decimated. Now

they are living in a foreign land, not knowing if they will ever go home again, paying for their sins and rebellion against God. They had turmoil, chaos, and many difficulties because of their actions and now the prophet Ezekiel is receiving instruction and answers to why this has happened to them.

We can learn from what took place with Judah. We can see God's instructions to them in how they could fix the dilemma they were in, and how they could have peace with Him. In our everyday lives we can totally mess things up through our rebellion from God and His instructions to us in His word. Some people never get out of the hole that they dig for themselves, but others are able to see the right path and way which leads to life and peace with God. Jesus is the answer to people who are confused, following their appetites and lusts of the flesh. Jesus can ultimately give us comfort, hope, and peace if we would only follow Him and His word. Jesus, and the salvation which He offers mankind, is where every honest seeker can find eternal peace.

## Understanding God's Word

In Ezekiel 40:1-2 these verses tell us that it is the 25th year of the exile, at the beginning of the year on the 10th day of the 1st month, the 14th year after Jerusalem was taken that the LORD in a vision brought Ezekiel to the land of Israel to show him the rebuilt temple. In Ezekiel 43:1-12 Ezekiel sees the glory of God returning to the rebuilt temple. This is where we pick up the vision.

**Verses 1-5:** Now the glory of God who was forced to leave His prior sanctuary is back in His new sanctuary (Ezekiel 8:6). Ezekiel tells us that this is the same vision he saw earlier, when God departed by the east gate of the temple (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:22-23) and now He returns in like manner in holy power and glory to reestablish Himself. This theophany comes through the East Gate into the temple and Ezekiel is taken by the Spirit into the inner court.

**Verses 6-12:** When Solomon's Temple was finished and a dedication ceremony was made, Solomon gave a speech and now the LORD makes

one of His own. God told Ezekiel that such a place of holiness was where He ruled and this matched His character. God now rules from heaven in holy supremacy as He would rule from this holy sanctuary after their captivity.

The LORD told the prophet that He would abide forever in this holy sanctuary on "My throne." Not meaning that He would abide forever in a temple made with hands (Hebrews 9:11), but rather meaning He would have an uninterrupted fellowship and communion with His people. As we look back and understand this relationship to mean with Judah under the Mosaic dispensation, and now today with Christians, His people in this last dispensation the Christian age.

The Temple itself pictured a place of holy separation from the world. But God's people worshipping idols and false gods led to God's anger against them and ultimately their captivity. These "abominable harlotries" which led to their captivity, God instructs them to put away these things. God tells Ezekiel if the people are ashamed

and repent about what they did that led to their captivity and they understand the design of the temple, its structure, its statutes and laws, and the holy God they were dealing with, it would help them to see their sinfulness and shame.

But some people may ask, "How would they be ashamed or repent by looking at the blueprint and design of the temple, its laws and structure, and God being holy?" Well, the details of these things were to teach them concerning their ungodliness and need for change. If they would be obedient and do what was right in the eyes of God, they would be able to have comfort and peace again in their land.

The same is true for mankind today. We can have "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 3:7). We can get out of sin and the chaos of this world if only we accept Christ on His terms and be obedient to the gospel (Acts 2:38).

Are you seeking a place of peace? If so, it is found only in Christ!

# Relishing Special Places

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text.

Uniform Lesson

November 9, 2014

Ezekiel 43:13-27

## Background of Text

In last week's lesson we learned that Ezekiel, in a vision from God, saw Him returning in all His glory from the east to the new temple in Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity (Ezekiel 43:2). God told him that His people needed to put away their harlotry and idol worship (Ezek. 43:2, 9), that the structure, design of His house, the statutes and all the laws would cause the Hebrews to be ashamed of their past behaviors and motivate them to do what is right in God's eyes (Ezek. 42:11). Also the hope was that the Hebrews would seek restoration and peace with God after their 70 year punishment and captivity.

Now the vision continues and Ezekiel sees the altar of sacrifice and burnt offering. He is given in minute detail the measurements of this altar and how it should be constructed, designed, consecrated, and cleansed. The importance of coming to God for forgiveness, and coming on His terms the way He instructs us is so important. Mankind, and especially His people, must understand this foundational truth of coming to God in the way and fashion that He describes. When we do understand and practice this principle, we will relish in the special places that we have to worship our heavenly Father just as the Israelites did.

## Understanding God's Word

**Verses 13-17:** In these verses we have the measurements and design of the altar given in minute details. The altar was to be fashioned and made like the ancient ziggurats of Ur and Babel (Genesis 11:4). The shape of this altar would be three ascending squares sitting on top of each other. The largest square would be the base and the smallest would be the top where the sacrifice would be made to God. We are told that the cubit was to be used in measuring its size, therefore it would have been around 18 square feet. The steps of the altar were to be on the east side but they would not be stairs as we think of them today. They would have been a way to approach the altar without violating the Law of Moses in (Exodus 20:26).

The altar was to sit right in the center of the inner court yard before the Temple, which stresses its importance to God. The first thing that the worshipper came to when entering the inner court yard was the sacred altar of burnt offering and sacrifice. Worshipers need to be right with God and the altar is where we must start.

The altar and temple were a very special and sacred place made for the Israelites to come and to make sacrifices to God. It is interesting how the altar was to be cleansed and sanctified before the people could come to make their offerings.

**Verses 18-27:** After the Lord gives Ezekiel the details of the construction of the altar, He now tells him how the priest's service was to be conducted.

Ezekiel is told strictly that the Levites who could now serve had to be descendants of Zadok (1 Chronicles 24:3). This would have excluded all of the other descendants of Aaron. The animals that could be used for the offering would be the same as the Law had previously described in Exodus 29:10.

We see that sin offerings were to be made to "*cleanse the altar and make atonement for it*" (Ezekiel 43:20), or, as verse 26 says, to "*purify and consecrate it.*" These offerings were to go on for seven full days, then the altar would be considered as clean (v. 26). The number seven is a symbol of completeness and a very important number throughout the Bible. So a complete number of days and sacrifices needed to be made before the altar would be clean, and before God would accept any other sin offerings made there at this sacred place designated by Him (v. 27).

These verses and part of Ezekiel's vision were to teach the Israelites that the altar was a special place designated by God where they could enjoy and delight in their opportunity to be obedient to God and His statutes and laws. The Israelites' laws and worship were different

from the way the heathens around them worshipped. It was special, distinct, and peculiar for the nation of Israel. As Ezekiel is seeing in this vision, God wants His people to come to the altar and the temple following His laws and statutes, not following the detestable practices of the heathen world around them.

God wants His church to be obedient to His word and to do His will today just as the Jewish nation was instructed in Ezekiel's day. God wants us to have special places and times where we can be with Him. Here are some special places that we as Christians should relish and enjoy for example: our assemblies where we can worship and praise God, gathering around the Lord's Table in communion remembering His death for our sins and salvation, meeting in our prayer closet where we can talk to our precious heavenly Father. Also revivals, retreats, family camps, and Christian service camps are all special places that we need to relish and protect.

You may ask why these places are special and needed. Well, because places like these which are designated to bring us closer to God are important and will help us grow in our life and everyday walk as Christians. Do you have these special places to be with God? If not, why not find them and enjoy them today!



# Life Needs Water

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text.

Uniform Lesson  
November 16, 2014  
Ezekiel 47:1, 3-12

## Background of Text

Ezekiel's vision continues. The whole book of Ezekiel is intended to instruct and encourage the nation of Judah not to lose heart because of the state of affairs that they are in now. Better days are coming for God's people and this chapter shows that a

wonderful nourishing and healing water flows from God. This water is available for all to drink and is needed for life. This water was available for the Jewish nation, and it is still available for whoever chooses to drink today.

## Understanding God's Word

**Verses 1 & 2:** Ezekiel is brought back to the door of the temple. Here he sees a stream of water coming out of the door flowing south past the altar into the inner court. He watches it flow into the outer court south down the mountain toward the eastern region into Arabah, then from there it flows toward the Dead Sea.

The Scriptures talk in different places about rivers and the goodness that they give to mankind. One example is in Zechariah 14:8 where there are two rivers that flow east and west. Another river is talked about by the prophet Joel in Joel 3:18 and watered the valley of Shittim, which is not even Israelite territory. These rivers talked about by the prophets are not to be taken literally. The prophets each explain in their own way that their river is the goodness and blessings of God being offered to mankind. It makes sense that this river that Ezekiel is seeing is a symbol of God's goodness flowing from His throne to bless mankind.

**Verses 3-6:** As Ezekiel follows and watches this river flowing from the temple it gets deeper and stronger as it flows. This is very true in life when people partake of the goodness and mercy of God they are able to see the depth, width, and richness of it. When an individual shares this knowledge of the goodness and richness of God, they witness how vast and unending a resource truly it is for all of humanity to partake of.

**Verses 7-12:** The trees mentioned here are not literal trees but are just showing how rich the water of life is in that it

feeds and supplies life to the trees. In return, these trees then provide food and healing for all who want to partake of the blessings of God.

Everywhere that it flows, the river gives life and healing. The bare desert plains and Dead Sea now thrive and swarm with life because the river of God reaches them. Now because of this wonderful river fishermen have a trade and are having success in Engedi and Eneglaim, towns near the Dead Sea (v. 10). It would have been a waste of time with the very high salt content to fish in this area, but now because of the healing, life-giving water of God, the nets are now full again. The river is making many good fish for the fishing trade.

Even though many will change and receive the river and its water of life, there will still be swamps and marshes that will not become fresh (v. 11). They will not swarm with life but will be left for salt. In spite of the spiritual medicine that is provided by the goodness of God, there are some individuals who will not partake of the cure, to their own demise.

What a beautiful picture of the mighty flowing river swarming with life, and on its banks all kinds of trees for food and healing. Why? Because this river flows from the Temple of God. In Revelation 22:1,2 we see the same kind of picture illustrated with the river flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb and the tree of life with its leaves for the healing of the nations. What an awesome picture of the new heaven and paradise in glory.

What a wonderful vision Ezekiel sees! He was being told that from the sanctuary, from God, comes this water of life which gives life and healing to anyone who would partake of it. Some Jews and Gentiles will not believe and partake of it to their own destruction. But this is a wonderful truth given to Ezekiel and his captive brothers which states, unequivocally, that God will be vindicated. God is the One and only God and life eternal and spiritual healing are found only in Him. What hope and encouragement this would be to Ezekiel and to the Jewish people.

Jesus, as He had His dialogue with the women at the well in John 4:1-26 tells her that He had "living water" (John 4:10). Then in John 4:14 Jesus states that if you drink of this "living water" that He gives you shall not thirst again. But the water that He gives shall become, in the one who drinks it, a well of water springing up to eternal life. Revelation 22:17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

Today mankind must drink the "living water" which Jesus, the Spirit, and the bride invite mankind to partake of. The spiritual healing and eternal life that are possible through belief, repentance, confession, immersion, and living a faithful life in Christ are available without cost. But you must choose to drink it to receive the blessings!

# A New Beginning

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text.

Uniform Lesson  
November 23, 2014  
Ezekiel 47:13-23

## Background of Text

Ezekiel's vision continues and now the LORD instructs him concerning the dividing of the land after the Babylonian captivity. The Israelites were going to have a fresh start, a new beginning in their land, and the inheritance that was once promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in these passages in Genesis 15:18, 17:8, 26:2-5, 28:12-15, 35:10-12) was to be renewed. The inheritance and possession of their prior occupancy of the territory before the invading Babylonians came and took them away was now going to be renewed with them by God. For the Israelites who were disenfranchised in their captivity

this was wonderful news that they would receive a portion of land for their family's inheritance again. God in His grace and loving-kindness was truly giving the Israelites a fresh, new start back in their land. But He also states that the aliens who were living in their midst should also receive an allotment of land for their inheritance. God was teaching the Israelites here how they should be welcoming to the aliens and strangers who may be in their midst. Ezekiel is told the boundaries of the land and the manner in which the land should be divided among all the people.

## Understanding God's Word

**Verse 13:** Ezekiel states that the LORD GOD said, *"This shall be the boundary by which you shall divide the land for an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel; Joseph shall have two portions."* These instructions here are very specific. This is clearly what God is commanding to be done. We see that Joseph receives two portions of the allotment of land. Jacob told Joseph that his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh were now his sons, just as Reuben and Simeon were in Genesis 48:5. After the conquest of the land of Canaan when the land was divided by lots, Joshua states in Joshua 14:4 that Manasseh and Ephraim were two tribes, and that the Levites were not given an allotment of land but would live in cities and be given pasture land.

**Verse 14:** Here it is clearly stated that each allotment of land was to be equal. This was done to make it fair so that each family would receive the same amount of land for an equal distribution of the land. The LORD GOD swore long ago to Israel's forefathers that this land would be theirs.

**Verses 15-20:** In these verses God shows the boundary of the territory that He was going to restore anew with Israel. It is important that we do not miss the fact that the boundaries given here are the same as given in Numbers 34.

**Verses 21-23:** This land was to be di-

vided among the tribes of Israel, which are Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Levi did not receive an inheritance of land (Joshua 13:14). The land was to be divided by lot among the tribes of Israel but also among the aliens or strangers in their midst. Whatever tribe the alien lived in they were to be given an inheritance. This is a wonderful thing that God was allowing. Israel had exclusivism where God wanted to keep them from the nations around them who may influence them in an adverse way. But when it came to an alien or stranger who wanted to accept God on His terms and be obedient to Him, God had open arms. For example Rahab the harlot in Joshua helped the spies and joined Israel and is mentioned among the faithful in Hebrews 11:31. Another example would be Ruth the Moabitess who through her faithfulness married Boaz and is in the lineage of Jesus. God was genuinely concerned about aliens and strangers in the land and wanted them to have their needs met and to become a part of His people.

Ezekiel's visions grew in their scope, teaching, and hope that they gave to the captives in Babylon. But as always if they wanted this new beginning in their land, they needed to heed God's teachings such as is commanded in (2 Chronicles 7:14 which says, *"And My*

*people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."*

God wants His people to follow Him, believe in Him, repent when they sin, and He will forgive the humble repentant sinners and heal their land. God told Ezekiel that not only would He forgive them and heal their land, but He would reestablish the temple and proper worship according to the Law of Moses and that they would have an inheritance given to each family, even the aliens living in the land. God is truly loving and kind when His people are obedient to Him and His word.

This same message and hope is true and available for mankind today that whoever chooses can have a new beginning and fresh start in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. For the repentant seeker who wants this new beginning and all the promises that are associated with it, they must have an active, obedient faith. They must believe in Jesus (John 8:24), they must repent (Luke 13:3), they must confess Him before men (Acts 8:37), they must be immersed for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38), and then live a faithful life until death (Revelation 2:10).

If you have not accepted Jesus for this new start, why not today?

# Seeking Words of Hope

Note: New American Standard Bible used as text.

Uniform Lesson  
November 30, 2014  
Isaiah 52:1-2, 7-12

## Background of Text

Isaiah's prophetic ministry started around 740 B.C. and lasted to around 680 B.C. He prophesied before the Northern kingdom was taken into Assyrian captivity and warned Judah of God's judgment and their captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. In our text Isaiah delivers a two pronged message

from God to Judah. One idea is the release of the captives from Babylon/Persia and the other subject is the gospel age of the Messiah. Both of these messages are welcomed news for the Jews and the world as we can enjoy the blessings and hope of the Messiah.

## Understanding God's Word

**Verses 1-2:** "*Awake, awake*" is a stirring declaration to wake up the people of God so that they can hear the good news that they will be delivered from their captivity and soon be able to return to their beloved Jerusalem. They were to consecrate themselves and clothe themselves from slaves to free men and women who were to be holy devoted to God and His ways.

"*Dust*" is symbolic of mourning, being oppressed and degraded. The Jews were to shake themselves free from this state of mind and from being in this state of mourning and depression. They needed to rise above their past state and "*loose their chains*" because they are the daughter of Zion. This is a good challenge and encouragement for those who are brokenhearted and depressed, thinking they are stuck in their present circumstances. No, through God we can break free and be overcomers. Judah was at this place spiritually and they needed to lift themselves up once again and be a free nation.

**Verses 7-12:** These verses seem to have a dual fulfillment. One they were a blessing and hope for the Jews, but also they are a blessing and hope for the gospel age where the world can have the freedom from sin and its bondage.

We know that verse is a prediction of the Christian age because the apostle Paul uses it in Romans 10:15. The good news, brought by the messenger, preacher, or teacher is a positive, pleasant, beautiful and uplifting thing to hear. But bad news is not beautiful; it is unpleasant and hard to swallow. All of us like to hear about "*peace*," "*hap-*

*piness*," "*salvation*," and that "*God reigns!*" Those are all good things and words of hope that we want to hear.

"*Watchmen*" or guards were stationed to protect and see who may be approaching their city or encampment. They could see enemies, citizens, or travelers coming from a distance and could alert their citizenry one way or another. These "*watchmen*" (v. 8) see the captives returning and shout joyfully, knowing that God is with them and restoring them to Jerusalem.

In v. 9 the people who were abandoned in the "*waste places*" or ruins after the third deportation to Babylon are now rejoicing in the return of the captives. Those Jews who were living in very poor conditions are now seeing that God has redeemed Jerusalem and will be comforting His people. Therefore, hope is on the horizon for the Jews.

The Lord "*bared His holy arm*" has the idea of God showing His power and strength in liberating His people from this idolatrous country so that all the known world would know about the Jews deliverance. When the Jews had the chance to leave they were told to "*depart, depart.*" We know that not all the Jews went back to Jerusalem; some stayed in Persia and it became their home and they were comfortable there. But God did not want His people there; He wanted them to depart and get out of that "*unclean*" nation with its idolatrous pagan worship.

The Lord in verse 11 also instructs them to "*purify themselves*" because they would be "*carrying the holy vessels*" used in the temple back with them

to Jerusalem. The Lord wants them to know how important and set apart these vessels are in His sight. Special care was needed in transporting these sanctified tools for proper worship to God.

Isaiah also tells them in (v. 12) that God wants them to take their time and not leave in a hurry or panicked rush. He does not want them leaving like escaped prisoners fleeing for their lives. When the Israelites left Egypt in their exodus they ran for the hills (Exodus 12:33-34) and left very quickly because Pharaoh and His armies were soon dispatched to bring them back. That would not be the case here; God was going to protect them from all sides and restore them back to their beloved land safe and sound!

What a wonderful message of hope this prophecy was to God's people. They were not going to be left in captivity in a strange land, held in bondage to false gods and worship. God has plans for His people and He will use them to bring the Messiah into the world. The Messiah was prophesied to come into the world and defeat Satan all the way back in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). This was, and is, a great message of hope for all of mankind. The Jews were going to have some very tough times ahead during the time of rebuilding in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel's lifetimes. But God protected and guided them till the Messiah came into the world. Now all nations and people of the world can be blessed and have hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ the Anointed One, the Divine Son of God. But this free choice of salvation is up to you to accept or reject.



# "Let Me Illustrate"

## Theme: C.S. Lewis Illustrates Part 2

Last month we concluded with a great quote from Lewis that reminds us that we were made for heaven. We begin this time with another look at how our heavenly focus affects our earthly living.

### Focused on Heaven, Living on Earth



Tom Claibourne

"Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.

The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth 'thrown in': aim at Earth and you will get neither."

(From *Mere Christianity*, 1952)

### God as a Veterinarian

In *A Grief Observed*, 1961, as Lewis wrestled with his own heartache and questions, he compared God's role in suffering to that of a veterinarian. He noted that a cat will spit and growl and even try to bite back as the vet tries to administer the very treatment that will bring it relief and healing.

The cat, in its limited understanding, does not see that what the vet is doing is for its own good. That perception does not mean that the vet is not good.

We dare not fight against God's strong hand as He works, sometimes uncomfortably, for our own healing. God is good.

### God as a Dentist

"When I was a child I often had [a] toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother—at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist the next morning.

I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not

begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie; if you gave them an inch, they took an ell [a former English measurement; approximately 45 inches].

Now, if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take an ell. Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of ... or which is obviously spoiling daily life .... Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if you once call Him in, He will give you the full treatment."

(From *Mere Christianity*, 1952)


### Positively Shaped by Circumstances

Often our childhood circumstances play a significant role in shaping what we become. Lewis' brother, Warren ("Warnie"), in his preface to *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 1966, called "Memoir of C. S. Lewis," explains the impact their living situation had on his brother's life.

"By the standards of present-day childhood in England, we spent an extraordinary amount of our time shut up indoors. We would gaze out of our nursery window at the slanting rain and the grey skies, and there, beyond a mile or so of sodden meadows, we would see the dim line of the Castlereagh Hills—our world's limit, a distant land, strange and unattainable. But we always had pencils, paper, chalk, and paint boxes, and this recurring imprisonment gave us occasion and stimulus to develop the habit of creative imagination.... And so, in circumstances that might have been merely dull and depressing, my brother's gifts began to develop; and it may not be fanciful to see, in that childhood staring out to unattainable hills, some first beginnings of a vision and viewpoint that ran through the work of his maturity."


Later Lewis himself would explain,

"I am the product of long corridors, empty sunlit rooms, upstairs indoor silences, attics explored in solitude, distant noises of gurgling cisterns and pipes, and the noise of wind under the tiles. Also of endless books."

(From *Surprised by Joy*, 1955) 

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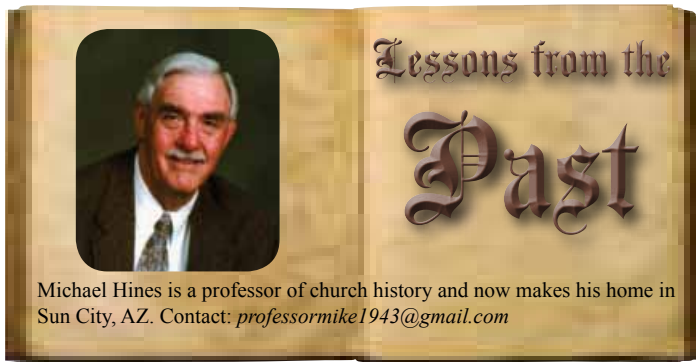
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## A Newcomer's Guide to Restoration History

### Chapter 10 -- Beginning of Woes (cont.)

#### Sectional Economic and Cultural Difference

With the exception of a few forays into the North, specifically at Gettysburg, most of the fighting took place south of the Mason-Dixon Line. As the war dragged on, Northern strategists concluded the South could be defeated only with the destruction of its economy, way of life, and manpower. They were right! When Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Confederate soldiers returned to a devastated agrarian economy. Union blockades worsened the cotton trade. Not only did the blockades keep Southern cotton from being exported to England, English textile mills looked to Egypt for more abundant and cheaper cotton. Cotton prices plummeted in the South. President Lincoln decreed that Southern soldiers returning home be permitted to take a mule and their rifle. These men returned home with little else by way of possessions. War destroyed the already inadequate Southern industrial base and transportation system. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, followed by passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution virtually eliminated the South's labor force. Once wealthy planters and merchants now found themselves in poverty. Poor mountain folk found themselves even more destitute.

After the war, the North recovered quickly. Largely untouched by the ravages of war, the North's industrial might churned out goods for national consumption. Northern farmers, who used machinery to multiply their labor, produced huge annual cash crops. Food processors and merchants continued to expand. In short, once the war ended, the Northern economy boomed!

Plans to rebuild the South followed several social experiments. Most standard histories of the period rarely discuss such experiments. Of concern was what to do with the thousands of freed slaves and property confiscated from wealthy plantation owners. The Port Royal Experiment got underway in October 1861 on Union-controlled islands off the coast of South Carolina. By and large, these experiments tried different theories on how to integrate freed slaves into the overwhelmingly white culture. Historian Willie Rose Lee says these experiments consisted of the "most drastic social changes ever attempted in American history." There were widespread doubts that freed slaves were even capable of equality. If freed, could a slave end up a serf, a wage laborer, a landowner, a citizen, a soldier, a voter, an officeholder? No one knew for sure. Some proposed solutions to all this sound much like Marxism. Other possibilities ended up with the former slave tied to the land and hardly free at all. Overall the Port Royal Experiment failed to contribute much to reconstruction after the

war but it did open minds to possibilities of social construction never before considered.

Once Reconstruction got underway in the south, the cities recovered much faster than the rural areas. The Southern culture, both urban and rural, lagged far behind that of the North. The poor majority in the South resented the affluence of the minority. Christian Southerners often found themselves hard pressed to care for their church physical plants or support their ministers. Members of Southern Restoration churches could not afford to travel to conventions. Organs and pianos were coming into use but were expensive. Such musical instruments were usually transported up the Mississippi River to the Ohio River and then on other navigable tributaries, increasing their cost beyond the ability of the poor Southern church. Southerners looked north across the Ohio to their Northern brethren for help. They received little response. Prosperous Northern congregations were too busy constructing impressing, pretentious buildings, with stained glass and expensive musical instruments.

With all of that – the bitterness of defeat, the devastation of war, the loss of life – you can well understand why the cracks and fissures existing before the war widened. Disciples of Christ historians McAllister and Tucker sum it up this way:

"Taking into account the total experience of Disciples in the Civil War, it is reasonable to conclude that they suffered an actual if not an official split."

Regardless of the complexity and ambiguity of the issue, the effect of the war on Disciples cannot be minimized. Seeds of discord, sown and cultivated, grew to full bloom with the separation of the Churches of Christ a generation later. The Civil War was nothing less than a watershed for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

As we shall see later, the Civil War did not cause division. It did, however, contribute to later separation. It is too simplistic to say that the war alone caused later division. It did, however, serve as one factor that contributed to a malaise that ended in the 1906 division.

#### Leadership Shifts

By the time Lee surrendered at Appomattox in 1865, leadership in the Restoration Movement shifted from first generation to second generation. Barton Stone died in 1844. Thomas Campbell passed on in 1854 at the age of 94. John T. Johnson, co-editor of Stone's *Christian Messenger*, died in 1857. Walter Scott died grief-stricken over the war in 1861. Alexander Campbell died in 1866, although he was senile and ineffective as early as 1863. D.S. Burnet died a year later, and Raccoon John Smith died in 1868. With the passing of these men, those in the movement looked to new leaders.

Robert Richardson, one of Alexander Campbell's closest friends, tried to step into the void. Others stepped up as well but the strongest new leadership arose from the editors of various periodicals. This marked the first major leadership shift in the movement – from great men to periodical editors. Speaking of this trend, W.T. Moore, writing at the end of the 1800s, said, "The Restoration Movement does not have bishops; it has editors." Periodical editors wielded tremendous influence as a coterie of followers grew up, adopting their perspective.

With few exceptions, individuals owned and edited these periodicals. The editor determined the publication's character,

(continued on page 22)

# Strangeness of the Month Club

\*Kent B. True

It has become a staple of news reporting and commenting on the news recently: a dramatic, intensively-reported (because it is dramatic) shooting takes place. Then comes the chorus of calls from certain quarters to “do something.” For many people, that something is obvious: restrict the liberty of people to own guns. But this pattern is not just found at ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and any other letter-designated news businesses out there. It is also found at places like *Christianity Today*. Shouldn’t Christians just naturally want the state to limit people’s ability to own guns? Let’s think about that (with thanks to Jeremy Orndorff for research assistance) as we examine . . .

## More Articles at CT About Guns, More Bad Reasoning and Statistics?

### “More Guns, More Shootings?”

Marlena Graves, *Christianity Today*, May 28, 2014

Graves writes for an online section *CT* calls, “her.meneutics.” As you might guess from what seems like a rather silly-in-an-attempt-to-be-different name, this is a place where women writers



Kent B. True a.k.a.

Harold N. Orndorff

comment on all sorts of things. As they tell us there, “Her.meneutics . . . provides news and analysis from the perspective of evangelical women.” There’s a niche for you: evangelical women. Well, it’s all about “perspective” isn’t it?

So what do at least some evangelical women think about guns and shootings? As we will see, “thinking” does not come into play much here. The details in this case are nothing new. But they are always worth review and repetition because writers like Marlena Graves so seldom get them anywhere near right.

Marlena begins, so very predictably, with allusions to some recent highly-publicized shooting incidents. She then laments that “Americans are seeing gun-owners’ rights expand in some cases,” citing a new law in Georgia.

Pause here for a moment to consider the muddle-headed view of “rights” implied here. Do people have rights about matters like this, or just temporary privileges? If governments can expand or contract these “rights” then those are not really rights, but legal privileges. Perhaps “rights” here is just loose talk for privileges. While this is very common, it is still vague and confusing. Perhaps confusion is the cause or desired effect of all this.

I say this because the article continues with a barrage of stupidity which includes the selective use of statistics, misinterpretation of statistics, empty appeals to “theology” and a host of reasoning errors. There are so many of these, strung together in such density, that were we to attempt to examine them all, the world could not contain the books that would result.

The whole “more guns means more violent crime” theme has been, and continues to be, thoroughly refuted by John R. Lott, Jr. in his writings that include *More Guns, Less Crime* and *The Bias Against Guns: Why Almost Everything You’ve Heard About Gun Control Is Wrong*. Lott is just the tip of the iceberg of researching this area by those without the assumptions of that part of our culture which appeals to some kind of ideological bias against guns.

Let’s look at just a couple of examples of bad reasoning here. For her article, Marlena Graves contacted a psychology professor who helped her conclude two things. First, “there is a great deal of evidence demonstrating that the more guns in a community, the more violent crime in that community.” The “great deal of evidence” cited is one study. But even if that conclusion is generally true, it tells us nothing about the causal connection between guns and crime. Statistical studies can seldom demonstrate causation. Do more guns cause more crime? Marlena Graves does not know, and her psychologist friend does not know - not from this evidence, at least.

Her second claim, strung together with the first one seemingly in the hopes you won’t think very carefully about it, is that “owning a gun increases the likelihood that you will die a gun-related death.” Consider the methodology of one recent study supposedly supporting this conclusion as reported in *Forbes*: the study matched shooting victims in Philadelphia to a “control group” by randomly calling Philadelphia residences shortly after the shooting occurs and trying to find someone with the same race, gender, and age as the victim. The police department told them if the victim had a gun and they asked whether the control group respondent had a gun. Then they used regression analysis to see if being in possession of a gun made you more likely to be shot, when compared to a control group of random Philadelphia residents.

You can see just how complex this sort of thing can quickly become. But Marlena, as is often the case, is just using “statistics and experts” to get us ready for what she really wants to say. Far into her article, she finally tells us, “Of course I take our constitutional rights seriously, but I can’t ignore the theological concerns of bringing guns into nearly all spheres of society.”

Let’s start with our so-called constitutional rights. The theory behind our Constitution was that rights are given by God; constitutions can only attempt to protect them. The fact is that what our Constitution says about “the right to keep and bear arms” (own, have in your house, and carry around guns, to update to our lingo) is almost never respected in the United States generally, and has not been at least since the 19th century. What the Constitution demands is that the right “shall not be infringed” (again for us moderns, infringed means “act so as to limit or undermine”). Our governments at various levels have come up with a thousand excuses to ignore what that says. But they are just that: excuses.

Marlena, like far too many today, including many if not most government officials, does not give a hoot about the Constitution here. As she says a few words later, “I’m not advocating a complete ban on guns, although I’d advocate for a complete ban on assault weapons.” She says she sees “no legitimate reason for civilians to carry around such high-powered [assault] weapons.” Marlena clearly has no idea (or chooses to attempt to mislead us here) that an “assault weapon” is, by definition, one that uses a

(continued on next page)



## Strangeness of the Month Club (cont.)

medium (not high) powered round and is capable of automatic fire (which, since 1968, has been illegal without a special permit from the government). Whether she is just ignorant or ignoring standard definitions to make a point, it is clear that Marlena is more than happy to limit the ability of others to have guns.

But let us move on to her “theological concerns of bringing guns into nearly all spheres of society.” What are these concerns that are theological? Her general statement of principle here is this:

“It’s not clear how permissive gun policies in churches promote a theology of peace rather than a theology of fear. The gospel at its core is a gospel of peace and reconciliation. We’re supposed to beat our swords into plowshares, not multiply our swords. We’re supposed to pursue the peaceable kingdom, not pack heat in the pews.”

This rather flimsy sloganeering using a few words lifted from their context in the Bible reveals that Graves’ reasons for wanting gun control are not really theological, whatever that might mean to her. They are, rather, things like these: many appeals for “tighter gun restrictions” are “gut-wrenching”, those who have “personally experienced gun violence” are “seeing gun-owners rights expand”, she “chafes” at the idea of people carrying concealed in church, she is “disconcerted” that some colleges permit concealed carry on campus, and she “can’t ignore cold and callous comments” made by some in the gun debate. In other words, Marlena finds some firearms and some of those who use them emotionally repulsive. But emoting is not argument.

Let us try to understand the supposed key theological affirmations here: the gospel is about peace and reconciliation and we should pursue the peaceable kingdom. Notice how there is no logical path from these rather vague concepts to her idea that we need the government to ban guns.

Did Marlena Graves ever think through what she is advocating here? She is demanding that armed government uses violence and guns to make sure people can only have guns of a kind she approves, when she approves, and where she approves. She is willing to misrepresent the meaning of the phrase “assault weapon” in her attempt to gain sympathy for her emotional distaste for guns. (Some might call that lying, but I won’t quibble here.) And she is willing to have me killed by the state, not for misusing a gun that does not meet her approval, but simply for possessing it. She claims to do this based on the principle that Christians must pursue peace and reconciliation. I don’t think Marlena Graves would recognize peace if it were sitting in her lap.

As Marlena wraps up her “case” against guns, she seems to jump from theological concerns back to statistics to raise two more “grave” concerns: gun-related accidents and suicide. But from the U. S. government’s CDC website we learn that in the United States for 2010, death by accidental discharge of firearms was 606, cars accidents accounted for 37,961, non-car transportation accidents (i.e. aircraft, boat) 1,600, and accidental poisoning 33,041. This in a society where nearly half of all households have guns. Gun accidents are nearly insignificant here statistically speaking.

Regarding suicide rates, the United States ranks 18th in the world with nearly all those countries with higher suicide rates

having much more stringent gun-restricting laws. Japan, with a suicide rate nearly double that of the United States, permits very little private gun ownership.

Graves refers to an equally nonsensical article from “her. meneutics” in January of 2013. In that article another writer likewise claimed to “support the Second Amendment.” But then she went on to claim that “gun rights and gun control” are not mutually exclusive. She was especially concerned that the poor and minorities suffer disproportionately from gun violence. She used Chicago as her example; Chicago: city of extreme gun control. If the problem with gun violence is the poor and minorities, wouldn’t sensible “gun control” restrict use in populations with the problem and leave others alone? Would any of the “thinkers” at her. meneutics agree to something like that?

It is not at all clear that the Christian faith has anything to say about owning a gun per se. Devices that can send projectiles at high speeds to designated points can be used to commit murder, about which the Christian faith has much to say. But those same devices can be used to defend the innocent, something which the Bible clearly approves. They can also be used for many purely recreational activities. But the mere fact that a device is sometimes used to commit murder does not somehow mystically transform that device into something of which the Christian faith disapproves.

There is clearly a little movement among the “evangelical women” at *Christianity Today* to show that they can be just as anti-gun as the heathen. And they even have supposed theological reasons for doing so. So far, their reasoning about guns is nonsense at best. What their theology should suggest to them, should they care to examine it, is that citizens of the “peaceable kingdom” should stop trying to enforce their emotional preferences on others by use of the violent apparatus of the state. (RH)

\* Kent B. True is the alter ego of Harold N. Orndorff, Jr., a campus minister who has taught college and seminary courses in the fields of apologetics, philosophy, ethics, and logic. Find more Kent, if you can stand it, at <http://www.kentsclubhouse.blogspot.com> - contact him at [hnoii@hotmail.com](mailto:hnoii@hotmail.com).

### “A Movement of Meaning And a Life Invested In It”

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## Lessons from the Past (cont.)

perspective, and outlook, and wrote most of the articles. Editors used their papers to create a constituency. In time, readers identified themselves with an editor's position on important issues of the day. Whether it was support for the multiplying missionary societies or the use of musical instruments, the editors shaped their readers' views.

Campbell's publications, *The Christian-Baptist* and *The Millennial Harbinger*, influenced thousands in their day. W.K. Pendleton and C.L. Loos tried to maintain the *Harbinger's* influence following Campbell's death. Circulation numbers for the *Harbinger* declined sharply during the Civil War. The war itself hindered circulation but those in the North dropped their subscriptions, accusing the editors of voicing Southern views. Ultimately the editors discontinued publication in 1870. Other periodicals, such as *The Christian Messenger* and Scott's *The Evangelist*, died with the editors.

New publications took the place of the early periodicals. Benjamin Franklin, a descendant of the printer-statesman Ben Franklin, began publishing *The American Christian Review* in 1856. Franklin, a cabinetmaker by trade, grew up in Ohio but lived most of his life in Indiana. An effective debater and evangelist, Franklin voiced the most conservative editorial policy of his time. Readers referred to his paper as "the old reliable." Franklin vowed neutrality during the Civil War, but he spoke out in opposition to most "innovations" following the end of the war.

Tolbert Fanning and William Lipscomb published *The Gospel Advocate* before the war, but it had little influence. After the war, David Lipscomb became editor and its contents reflected Southern interests, opposed missionary societies, salaried preachers, and other innovations. During the war, Lipscomb stood solidly as "a man of the South." When the American Christian Missionary Society finally took an openly anti-slavery position and published the "loyalty resolutions," Lipscomb became more entrenched in opposition to missionary societies. *The Gospel Advocate* remains one of the most influential publications in the non-instrumental wing of the Restoration Movement.

One of the most enduring periodical is *The Christian Standard*.

### THE CURSE AND THE CURE (CONT.)

had been crushed when the tower of Siloam collapsed, said those killed must have been terrible sinners. However, Jesus called them to take a serious inward look at themselves when He said, "I tell you, unless you repent you too will all perish" (Luke 13:5). The horrific destruction of Jerusalem, this time at the hands of the Romans, loomed just 40 years away. His call to repentance was a call to survival.

Surely the prophetic message of Isaiah speaks to our day. Self-willed sin and deafness to the message of God through His prophets had created the problems that threatened their very survival. Genuine repentance and quiet trust in and reliance upon God was their hope of salvation and strength.

Is it any different in our land in our day?

I think not! (RH)

Richard L. Marshall is a retired preacher who makes his home in Florida.

*The Standard* first came off the presses in Cleveland, Ohio, in April 1866. The first issue carried Alexander Campbell's obituary. Each issue advocated New Testament Christianity, unity, practical piety, support of worthy institutions, reviews of other religious literature, and analyses of the day's most important religious movements. T.W. Phillips and fourteen other Christian leaders were stockholders in the periodical. The *Standard* struggled through its first year. The stockholders opted out and turned all of the *Standard's* assets to the editor, Isaac Errett. R.W. Carroll and Company also stepped in to provide additional assistance. Errett moved the paper's editorial offices to Cincinnati where it remains. Errett bought out the Carroll and Company when the periodical began showing a profit. The Errett family kept ownership until 1955 when what had become Standard Publishing Company was sold and it became Standex International. The Errett family provided outspoken leadership to the movement throughout most of the later nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

Editors and "wanna-be" editors began numerous papers; each represented a point of view and each garnered a following. Some of the more influential editors and their periodicals include J.H. Garrison's *The Christian-Evangelist* which began in 1882; *Lard's Quarterly*, edited by Moses Lard, began in 1863. A few periodicals antagonized nearly everyone. *The Apostolic Times* founded in 1869 was one such periodical. The editors of this periodical attacked and attacked and attacked! The paper began as a reaction to *The American Christian Review* but also rejected Isaac Errett's progressive spirit. Destroyed by its attitude, the periodical later merged with others but eventually disappeared.

Overall, the national fractures created because of the upheaval of the Civil War, the death of the first generation's leadership, and the rise of outspoken voices of editors more concerned with promoting their own views than maintaining a united brotherhood, all pointed to potential division. Sadly, however, those three factors were not the only cause of division within the Restoration Movement's culture. (RH)

(To Be Continued)

**"The water of baptism which God meant to unite us has become the water that divides us."**



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George Boose

## LESSONS FROM (an unremarkable) LIFE

George Boose is a Christian leader who makes his home in Downey, CA. He is the author of two books published by the CRA. Contact: gboose@earthlink.net

### Faith

*FAITH: Firm belief in something for which there is no proof*

During the dreary months of my wife's pregnancy, I viewed the forthcoming "blessed event" with trepidation and self-doubt concerning my ability to graciously welcome this invader into our rhapsodic household. Finally, the fatal announcement came in the middle of the night, "We need to go to the hospital." I shaved and made certain I was properly dressed as would be expected of a new father. After the obligatory pacing and fretting, a Florence Nightingale imitator appeared in the waiting room to proclaim my son had the right number of fingers and strong lungs.

More amazing to me than the "miracle" my wife had performed in producing a living, breathing miniature human being was the instantaneous transformation of my attitude. I knew, fully believed, without a flicker of a doubt, with a faith strong enough to move that hospital right off its foundation - I was the father of the most perfect, important, beautiful baby ever born. That faith not only abided - it grew.

At an early age (two or three months) we visited the photographer for our first formal shooting. I was convinced that when the photographer developed the first prints he would immediately recognize this was the best looking baby ever birthed and rush to put an enlarged copy in the shop window. For months I searched the display window whenever we passed the studio, knowing with certainty his business would double or triple with the proper advertising—a picture of my son. When the business closed some years later I secretly credited his failure to that crucial oversight which should have been so obvious about my boy's image.

Although possibly a product of my own vanity, the "faith" I exhibited in the visage of my son was understandable for a parent to exhibit. However, the standards of the world apparently judged me to be biased in favor of my progeny. Today I find immeasurable solace in the fact he matured into a man with great beauty of soul (and, I think, striking physical good looks also - taking after his sire).

Faith ("an assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen") in the saving grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ concerns a matter of eternal consequence. We have placed our faith in the hope (the knowledge) that Christ will come again and take us home to reign with Him. Oh, if our faith could only equal that which is immortalized in the words of an old hymn, "Faith of our fathers! holy faith! We will be true to thee till death!"

I hope I've learned how vital it is for everyone to nurture their faith in the eternal as much as we often do in the temporal. (RH)

The CRA gratefully acknowledges  
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### Churches Seeking Preachers

**\*Ocala, FL**— Southwest Christian Church, Ocala, Florida, is seeking an experienced minister willing to preach, teach, and evangelize. Graduate of Christian Church/Church of Christ Bible College preferred. You may apply by submitting a resume either by e-mail to Chairman, Alvin Gloer at [agloer@comcast.net](mailto:agloer@comcast.net) or to Alvin Gloer, 504 Lake Dr., Ocala, FL 34472.

**\*London, KY**— Community Christian Church, London, Kentucky, is seeking a Senior Minister. We are seeking a full-time minister with a college or seminary degree from a Restoration Movement-based Bible College/University. Our Senior Minister is to share with the elders in the vision and spiritual leadership for the church; preaching the Word of God, ensuring the spiritual care, spiritual growth, stability, and leading of the congregation so that the body is built up and equipped to lead people in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ through the various ministries of the church. The staff consists of a full-time secretary, full-time Children's Minister, part-time Executive Minister, and a part-time Worship Leader. Contact us at [billyg360@gmail.com](mailto:billyg360@gmail.com) or mail to 723 West Fifth Street London, KY 40741

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## Calendar of Events

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

### 2014

**Restoration Destination ..... October 17-18**  
**(Fulton, MO)**  
**Contact: vhbaskets@juno.com**

**Georgia Old Fashioned Family Camp ..... October 23-25**  
**(Clarkesville, GA)**  
**Contact: Tony Sullivan, 770-328-5518**

**Restoration Destination ..... November 10-12**  
**(Myrtle Beach, SC)**  
**Contact: Bill Wines, 843-602-6132**

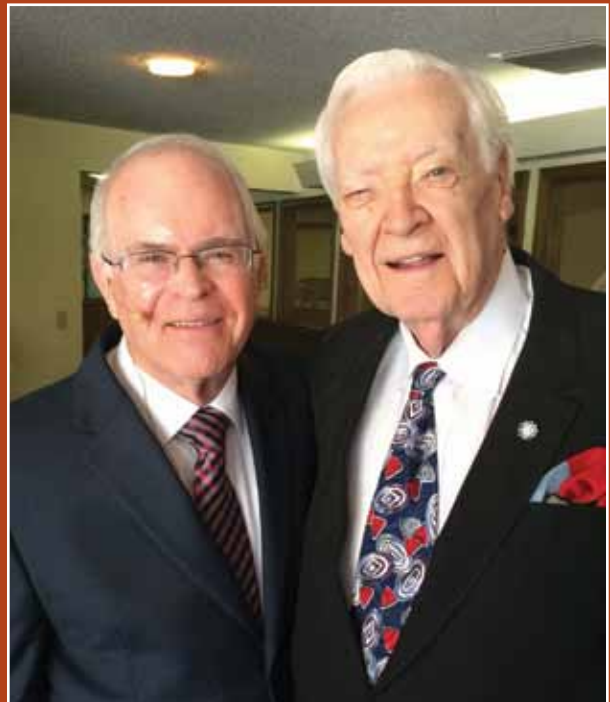
### 2015

**Church Leaders Seminar ..... January 8-9**  
**(Salt Fork State Park Lodge)**  
**Contact: P2PM\_KERRY@YAHOO.COM**

**Florida Bible Conference .... January 27-29**  
**(First Christian Church, Kissimmee, FL)**  
**Contact: The CRA, 513-229-8000**

**Winter Worship and Workshop..... February 9-12**  
**( Pigeon Forge, TN)**  
**Contact: Barnabas Ministries:Barnabasohio@att.net**

## The CRA Today



Pictured are Bill Campbell (L) and Roy Blackmore (R). Bill ministers with the Woodland Christian Church in Tulsa, OK, and is also the author of the lead article on page 1. Roy Blackmore is a retired preacher (92) and is a member of the congregation where Bill ministers.

Recently, the editor journeyed to Tulsa and presented Roy with "The Sword and Trowel Award" for his years of faithfully defending the faith and building the Kingdom. Originally he was from Hillsboro, OH, and was graduated from The Cincinnati Bible Seminary. He has had ministries in Ohio, Illinois, and Oklahoma. He was also a CRA trustee from 1956-1989. His wife, Martha, went to glory about 2 years ago.

The CRA is here today because of the faithful service of men like Roy Blackmore. We thank him and honor him.